

RURAL CHAMPION COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

JUNCTION CITY MAIN STREET ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Background Information

Counties have identified that to be able to create a future for their residents and keep thriving communities, they needed programs to concentrate on and promote community development for programs in the long term. By establishing Community Development departments, they will have direct impact on success.

Serving as the Market Manager, the Rural Champion will be able to fully dedicate their time to Main Street project and move the market from one event to a destination in downtown.

Junction City Main Street, located in a heavily rural area, identified an estimated 160-200 home-based businesses operated by the spouses of active-duty soldiers. During January 2022, a focus group interview was conducted with military spouses that operate home-based business operations. It was suggested that a program designed to assist the informal economy of home-based businesses targeting both military spouses and surrounding rural areas would have a significant impact.

Previously, there was a Farmer's Market in the ideal location for this project. However, there was no administrator. Approximately two vendors have been present each Saturday morning over the last 8 years. Those vendors were "grandfathered" into the Market at the start of the season. Doing this allowed them to set up booths at no cost. Although, the vendors insisted on paying to participate. Not much is known about the previous market other than the times and seasonal dates it was open.

Additionally, initial action was not taken as the community already had a farmers' market through Livewell Geary County on Thursday evenings that met the community needs. Since those initial meetings, the Project Manager for New Venture Advisors LLS, was leading a community wide food plan survey.

Since acceptance into the Kansas Main Street program in March 2022, the concept of a farmers' market has been on the radar for Junction City Main Street. Downtown farmers' markets were frequently described as "low hanging fruit," but with revitalization that would change the perspective of these events.

Equipped with new data, Junction City Main Street

felt comfortable in moving forward with the original plan to bring a farmers' market to downtown Junction City. Currently, the Main Street Market team has two individuals that currently serve on the Geary County Livewell Farmers Market board. Their input is exceptionally beneficial to bring harmony between the two markets with plans to have each market strive to help the other succeed.

Gaps/Barriers Identified: Capacity Barriers:

- During the focus group interview, it was reported that vendor markets are being created in a random fashion by different military spouses. The vendor attendance at these random vendor markets has been good, but customer attendance has been poor. By having an organized, structured, well promoted, and consistent Main Street Market at a prominent location in a busy area, as is being planned with Main Street Market, it is expected that the vendors will have the turnout needed for economic success.
- The primary challenge we had was the concern that Junction City could not support two Farmers Markets. Through New Venture Advisors LLS, data was obtained which gave credence to moving forward with a second market. There had been concerns about space and lack of parking in the downtown region.
- Conflicts with a local business owner was a barrier. They felt the business was being encroached upon by the Market and became very irate during a Market event. This challenge forced new ways of handling and diffusing negative situations with community members.
- At the beginning of the year, there were no agricultural vendors signed with the Market. It wasn't until a few weeks prior to the season kick-off that two consistent agricultural vendors signed up to participate.
- Regardless of the many learning experiences throughout our season, it has still been very much a successful project. We are now working towards creating a sustainable future for the Market, and all of our vendors and volunteers.

Steps to Success

The goal for this project team was preparing to establish Main Street Market for 2023. There will be two markets within one, a farmers' market and a maker's market, both of which will be located in the historic district of downtown Junction City. In

addition to the farmers market and makers market, there will be music, entertainment, educational events, themes and a variety of activities throughout the season. By having an organized, structured, well promoted and consistent Main Street Market at a prominent location in a busy area, it is expected that the vendors will have the turnout needed for economic success.

The primary goal of establishing the Main Street market is to build a starting point for local entrepreneurs to thrive within our community and to help them grow into a brick-and-mortar business in Junction City. The vision and mission statement of Junction City Main Street state clearly the pathway towards downtown revitalization through the mandatory Main Street four-point approach of promotion, design, organization, and economic vitality.

