

KANSAS STATE
UNIVERSITY

Extension

Southwind
District

Making a **DIFFERENCE**

2nd QUARTER 2026



Kids Cooking Summer 2026

Teaching Healthy Habits Through Hands-on Cooking

During the summer of 2026, the Southwind Extension District provided free Kids Cooking classes for youth ages 7–10 in ten communities across the district. The program reached 123 children through hands-on experiences that built confidence in the kitchen while teaching food safety, nutrition, and basic cooking skills.

This year's program expanded from eight locations in 2025 to ten locations in 2026, adding Thayer and Toronto to increase access for families. To make the program more efficient while maintaining educational quality, the schedule was redesigned from three 2-hour sessions to two 3-hour sessions at each location. The revised format reduced travel costs, allowed staff and volunteers to devote fewer days each week to the program, and enabled Extension staff to continue other educational programming throughout the summer.

Program Reach

Kids' Cooking classes were offered in:

- Iola
- Humboldt
- Chanute
- Thayer
- Yates Center
- Toronto
- Bronson
- Fort Scott
- Erie
- St. Paul



What Youth Learned

The two-day curriculum emphasized practical life skills through hands-on learning and small-group instruction. Participants rotated through skill stations where they practiced:

- Proper handwashing and kitchen safety
- Knife safety and safe food preparation
- Measuring dry and liquid ingredients
- Reading and following recipes
- Using kitchen equipment such as blenders and rice cookers
- Identifying flavors and food groups
- Building healthy meals

Cooking stations gave participants opportunities to safely cut vegetables and meat, stir foods while cooking, measure ingredients accurately, bake, prepare pastries, and remove foods safely from the oven.

Each participant took recipes home, shared prepared foods with family members, and received a K-State promotional item to encourage continued learning at home.

Measurable Impact

Parents consistently reported that the program increased their children's confidence, enthusiasm for cooking, and willingness to help prepare meals at home.

Examples of parent feedback included:

"My son offered to make breakfast for us 'since he knows how to cook now.'"

"My daughter made supper Saturday night because she knew how to make the chicken fried rice."

"We made the energy balls at home and have been eating them for breakfast this week. He also coached me on how to correctly 'bear claw' when chopping."

The Southwind Extension District's Kids Cooking program provided far more than recipes. Youth gained practical cooking skills, food safety knowledge, confidence, independence, and an appreciation for healthy foods. Families reported that participants continued using their new skills at home by preparing meals, discussing nutrition concepts, and requesting healthy recipes.

Kansas 4-H Summer Enrichment

Kansas 4-H Summer Enrichment provides hands-on learning opportunities that keep youth engaged, build new skills, and encourage exploration during the summer months. Through project-based activities in STEM, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Creative Arts, Family and Consumer Sciences, and Personal Development, youth gain confidence while learning in safe, welcoming environments supported by K-State Extension, trained summer educators, and local volunteers.

Many of the programs delivered by our summer interns were STEM-based, such as robotics and catapults, but one especially important program for our district was Reading Makes Cents.

The Situation

According to Census Reporter data from the American Community Survey, the median household income in Southeast Kansas is about three-quarters of the Kansas median and two-thirds of the national median. Fourteen percent of residents live below the poverty line, making financial literacy an essential life skill for local youth.

What We Did

To introduce financial literacy at an early age, we presented Reading Makes Cents, K-State Extension's money management program for elementary-aged youth. Through read-aloud books, interactive discussions, budgeting games, and hands-on activities, participants learned about coins and currency, the history of money, budgeting, and saving.

One popular activity challenged youth to purchase trail mix ingredients using a limited amount of change. Many discovered they could not afford everything they wanted, reinforcing the importance of budgeting, prioritizing needs over wants, and making thoughtful financial decisions.

