# KSU Center for Engagement and Community Development

# USDA RBOG Project:

# Rural Grocery Sustainability Project

# Customer Survey

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Nider's Thriftway, Onaga
Wilbur's Market, Potwin
Wilbur's Market, Florence
GCIA Grocery, Gove

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**Introduction.** In January of 2007, a group of rural grocery store owners, rural community development service providers, and economic development professionals requested a meeting with the Kansas State University Center for Engagement and Community Development to discuss the economic and operational realities confronting rural grocery operations. Declining population in rural areas continues to exert constant constriction on rural community business and service providers. Of the 627 incorporated cities in Kansas, nearly 75% are populated with fewer than 1,500 people. The majority of these communities do not have the business support network of a chamber of commerce or economic development director. For grocery stores, the declining customer base leads to longer product shelf time, reduces product reorder volume, and threatens business viability. Competition of larger regional stores can put smaller stores at a disadvantage.

Keeping these stores strong is a significant investment in the economy of rural communities. Grocery stores are an anchor business in rural communities. The issues facing rural grocery stores are common across Kansas, yet there has been little documentation of the issues. In spite of these constraints, two sources of hope surfaced. First is the belief that the rural population customer base is not beyond the point of business viability. The second point of hope lies in the creative solutions rural grocers are willing to embrace, including forming strategic partnerships, joint purchasing, and openness to trying new ideas for business creation.

Supported by funding from a USDA Rural Business Opportunity Grant, the Center for Engagement and Community Development (CECD) partnered with K-State Research and Extension, Kansas Sampler Foundation, Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, and Kansas Rural Grocers on a project to survey Kansas rural grocers and their customers to identify strengths and weakness of small town grocery stores. Through this project, rural grocery stores will be better able to understand economic and business models necessary for sustainability.

This report, along with a report on the survey of store owners, is part of the first stage of the project: surveying Kansas rural grocers and reporting the findings. Postal patrons in communities of five cooperating stores were surveyed to assess customer preferences and needs. The results of these surveys are summarized and cross referenced to the owners' surveys to identify areas where customers' and owners' perceptions agree or diverge. Subsequent stages will include identifying and disseminating information regarding 'best practices' for rural grocers.

**Survey.** In cooperation with grocery stores in Alma, Florence, Gove, Onaga, and Potwin, Kansas, surveys were sent to all postal patrons of each town. These surveys were designed not only to provide customer information to the individual cooperating stores, but also to give a cumulative profile of a typical customer of rural groceries in Kansas.

Of the 5,777 surveys sent, 990 were returned for a response rate of 17.1%. The surveys and a cover letter were mailed February 11, 2008. Flyers were posted in the cooperating stores as a reminder. Returned surveys were accepted until April 18, 2008. A copy of the survey can be found in the Appendix. The following tables summarize the information collected from the customer surveys.

Customer Survey – Tables

Table 1.

| Customer Survey. Question #1: Please circle the number that best represents the importance of each of the following to your grocery shopping expectations. | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Not Very Important | | | | Very Important |
| 1. Quality of food . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 0% | 0.4% | 3.7% | 21.3% | 74.6% |
| 2. Availability of food (variety, brand choices) | 0.2% | 2.3% | 20.2% | 42.6% | 34.8% |
| 3. Prices of items offered . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 0.3% | 0.7% | 14.5% | 31.0% | 53.5% |
| 4. Customer service . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 0.2% | 2.3% | 15.4% | 42.0% | 40.1% |
| 5. Cleanliness of store . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 0.3% | 0.3% | 7.0% | 31.2% | 61.2% |
| 6. Convenient business hours . . . . . . . . . . . . | 0.4% | 1.7% | 13.9% | 45.5% | 38.5% |
| 7. Travel time to the grocery store . . . . . . . . | 3.1% | 7.8% | 27.8% | 32.7% | 28.6% |
| 8. Supporting local business . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 0.8% | 2.9% | 14.4% | 32.1% | 49.7% |
| 9. Buying locally grown foods . . . . . . . . . . . | 4.6% | 10.9% | 26.1% | 28.4% | 30.0% |

