

Extension Develops Local Food Systems



Warren County Horticulture Agent works with a specialty greens producer. Greenhouses and high tunnels allow for lettuce to be grown year-round for local retailers.

Extension Provides Resources that Expand Produce Production to Retail Sales in Southern Kentucky

Through Extension, agriculture producers diversify crops and add value to extend access to local food throughout the year.

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COOPERATIVE EXTENSION



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It starts with us

Extension clients become agricultural leaders in their community. They mentor other producers on production, participate in local marketing efforts, and advocate for agriculture in the state.

Extension specialists and horticulture agents in Southern Kentucky conduct education and certification programs for fruit and vegetable producers and entrepreneurs. Producers sell a diverse variety of produce enabling consumers to access fresh food at the peak of perfection to improve their health.

Starting in **Barren County**, a producer reported Extension trainings led to a 50% production increase on her farm, and farmers market profits increased by 300%. She was able to install a second high tunnel structure through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), which was covered in the Extension Vegetable Production series. A second high tunnel allowed the farm to incorporate strawberry production as an additional enterprise.

Furthermore, a **Metcalf County** producer reported significant changes in his vegetable production operation, including implementing crop rotation as a cultural practice to control disease development, and utilizing high tunnels to sell early in the season as well as extending production into the fall months. He applied leadership skills as the president of the local farmers market board. This producer has become a peer mentor to more than 20 other high tunnel growers in Southern Kentucky counties. The 2017 Western Kentucky Commercial Horticulture Tour featured this operation.

Increased production is only valuable if there is a market for the crop. Southern Kentucky fruit and vegetable growers are able to sell their produce at the Southern Kentucky (SoKY) Marketplace, located in Bowling Green. Over 40 agricultural producers and food

entrepreneurs from five Kentucky counties sell to an average of 500 consumers on Saturdays. SoKY Marketplace continues to make measurable strides each year since its creation in 2014.

The **Warren County** Cooperative Extension Service provides technical support for the SoKY Marketplace. The Horticulture Extension Agent trains growers in Produce Best Practices Training, which allows them to offer safe raw or cooked food samples at the market and increase sales. The Homebased Microprocessor Workshop certified 26 growers in the Southern Kentucky area to sell value-added products at the market in 2017. With this certification, producers can access the Culinary Incubator Kitchen that is part of the SoKY Marketplace.

As Kentucky farm families look for new enterprises and ways to expand small-scale agriculture production, Extension provides programs showing value not only through increased production but also in the form of additional profits. With the demand for local food at an all-time high, Extension will continue to build on the knowledge gained, practices changed, and the economic results from training opportunities to increase the stability of the local food system.



High tunnels extend the growing season for farmers, and often lead to crop diversification.

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