Getting started:

The need for farmers, food entrepreneurs, and food chain workers to thrive in our local economy was the second most highly ranked goal, with 53% of respondents identifying this goal as a priority. More specifically, it was reported that the current local food system in Geary County is underdeveloped with only one farmers' market, one small meat processing facility and three value-added producers. Only 3% of farms currently sell direct-to-consumer. The need to grow the Geary County local food economy were key themes heard throughout the community engagement process. Three objectives were developed through New Venture Advisors LLS:

- Objective 1: Support local food and farm businesses to increase the supply of healthy, locally produced foods.
- Objective 2: Build demand for locally produced agricultural products and facilitate markets for local producers and food businesses.
- Objective 3: Support small businesses and expand workforce development to foster food system entrepreneurship and a robust employment pipeline.

Building the committee, workgroup, and relationships:

- Involvement from the Junction City Main Street board members and a multitude of community members and leadership including City officials. The local military community has also been a great asset with their involvement and volunteers
- Groups have collaborated from around our area, such as local farmers, youth groups, several non-profit organizations, schools, and city-wide events such as Freedom Fest and Oktoberfest. Many local businesses have come out to support and help promote the

Market.

- Positive community relationships include the help of Junction City Parks and Recreation, who allowed us to borrow tables and chairs from them all season. The City Manager and Codes Department has assisted us with special events permits, trash cans, removal of a dumpster, and road barriers to be used. The city police force helped by patrolling the intersection next to the Market to ensure the safety of all patrons and to enforce speed limits. And local businesses were our biggest supporters by promoting and collaborating on events, allowing us to utilize their business space for parking and micro-event space, and by "buying local" from our farmers.

Solutions

Junction City Main Street has initiated and designed a sequential process to help transition interested entrepreneurs from home-based businesses to the Maker's Market which will serve as an incubator, into maker spaces/workspaces/co-ops/pop-ups, and eventually brick and mortar. Additionally, and in conjunction with the market, Junction City Main Street has launched Junction City Entrepreneur 101 (JCE 101), a class that is held twice a week for six weeks that is designed to teach entrepreneurs the basics of starting their own business and turn their ideas into actions. To create a cycle between the market and the class, there are a few perks that include:

- The registration fee for JCE 101 is \$150 for the class. This fee will be returned to the student if there are no absences. However, students who take JCE101 and would like to become a vendor the next season will have their vendor fees waived. On the opposite end, if a vendor has not attended the previous JCE 101 class and participates at the following season of the Main Street Market, their registration fee is waived.
- For the first round of JCE101 in the fall of 2022 (pre-market season), there were 10 students enrolled and 50% of them were military spouses or active duty. Eight out of 10 were women. We had 5 of the students establish new LLC's. Out of our 10 students from the first class, 2 took advantage of being market vendors. For the second round of JCE101 in the fall of 2023 (post-market season), there were 12 students enrolled, 8 of which were women, and 5 of the students had been regular vendors at the market.

Initial solutions to make progress:

- In an ongoing effort to better understand the region's needs, a prominent entrepreneurship research professional was invited to spend a day interviewing public/non-profit sector leader, and business owners.

- Findings relevant to a home-based ecosystem included seed and gap funding; incubators, co-work or maker spaces; mentoring/ education to include online marketing, general business management, customer service; quality childcare; and growing a business.
- The ease of set up and tear down for the Market was improved as measured by hours involved; from 6 hours to less than 3.5 hours.
- A method was established and put in place for financial sustainability of a Market Manager exclusive of grants received.
- There is a person identified to be responsible for each area (vendors, nonprofits, special events, promotion, SNAP/healthy prescription, Junk In The Trunk, Kids Business Fair, and Food Trucks) with a communication plan that allows all of these leaders to be aware of market needs.
- There is a method in place, such as google drive, that stores all the documents in an accessible location for all Market leadership to access as necessary.

