



Wyandotte County, Kansas

Wyandotte County – or the “Dotte,” as residents affectionately call it – is the smallest county in Kansas by land area, but the fourth largest by population. Bordered by the Missouri River on the north and the Kansas River on the south, the Dotte is one of nine counties in a bi-state region surrounding the Kansas City, Missouri, metropolitan area. Despite being located in a metro area of more than 2 million people, much of the county has a rural character with large yards and wide expanses of open land. The City of Kansas City and Wyandotte County consolidated in 1997 to create the Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kansas (Unified Government), which closely collaborates with the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC), the area’s designated metropolitan planning organization.

The Dotte is home to 160,000 residents, 93% of whom live in Kansas City, Kansas. The U.S. Census Bureau reports 62% of the population is White alone and 25% is Black alone; 42,801 people identify themselves as Hispanic or Latino. In addition, 15% of the county’s population is foreign born, and a significant proportion of those residents are refugees, primarily from Burma, Burundi, Somalia, Bhutan, Iraq, and Sudan. The county struggles economically with a median household income of \$39,326 and about a quarter of its population living below the poverty line.

Agriculture and Food Production With ample water supplies and high quality soils, Wyandotte County has great potential to increase local food production and the viability of its agricultural economy. Its leading agricultural product is cattle, supported by soybeans, corn, and forage production. There are also 260 acres in wheat production and a small number of farms producing fruits, vegetables, eggs, and small livestock including sheep and goats.

Wyandotte County Agriculture

Number of farms ¹	164
Percent of land in farms ¹	13%
Percent of land with high quality soils ²	77%
Percent of farms that are small ¹	99%
Average market value of agricultural products sold per farm ¹	\$20,000
Average age of farmers ¹	62 years old

Sources: ¹ USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2012 Census of Agriculture; ² USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. General Soil Map, 2007



Northrup Park Community Garden, Kansas City, Kansas

However, the Dotte’s 164 farms are very small and struggle economically. Constrained by multiple factors – including urban development pressure, limited access to farmland, and a regional focus on large-scale commodity agriculture – 86% of farms have gross annual sales of less than \$20,000.

A strong network of 250 community partner gardens and a cadre of public policies and programs help foster an emerging urban agriculture sector. For example, the Unified Government has a Brownfields Program that can help revitalize blighted lots for agricultural purposes, and Juniper Gardens Training Farm works with refugee farmers to build their agricultural business skills.

Market demand for local food is strong. Four small farmers markets, served primarily by farmers from Wyandotte County, connect urban consumers to local food. There are also about 50 farmers markets in the greater Kansas City metro region; most of these are served by farmers from outside the region, many of whom come from two or more hours away. Beyond farmers markets, many institutions in the metro area want to serve local food, but this demand is not being met by Wyandotte County farmers. While farmers in the region have access to meat processing, the county does not have infrastructure to support first-stage processing for fruits, vegetables, and grains. Three food hubs are at various planning stages for the state and region, and could potentially provide aggregation, processing, and distribution opportunities to regional and Wyandotte County farmers if the agricultural sector expands to meet market demand.

Food Access Wyandotte County has the highest rate of food insecurity in the state for reasons tied both to geography and income. Eighteen of the county’s census tracts are designated as “food deserts” by the USDA, and about 14% of the population (about 22,000 residents) is both low income and has limited neighborhood options for healthy food. Countywide, about 81% of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch.



Wyandotte County Population

Area ³	152 sq. miles
Population ³	159,466
Percent of population below the poverty line ³	24%
Percent of students eligible for free or reduced lunch ⁴	81%

Sources: ³ U.S. Census Bureau 2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, ⁴ Kids County Data Center, 2015

Several public and private entities have partnered in Wyandotte County to increase access to healthy and affordable food for low-income residents. The Unified Government partners with other funders to support a regional

“Double Up Food Bucks Kansas City” program that doubles the value of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits at the county’s four farmers markets. In 2015, community partners, including the Unified Government and MARC, initiated a complementary program to allow SNAP recipients to receive the matching benefit for local produce purchases at five grocery stores, including two in Wyandotte County. Mayor Mark Holland is also supporting healthy food availability by championing the Downtown Healthy Campus Plan, which includes aspirations for a full-service grocery store in an underserved area of Kansas City, Kansas.

A sophisticated emergency food system also plays a major role in addressing the county’s food access issues. The Harvesters Food Bank serves 36 pantries and provides several summer feeding sites and take-home backpacks of food to address childhood hunger. The county’s Cooperative Extension service and several homeless shelters and food pantries, including Harvesters, teach residents how to prepare meals with fresh, healthy ingredients. Lastly, there is a well-established network of community gardens and a growing number of publicly accessible orchards in underserved neighborhoods for residents who are interested in producing their own fruits and vegetables.

Growing Food Connections Wyandotte County was selected to be one of eight Communities of Opportunity across the country to participate in Growing Food Connections (GFC), a 5-year initiative funded by USDA-NIFA to improve community food security and support local agriculture and food production. County leadership demonstrated a need and a strong commitment to strengthening the county’s food system and created a steering committee of local government representatives and food system stakeholders to accomplish this work. This steering committee works with the GFC team of researchers and technical assistance providers to identify and address local policy opportunities and barriers to achieve its food system goals.

The steering committee is dedicated to strengthening the local food system by promoting sustainability, collaboration, economic development, education, and policy change. The committee’s goals revolve around community engagement and regional collaboration. These goals are guided by the following vision statement:

“Wyandotte County will promote a healthy, locally produced, and culturally appropriate food system that meets the needs and desires of all residents and supports economic vitality. This initiative will be an integral and innovative contributor to regional food system efforts.”

WYANDOTTE COUNTY STEERING COMMITTEE

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| Lindsay Behgam
Unified Government of Wyandotte County | Beth Low-Smith
KC Healthy Kids |
| Andrew Bracker
City of Kansas City, Missouri | Donna Martin
Mid America Regional Council |
| Nozella Brown
Kansas State Research & Extension, Wyandotte County | Andrea Matthew
Kansas City Community Gardens |
| Alyssa Carodine
Healthy Communities Wyandotte | Brian McKiernan
Unified Government of Wyandotte County |
| Joe Connor
Unified Government of Wyandotte County | Marlene Nagel
Mid America Regional Council |
| Kimiko Gilmore
City of Kansas City, Missouri | Robin Richardson
Unified Government of Wyandotte County |
| Rachel Jefferson
Historic Northeast Midtown Association | Jeff Samborski
University of Missouri Extension |
| Katherine Kelly
Cultivate KC | Karen Siebert
Harvesters - The Community Food Network |
| Gretchen Kunkel
KC Healthy Kids | |

GROWING FOOD CONNECTIONS PARTNERSHIP



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