Table 2.

| Customer Survey Question #2: Please circle the number that best represents how well your **local grocery store** meets your shopping expectations. | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Doesn't meet Expectations | | | | Exceeds Expectations |
| 1. Quality of food . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 5.4% | 11.1% | 34.1% | 35.0% | 14.0% |
| 2. Availability of food (variety, brand choices) | 5.3% | 17.4% | 40.6% | 27.9% | 8.4% |
| 3. Prices of items offered . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 6.7% | 19.2% | 42.3% | 23.5% | 7.8% |
| 4. Customer service . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 3.6% | 8.1% | 23.3% | 33.8% | 30.7% |
| 5. Cleanliness of store . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 5.4% | 5.7% | 20.0% | 39.3% | 29.1% |
| 6. Convenient business hours . . . . . . . . . . . . | 2.2% | 5.8% | 17.5% | 43.3% | 30.8% |
| 7. Travel time to the grocery store . . . . . . . . | 2.1% | 2.5% | 14.5% | 33.7% | 46.7% |
| 8. Supporting local business . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 3.4% | 3.9% | 19.4% | 31.7% | 41.3% |
| 9. Buying locally grown foods . . . . . . . . . . . | 7.1% | 15.7% | 40.0% | 23.6% | 13.2% |

Table 3.

| Customer Survey Question: Combined | a)Importance | b)Meets expectations | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Not Very Important | | | | Very Important |
| a. Quality of food | 0% | 0.4% | 3.7% | 21.3% | 74.6% |
| b. Quality of food | 5.4% | 11.1% | 34.1% | 35.0% | 14.0% |
| a. Availability of food (variety, brand choices) | 0.2% | 2.3% | 20.2% | 42.6% | 34.8% |
| b. Availability of food (variety, brand choices) | 5.3% | 17.4% | 40.6% | 27.9% | 8.4% |
| a. Prices of items offered | 0.3% | 0.7% | 14.5% | 31.0% | 53.5% |
| b. Prices of items offered | 6.7% | 19.2% | 42.3% | 23.5% | 7.8% |
| a. Customer service | 0.2% | 2.3% | 15.4% | 42.0% | 40.1% |
| b. Customer service | 3.6% | 8.1% | 23.3% | 33.8% | 30.7% |
| a. Cleanliness of store | 0.3% | 0.3% | 7.0% | 31.2% | 61.2% |
| b. Cleanliness of store | 5.4% | 5.7% | 20.0% | 39.3% | 29.1% |
| a. Convenient business hours | 0.4% | 1.7% | 13.9% | 45.5% | 38.5% |
| b. Convenient business hours | 2.2% | 5.8% | 17.5% | 43.3% | 30.8% |
| a. Travel time to the grocery store | 3.1% | 7.8% | 27.8% | 32.7% | 28.6% |
| b. Travel time to the grocery store | 2.1% | 2.5% | 14.5% | 33.7% | 46.7% |
| a. Supporting local business | 0.8% | 2.9% | 14.4% | 32.1% | 49.7% |
| b. Supporting local business | 3.4% | 3.9% | 19.4% | 31.7% | 41.3% |
| a. Buying locally grown foods | 4.6% | 10.9% | 26.1% | 28.4% | 30.0% |
| b. Buying locally grown foods | 7.1% | 15.7% | 40.0% | 23.6% | 13.2% |

Table 4.

| Owner Survey. When running a grocery store, how important is it to you to offer each of the following? Rate the importance of each by circling the number that best fits your response. | Not Very Important | | | | Very Important |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Quality of food | 0% | 1.2% | 1.2% | 5.9% | 91.8% |
| 2. Availability of food (variety, brand choices) | 0% | 3.5% | 24.7% | 36.5% | 35.3% |
| 3. Prices of items offered | 0% | 2.4% | 25.9% | 42.4% | 29.4% |
| 4. Customer service | 1.2% | 0% | 2.4% | 10.6% | 85.9% |
| 5. Business hours | 0% | 0% | 17.6% | 48.2% | 34.1% |
| 6. Buying locally | 13.8% | 13.8% | 23.8% | 8.8% | 40.0% |

