

Q & A: Atchison and Leavenworth Counties District Formation

Q: Are Atchison and Leavenworth Counties discussing to form an Extension District?

A: Discussions have been initiated to assess opportunities that an extension district could offer our counties. Although the two counties have entered into discussions, we are still in the process of researching the possibilities of districting.

These discussions have been supported by the encouragement of Kansas State University Extension Service as a method to enhance and improve the quality and diversity of programs for the citizens of our counties

Q: What is driving the interest in Atchison and Leavenworth counties forming an Extension district?

A: First: The necessity for relevant, more effective, high quality specialized programs to meet the growing needs of our county citizens. These needs require personnel who have skills and time to focus on the delivery of these specific programs.

Kansans have indicated a need for more in-depth subject matter knowledge from Extension service. This isn't always possible when a county agent has to divide time between several Extension program areas and thus cannot focus on the more in-depth issues. Agents in a one county Extension Council system who are stretched thin in their own counties can be much more effective at focusing if they can specialize in a certain program area and collectively serve a broader population.

Second: Changing demographics, changing economic and social climates in communities create a demand on more diverse and specialized programs to meet the need of our citizens.

This presents a burden on the existing number of extension agents our county has to meet this increasing multitude of programming needs for the county citizens.

Third: Districting would allow counties to combine resources, in funding and personnel, to become more efficient in developing and delivering more diverse and specific programs and services.

Funding for staffing and programs is an ongoing challenge. The average county Extension council's budget is financed about 80 percent with county funds and 20 percent state and federal funds. But many counties that have the authority to determine county Extension council funds are struggling to provide enough funds for salary and benefits of personnel and operational expenses.

Q: How could a District System improve on these issues for Atchison/ Leavenworth County?

A: All agents of the district become available resources. With districting, agents can be more specialized. Agents can better utilize the time they spend planning and preparing for specific program areas that will be delivered to a larger audience across two counties.

Right now, county agents are expected to cover a broad array of programming areas. For example, one agent might be expected to give programs on tree care, soil fertility, livestock nutrition and also help with 4-H programming in addition to a myriad other program areas.

Q: How can a District benefit residents of the counties that form the district?

A: With agents able to focus more on a particular area, the quality of the programs and the depth of information delivered to residents in the district will improve. In a District format, available programs can increase in quality and quantity with several agents available in the county to deliver programs.

Q. How is an Extension District formed?

A. A proposal of the formation of an Extension District is presented to county commissioners of the counties proposing to form the district.

The proposal requires the approval of each county extension council, county commissioners, and the director of K-State Research and Extension. The Kansas Attorney General reviews all paperwork and makes the decision to approve the district. There is a public comment period before the proposal is submitted to the Attorney General.

This proposal is presented after the counties, through joint discussions at the County Council level, jointly evaluate the value that a District would bring to each county and determine that the district system would enhance programming and staffing needs to improve the quality of Extension services for all citizens in the counties forming the district.

Q: Will county citizens lose local control of Extension governance ?

A: Extension districts rely on strong local governance. A District Board would oversee the new district, represented by four members each from Leavenworth and Atchison counties.

A District Board oversees the new district, represented by four members from each county. The district laws require the governing body of four members to be elected by the general public on a general election ballot. This is held in odd years in the spring with other municipal elections, such as school districts and city commissions. This governing body is responsible to the public.

Q: Will county citizens lose control of Extension program development?

A. No - Each county involved in district programming will appoint representatives to the four Program Development Committees (PDCs) for the district. The elected District Board appoints the PDC members.

Q: Will Districting affect current relationships with groups such as 4-H clubs/FCE/ community coalitions, etc?

A – Yes, it will change for the better. The long-term relationships with current district agents will remain. However; as agents become more specialized the groups will be offered a greater variety of programs.

Q: What would agent staffing look like in a typical Extension district?

A: That would depend on needs set forth by the District Board as well as funding. The district would combine agent staff of the two counties.

Based on the assessed needs of the District, there may be a 4-H youth development agent, a crops and soils agent, a livestock agent, a horticulture agent, a family and consumer science (FCS)/nutrition and food safety agent, a FCS/family and child development agent, or a community/rural development agent.

Q: If a county's Extension office becomes part of a district, does it mean the county office will close?

A: This is a decision that districts will make depending on needs of the district. The districts that have formed to date have decided to maintain offices in each of the counties of the district.

The presently formed Districts recognize the need for citizens to have access to an extension office without excessive travel.

Q: Do the counties in districts still have individual county fairs?

A: County Fairs would remain in each county as they presently exist. The County Fair is recognized as an event with strong local identity and traditions.

County fairs are run by fair boards or associations in most counties of Kansas. Existing Extension Districts in the state have decided that it is appropriate to be involved with county fairs in each county.

Q: What about the downside to districting? Surely there must be some.

A: Some people worry about local access to their agent. County Extension agents have been generalists that people can go to for information on many topics. In a district, agents will be more specialized and will be programming beyond the county where they are based, so access to a particular agent may change.

But with current communication technology, many of those issues can be overcome and residents will have access to several agents who have specialized, more in-depth knowledge on specific topics.

Q: How are Extension districts funded?

A: The Extension District becomes a taxing authority to fund the needs of the district and would replace the present local tax based budget assigned by county commissioners with a tax levy based budget presented by the District governing board. This governing body is responsible to the public.

District Boards develop a budget to provide funding for extension. A proposed budget is presented at a public hearing to allow citizen input. The funding comes from property taxes of the counties within a given district.