Transitions/Evolutions/Changes/Shifts to the solutions:

- We had held several meetings with committee members and had come up with themes and ideas that would be highlighted every Saturday. Each week would have an event and activities that would also highlight local vendors, non-profit organizations, and small businesses within the Market. We have learned over the last several months that advertising through social media, blog posts geared specifically towards each week, and micro-events incorporated into a weekly theme, all helped to generate a greater amount of foot traffic.
- One change that was made Just before the season began, we decided to apply for SNAP. The application process did take time, and we were initially going to wait until next season to apply and introduce it in our Market. Proceeding with SNAP meant that we had an even larger turn out of patrons who could utilize their SNAP benefits throughout the season.

Through the use of social media, word of mouth, promotional signage, and attendance at our local community events, we saw an increase each week in the attendance of new patrons. Leading to at least 10 people reporting it is their first time visiting the Market each weekend. Through a continuing effort to support our vendors and patrons, we have been able to provide a layout in advance of each vendor location for each week. Through this trial-and-error process, we have situated our vendors

where they do not compete with like products while allowing them to provide their best for each patron. This leads overall to familiarity of the Market site and allows each vendor to know where they will be and how to best situate their products.

While we have seen the constant ebb and flow of progress throughout the season, progress has been abundantly made. The Market has seen an influx of vendors and entrepreneurs; from established businesses to new vendors looking to start their very first business. Our Market team has also found a rhythm and routine that is built upon each week. Our promotional materials have helped bring in new patrons each week, and our strong social media presence has drawn tremendous positive attention from those within our community and within the surrounding areas.

Continued success allows us to establish a season-long map that allows vendors a non-changing site within the Market and continued predictability of their location. Doing so would allow us to fill all the spaces and rotate vendors that may not be present for the full Market season. Our Market schedule was mapped out for the entire season in 2023.

Resources Identified

Financial support was received included the Rural Champion grant and Ewing Marion Heartlands Challenge Kauffman Grant- \$13k for three-year funding source.

Non-financial resource partners have included the City of Junction City; Livewell Geary County Community Farmer's Market; Emporia Main Street; Leavenworth Main Street; Flint Hills Regional Council; Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation; Kansas Department of Rural Prosperity; Main Street America to include all of the resources through the Main Street Now Conference in Richmond, Virginia' Erin Bishop Kansas State Research and Extension; Boy Scouts; Milford Nature Center; Corp of Engineers; Milford Fish Hatchery; Milford State Park; Brigade Baseball; Junction City Little Theater; Geary Community Healthcare Foundation; Crossfit; Dorothy Bramlage Library; Konza Community Medical; Freedom Fest Committee; Oktoberfest Committee; Geary County K-State Research and Extension 4-H Director; MHK Studio Play; Stantec Consulting Services LLC, Jessica Reilley with Mix of Pixels; Fort Riley Soldiers and Volunteers; Ft. Riley Spouses Club leaders; JCE101 Vendor participation; Vendor 101; and numerous vendor participants.

Implementation grant will be used for marketing funds in several different areas. Marketing for the project is where we are focusing these grant funds because there cannot be a successful market without good attendance numbers. It's crucial to have the community aware of the market to have

higher attendance and support. Therefore, it's necessary to push hard in several directions to ensure the town, region and state has the market information in hopes to bring in more visitors and allow for vendors to sell more. The few listed below are examples of the marketing needs:

- Print/banner materials - Send out mailers to the town, print more information brochures and purchase additional a-frames/banners to be placed throughout the town. Purchase a branded, strong/sturdy canopy tent with organization's logo on to allow for vendors and attendees to easily spot in the crowd and be able to share information.
- Online Marketing - Boosting/promoting more online marketing, including professional marketing campaign to allow for a cohesive brand. Include promo videos put together of the market that can be shared. These videos would be a general video, a vendor focused video and an information video about accepting SNAP EBT & Healthy Prescriptions.
- Signage - Research the placement of a permanent digital sign that can be placed in town for all the bypassing traffic to see. Since there are rotating themes/events for every market. it would be a convenient way to reach a good chunk of the population and provide updates for upcoming events.

A portion of funds will also be used to support a market manager through the 2024 season. The biggest thing we struggle with is getting all the great things happening at the market, out to residents. These marketing tools will hopefully help create more foot traffic every weekend.