

K-State keeping rural, urban Kansans on the forefront of COVID-19 knowledge

**Kansas State University is helping families in Kansas by arming them with new research, information, tools and outreach during the COVID-19 pandemic. From health and safety in meatpacking plants to food security and economic and mental health resources, K-State is taking a multifaceted approach to assist Kansans.**

**"As the land-grant university, it is our mission to support the state and its people not only through education but also research, engagement and service," said Peter K. Dorhout, vice president for research. "Agriculture is the largest economic industry in the state, and I am proud of the work our entire university is doing to help all Kansans, but especially those in this vital industry."**

**Joel DeRouche, professor of animal sciences and industry, says the current situation has affected all aspects of the livestock industry.**

**"The reduction in cattle and swine processing within the packing industry has forced many producers to retain animals on their operations that would have been marketed to processors on a normal schedule," DeRouche said.**

**The K-State animal sciences and industry department is directly aiding producers by discussing modifications to feed and management practices, working with producers on ration formulations and how to reduce feed costs. The department also is working with veterinarians across the state and advising producers who are holding animals until the market turns around on best practices for keeping those animals healthy.**

**Randall Phebus, professor of animal sciences with 30 years of experience working with meat processing facilities, says he is talking regularly with contacts in the meat and poultry industries to understand the challenges they are facing and the importance for research on personnel safety, food safety, and food and agricultural security as they try to maintain and meat processing operations.**

**"It comes down to sharing information between facilities, public health officials, researchers and the people running the facilities," Phebus said. "And that's where I think K-State can really step up. To be able to help the agriculture production and food processing sectors is like a calling for us researchers."**

**Glynn Tonsor, professor of agricultural economics, says the Kansas economy is directly and substantially impacted by anything that alters the agricultural**

economy and this is even more true when the livestock sector and the effects of COVID-19 are considered more narrowly.

"I am doing my best to provide information that aids in decision-making," Tonsor said. "Ultimately, I hope my efforts provide economic context and information that enables tough decisions to be more guided and less influenced by emotion."

The agricultural economics department is maintaining and updating K-State's [AgManager](#) site, which includes valuable resources for the livestock community as well as others in the agricultural sector.

The K-State Family Center, the clinic of the couple and family therapy program in the College of Health and Human Sciences, prepared to serve its clients via telehealth when the university moved to reduced operations.

"The circumstances surrounding Covid-19 are difficult for many people," said Marcie Lechtenberg, clinic director and clinical assistant professor. "Financial stress, child care and school issues, concerns about health, grief over canceled events and activities, and increasing social isolation are just a few of the things that can place a strain on relationships and individual mental health. The couple and family therapy program recognized that it was of critical importance we offer our therapy services via telehealth and make sure those services are financially feasible for our clients."

Telehealth services have been used to serve clients since March 23 and the clinic has provided more than 430 hours of therapy to individuals, couples and families to date. All graduate students and faculty are now helping clients online.

The clinic operates on a sliding fee scale and clients' fees can be adjusted because of decreased income. New clients may schedule an appointment through [the Family Center website](#), [hhs.k-state.edu/familycenter](https://hhs.k-state.edu/familycenter), or by calling the clinic at 785-532-6984.

Other resources include:

- "[Agriculture Today](#)," a radio program and podcast produced by the College of Agriculture and K-State Research and Extension, covers timely topics and distributes research as well as new ideas and information.
- [Webinars](#) and a YouTube channel with informational videos help keep Kansans up to date on topics such as farm finance and recommended alternatives to conducting scheduled prescribed burns of Conservation Reserve Program acreage because of the COVID-19 situation. The webinars have been viewed more

than 4,000 times and videos on the YouTube channel currently have more than 6,000 views.

- The [Center for Engagement and Community Development](#) is helping ensure Kansans in all communities have continued access to healthy foods during this time.

"Many small-town grocery stores have seen an increase in their sales since COVID," said David Procter, director of the center. "People are trying to stay close to home, so when you have a small town that has lost its grocery store this becomes a real problem."

The center is part of the [Rural Grocery Initiative](#) and is a resource for all grocery store owners in Kansas. The center provides funding as well as technical and informational assistance through the [Kansas Healthy Food Initiative](#). This assistance is primarily for improving access to healthy food and can include such things as upgrading a store's online sales system.

A new Facebook page for grocery store owners has also been developed by the center. The group allows owners to ask specific questions of not just those at K-State, but also other store owners.