Table 5.

| Owner Survey. How does your store do at providing the following to customers? Rate your store by circling the number that best fits your response. | Not Very Important | | | | Very Important |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Quality of food | 0% | 0% | 4.8% | 41.0% | 54.2% |
| 2. Availability of food (variety, brand choices) | 1.2% | 3.6% | 30.1% | 44.6% | 20.5% |
| 3. Prices of items offered | 1.2% | 8.4% | 25.3% | 53.0% | 12.0% |
| 4. Customer service | 0% | 1.2% | 1.2% | 39.8% | 57.8% |
| 5. Business hours | 1.2% | 2.4% | 20.5% | 43.4% | 32.5% |
| 6. Buying locally | 13.0% | 15.6% | 36.4% | 18.2% | 16.9% |

Table 6.

| Owner Survey. Combined. a) Importance to you b) How well do you do | Not Very Important | | | | Very Important |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. Quality of food ........................ | 0% | 1.2% | 1.2% | 5.9% | 91.8% |
| b. Quality of food ........................ | 0% | 0% | 4.8% | 41.0% | 54.2% |
| a. Availability of food (variety, brand choices) | 0% | 3.5% | 24.7% | 36.5% | 35.3% |
| b. Availability of food (variety, brand choices) | 1.2% | 3.6% | 30.1% | 44.6% | 20.5% |
| a. Prices of items offered .................. | 0% | 2.4% | 25.9% | 42.4% | 29.4% |
| b. Prices of items offered .................. | 1.2% | 8.4% | 25.3% | 53.0% | 12.0% |
| a. Customer service ...................... | 1.2% | 0% | 2.4% | 10.6% | 85.9% |
| b. Customer service ...................... | 0% | 1.2% | 1.2% | 39.8% | 57.8% |
| a. Business hours ........................ | 0% | 0% | 17.6% | 48.2% | 34.1% |
| b. Business hours ........................ | 1.2% | 2.4% | 20.5% | 43.4% | 32.5% |
| a. Buying locally......................... | 13.8% | 13.8% | 23.8% | 8.8% | 40.0% |
| b. Buying locally......................... | 13.0% | 15.6% | 36.4% | 18.2% | 16.9% |

Table 7.

| Combined Owner & Customer - Importance | a) Owner | | b) Customer | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Not Very Important | | | | Very Important |
| a. Quality of food | 0% | 1.2% | 1.2% | 5.9% | 91.8% |
| b. Quality of food | 0% | 0.4% | 3.7% | 21.3% | 74.6% |
| a. Availability of food (variety, brand choices) | 0% | 3.5% | 24.7% | 36.5% | 35.3% |
| b. Availability of food (variety, brand choices) | 0.2% | 2.3% | 20.2% | 42.6% | 34.8% |
| a. Prices of items offered | 0% | 2.4% | 25.9% | 42.4% | 29.4% |
| b. Prices of items offered | 0.3% | 0.7% | 14.5% | 31.0% | 53.5% |
| a. Customer service | 1.2% | 0% | 2.4% | 10.6% | 85.9% |
| b. Customer service | 3.6% | 8.1% | 23.3% | 33.8% | 30.7% |
| a. Business hours | 0% | 0% | 17.6% | 48.2% | 34.1% |
| b. Business hours | 0.4% | 1.7% | 13.9% | 45.5% | 38.5% |
| a. Buying locally | 13.8% | 13.8% | 23.8% | 8.8% | 40.0% |
| b. Buying locally | 4.6% | 10.9% | 26.1% | 28.4% | 30.0% |

Table 8.

