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New Food Policy Council aims to expand access to healthy foods for all of Johnson County

JOHNSON COUNTY, KANSAS (March 29, 2016) – The newly-created Johnson County Food Policy Council will help increase access to healthy foods for residents throughout the county. Johnson County Department of Health and Environment (JCDHE) has taken the lead on this issue with partners throughout the metro area representing all stages of the food system – from growing and production to distribution and food service.

“The availability of nutritious food for all citizens is essential to the health and well-being of the community,” says Lougene Marsh, JCDHE director. “Recent data shows that 61% of Johnson Countians are overweight or obese. We also have a 12% food insecurity rate (over 65,000 individuals) who may not know where their next meal is coming from. Something needs to be done to address these issues at all levels.”

The Johnson County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) chairman will approve members of the JCFPC, upon the recommendation of the JCDHE director and the JCFPC. The JCFPC will advise the BOCC on policies and practices that could effectively address food access, hunger, obesity, community development, economic development, agriculture, food waste, and nutrition and food education.

In 2011, JCDHE conducted a community health assessment which resulted in a five-year plan with the goal of increasing the availability of healthy food as one of its top priorities. In 2012 after receiving a grant from the Kansas Health Foundation, JCDHE formed an Access to Healthy Food Coalition to further study the issue.

This coalition has spent the past four years studying Johnson County’s food system and identifying additional partners interested in working together to increase access to healthy, fresh, and affordable food for all Johnson Countians. The group determined there was interest in creating a food policy council, which would include representatives such as local government, agriculture producers, anti-hunger organizations, retail food outlets, local health systems, school
districts, and charitable organizations. The BOCC approved the creation of that council earlier this month.

The Council will first prioritize parts of Olathe, Overland Park and Edgerton that have been previously identified by the coalition as food deserts - a geographic area where affordable and nutritious food is hard to obtain particularly for those without access to an automobile.

**About Johnson County, Kansas**
Located in the southwestern quadrant of the Kansas City Metropolitan Region, Johnson County, Kansas is a community of choice with a current population of more than 580,000, making it the most populated of the 105 counties in Kansas, but traditionally having the lowest mill levy in the state. For more information visit the county’s website at [www.jocogov.org](http://www.jocogov.org).