Historically, Extension Districts in Kansas have been good stewards and are responsible in their decision-making relating to tax authority. The numbers have remained consistent through the years.

Presently the Extension councils receive their local funds from a tax levy upon all taxable tangible property in the county administered through the county commissioners.

Q: Is it possible for a county to either get into or out of an existing district?

A: Yes, there are procedures in place for either of those actions to occur.

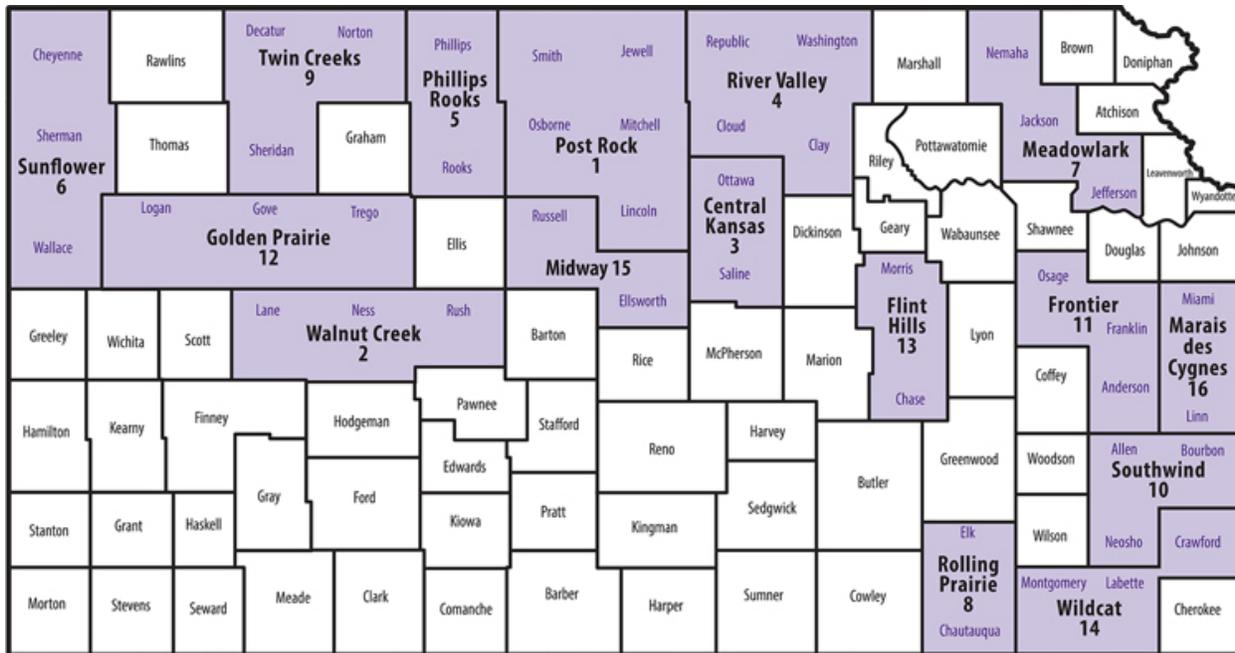
Reference - Kansas Extension District Law –
<http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/boardleadership/p.aspx?tabid=602>

Q: How many counties in Kansas have already formed districts?

A: Forty-four counties have formed 16 Extension Districts across the state.

Mitchell and Lincoln counties were the first to form the Post Rock District in 1994. Jewell and Osborne counties joined the district in 2005 and Smith county joined the Post Rock district in 2012.

The map below shows the location of those districts.



Q: Do other states have Extension districts?

A: Yes, most of our surrounding states have gone to some form of multi-county staffing and programming.

This multi-staffing and programming format exist in 26 other states, including Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Kentucky and Tennessee.

Kansas Cooperative Extension Service

Dates Districts Organized

Post Rock Extension District #1 (Lincoln, Mitchell) July 1, 1994

Post Rock expanded to include Jewell and Osborne July 1, 2005; Smith July 1, 2012

Walnut Creek Extension District #2 (Lane, Ness, Rush) July 1, 1996

Central Kansas Extension District #3 (Ottawa, Saline) July 1, 2004

River Valley Extension District #4 (Clay, Cloud, Republic, Washington) July 1, 2005

Phillips-Rooks Extension District #5 (Phillips, Rooks) July 1, 2005

Sunflower Extension District #6 (Sherman, Wallace) July 1, 2005

Sunflower expanded to include Cheyenne July 1, 2006

Meadowlark Extension District #7 (Jackson, Jefferson, Nemaha) July 1, 2006

Rolling Prairie Extension District #8 (Chautauqua, Elk) July 1, 2008

Twin Creeks District #9 (Decatur, Norton) July 1, 2009

Twin Creeks expanded to include Sheridan July 1, 2011

Southwind Extension District #10 (Allen and Neosho) July 1, 2010

Southwind expanded to include Bourbon July 1, 2011

Frontier Extension District #11 (Franklin and Osage) July 1, 2010

Frontier expanded to include Anderson July 1, 2014

Golden Prairie Extension District #12 (Trego and Logan) July 1, 2010

Golden Prairie expanded to include Gove July 1, 2011

Flint Hills Extension District #13 (Chase and Morris) July 1, 2010

Wildcat Extension District #14 (Crawford, Montgomery and Labette) July 1, 2011

Midway Extension District #15 (Ellsworth and Russell) July 1, 2013

Marais des Cygnes District #16 (Linn and Miami) July 1, 2014.