| Combined Owner & Customer - Expectations | a) Owner | | b) Customer | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Doesn't meet Expectations | | | | Exceeds Expectations |
| a. Quality of food | 0% | 0% | 4.8% | 41.0% | 54.2% |
| b. Quality of food | 5.4% | 11.1% | 34.1% | 35.0% | 14.0% |
| a. Availability of food (variety, brand choices) | 1.2% | 3.6% | 30.1% | 44.6% | 20.5% |
| b. Availability of food (variety, brand choices) | 5.3% | 17.4% | 40.6% | 27.9% | 8.4% |
| a. Prices of items offered | 1.2% | 8.4% | 25.3% | 53.0% | 12.0% |
| b. Prices of items offered | 6.7% | 19.2% | 42.3% | 23.5% | 7.8% |
| a. Customer service | 0% | 1.2% | 1.2% | 39.8% | 57.8% |
| b. Customer service | 3.5% | 8.4% | 22.9% | 34.2% | 30.5% |
| a. Business hours | 1.2% | 2.4% | 20.5% | 43.4% | 32.5% |
| b. Business hours | 2.2% | 5.8% | 17.5% | 43.3% | 30.8% |
| a. Buying locally | 13.0% | 15.6% | 36.4% | 18.2% | 16.9% |
| b. Buying locally | 7.1% | 15.7% | 40.0% | 23.6% | 13.2% |

Table 9.

| Customer Survey | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| What do you consider "locally grown foods" to be? *Check all that apply.* | | | |
| Food grown within certain distances: | | Food grown within certain regions: | |
| 49.4% | 0-50 miles | 43.4% | county of your residence |
| 28.3% | 50-100 miles | 42.3% | counties adjacent to your county |
| 22.2% | 100-200 miles | 50.1% | in the State of Kansas |
| | | 18.3% | in Kansas and surrounding states |
| | | 15.1% | in the United States |

Table 10.

| Customer Survey | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Please mark the appropriate responses to the following: | | | |
| Local Grocery Store | | Chain Grocery Store | |
| Visits per month | | Visits per month | |
| 4.0% | none | 1.1% | none |
| 41.5% | 1-4 times | 70.9% | 1-4 times |
| 25.1% | 5-8 times | 20.9% | 5-8 times |
| 29.1% | more than 8 times | 7.1% | more than 8 times |
| Estimated av. dollar amount spent per visit | | Estimated av. dollar amount spent per visit | |
| 38.0% | $0.00 - $20.00 | 6.8% | $0.00 - $20.00 |
| 57.9% | $20.00 - $100.00 | 61.1% | $20.00 - $100.00 |
| 3.6% | $100.00 or more | 31.9% | $100.00 or more |
| Primary reason for visit. Check all that apply. | | Primary reason for visit. Check all that apply. | |
| 50.7% | getting weekly/monthly groceries | 81.3% | getting weekly/monthly groceries |
| 80.6% | picking up a few essential/emergency items | 40.6% | picking up a few essential/emergency items |
| 2.1% | ATM/bank | 4.2% | ATM/bank |
| 13.9% | eating at restaurant/café/deli | 8.7% | eating at restaurant/café/deli |
| 1.6% | entertainment/browsing store | 13.2% | entertainment/browsing store |
| 1.7% | pharmacy | 34.6% | pharmacy |
| 1.3% | photo development | 18.8% | photo development |
| 7.6% | video/DVD rental | 3.6% | video/DVD rental |
| 22.2% | supporting local food growers/producers | 4.5% | supporting local food growers/producers |
| 62.6% | supporting my community | 5.3% | supporting my community |

Table 11.

| Customer Survey |  |
|---|---|
| I shop primarily where I work | |
| 40.0% Yes | 43.2% No |

Table 12.

| Customer Survey | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| So that we may group your responses with those of similar respondents, please answer the following questions: | | | |
| Distance you are willing to travel to get groceries? | | What is your age? | |
| 10.6% | 0-5 miles | 7.9% | under 30 |
| 15.6% | 5-10 miles | 33.9% | 31-50 |
| 28.0% | more than 10 miles | 41.2% | 51-70 |
| 45.6% | distance is not an issue | 16.9% | over 70 |
| What is your weekly family grocery budget? | | What is your annual household income? | |
| 30.9% | under $50 | 29.9% | $20,000 to $35,000 |
| 62.0% | $100 to $200 | 27.2% | $35,000 to $50,000 |
| 3.4% | greater than $200 | 39.2% | greater than $50,000 |
| 3.6% | $50 to $100 | 3.2% | less than $20,000 |
| What is your gender? | | | |
| 77.4% | female | 21.6% | male |

# Appendix
# Customer Survey

Please circle the number that best represents the importance of each of the following to your grocery shopping expectations.

| | Not Very Important | | | | Very Important |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Quality of food . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Availability of food (variety, brand choices) . . | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Prices of items offered . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Customer service . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Cleanliness of store . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Convenient business hours . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Travel time to the grocery store . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Supporting local business . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Buying locally grown foods . . . . . . . . . . . . | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Other______________________________ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Please circle the number that best represents how well your **local grocery store** meets your shopping expectations.

| | Doesn't meet <u>Expectations</u> | | | | Exceeds <u>Expectations</u> |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Quality of food . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Availability of food (variety, brand choices) . . . | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Prices of items offered . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Customer service . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Cleanliness of store . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Convenient business hours . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Travel time to the grocery store . . . . . . . . . . . . | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Supporting local business . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Buying locally grown foods . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Other_____________________________________ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

What do you consider "locally grown foods" to be? *Check all that apply*.

Foods grown within certain distances:

____ 0-50 miles

____ 50-100 miles

____ 100-200 miles

Food grown within certain regions:

_____ county of your residence

_____ counties adjacent to your county

_____ in the State of Kansas

_____ in Kansas and surrounding states

Please mark the appropriate response to the following:

*Note: A ***local*** **grocery store** is any independently owned small grocery store only found in your community.
A ***chain*** **grocery store** is any nationally franchised store (Dillon's, Wal-Mart, Sam's Club).

**Local Grocery Store**

My local grocery store is? ________________________

Visits per month
_____ none
_____ 1-4 times
_____ 5-8 times
_____ more than 8 times

Estimated average dollar amount spent per visit
_____ $0.00 - $20.00
_____ $20.00 - $100.00
_____ $100.00 or more

Primary **reason** for visit. *Check all that apply.*
____ getting weekly/monthly groceries
____ picking up a few essential/emergency items
____ ATM/ bank
____ eating at restaurant/café/deli
____ entertainment/browsing store
____ pharmacy
____ photo development
____ video/DVD rental
____ supporting local food growers/producers
____ supporting my community

**Chain Grocery Store**

The chain grocery store I shop at is? _____________

Visits per month
_____ none
_____ 1-4 times
_____ 5-8 times
_____ more than 8 times

Estimated average dollar amount spent per visit
_____ $0.00 - $20.00
_____ $20.00 - $100.00
_____ $100.00 or more

Primary **reason** for visit. *Check all that apply.*
____ getting weekly/monthly groceries
____ picking up a few essential/emergency items
____ ATM/ bank
____ eating at restaurant/café/deli
____ entertainment/browsing store
____ pharmacy
____ photo development
____ video/ DVD rental
____ supporting local food growers/producers
____ supporting my community

**I shop primarily where I work? _____ Yes _____ No**

**The town where I work is? ______________________________________________**

**What one thing would encourage you to shop at your local grocery store more often?**

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

So that we may group your responses with those of similar respondents, please answer the following questions. You will not be identified individually by this data.

Distance you are willing to travel to get groceries?

____ 0 – 5 miles

____ 5 – 10 miles

____ distance is not an issue

____ more than 10 miles

What is your age?

____ under 30

____ 31 – 50

____ 51 - 70

____ over 70

What is your weekly family grocery budget?

_____ under $50

_____ $100 to $200

_____ greater than $200

_____$50 to $100

What is your annual household income?

_____ $20,000 to $35,000

_____ $35,000 to $50,000

_____ greater than $50,000

_____ less than $20,000

What is your gender?

_____ female _____ male

**Please use the space below for any additional comments you have that were not addressed above.**

**If you have any questions or would like more information on our data collection or a final copy of the report, please contact us at the Center for Engagement and Community Development, 202 Ahearn Fieldhouse, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506-0307, call us at 785-532-6868, or email us at cecd@ksu.edu.**