Outcomes

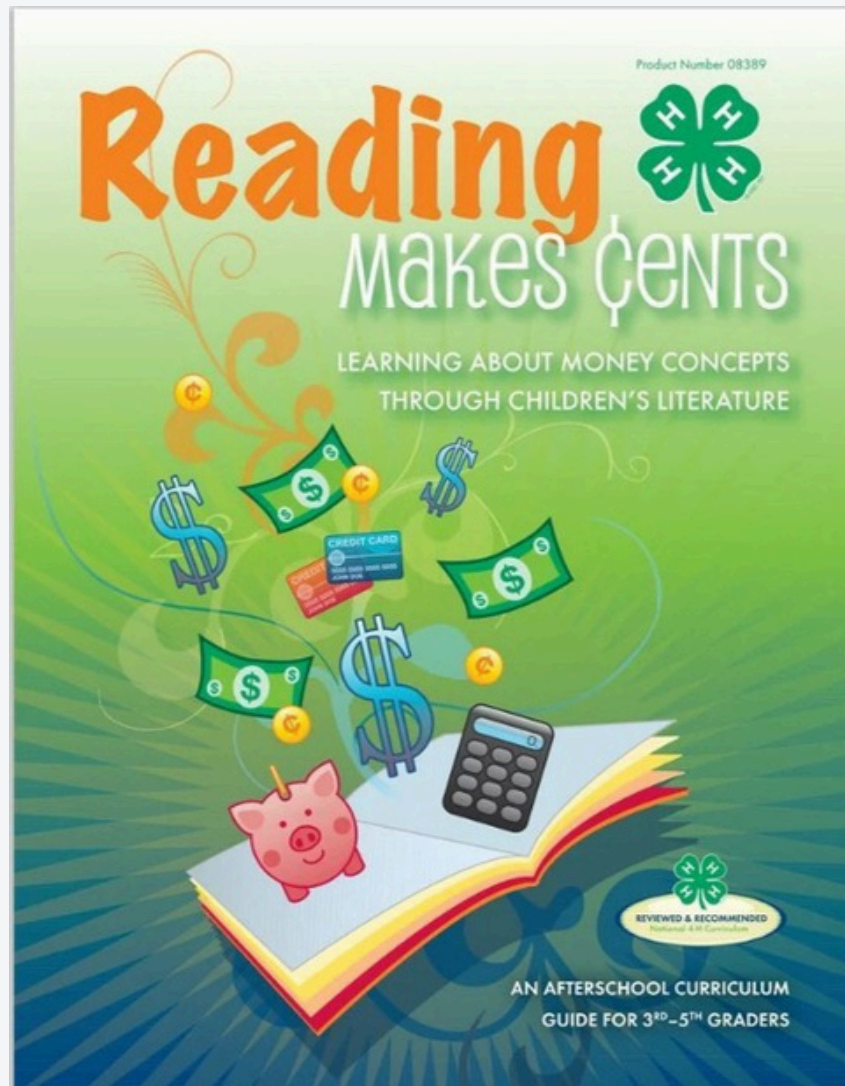
Participants demonstrated an 11% increase in knowledge of money and money management based on pre- and post-program evaluations. The greatest gains were in recognizing symbols on U.S. currency and understanding who prints money. Most social-emotional learning measures also improved, with only one question—"I listen when others are talking"—showing a slight decrease.

Success Stories

Parents shared positive feedback about the program. One wrote: "These two are amazing! My kids come home from the class at the daycare and are excited to share all the things they've learned."

Reference

Census Reporter. (2024). Census profile: Southeast Kansas PUMA, KS.





Libraries with Heart: Expanding Access and Impact in Hypertension Prevention

Nearly half of all Americans have high blood pressure, a leading risk factor for heart attack and stroke. In a collaborative effort to improve community health, six local libraries launched the *Libraries with Heart* initiative, a program designed to increase access to blood pressure monitoring and education. This initiative is made possible through a General Funds Basic Human Needs grant from the Community Foundation of Southeast Kansas, in partnership with K-State Extension – Southwind Extension Education Foundation, the American Heart Association, and participating libraries.

One patron, newly advised to monitor their blood pressure, was able to borrow a device from the library at no cost - turning a potential

obstacle into consistent, confident self-management. In another instance, a staff member used a used a monitor while feeling unwell and received immediate reassurance and guidance on her next steps. These stories illustrate how simple, free access to reliable health tools supports timely decisions, reduces stress, and builds confidence in self-care. By reaching 116 individuals through 7 HAPp (Hypertension Awareness and Prevention Program) Now presentations and 4 health fairs, the program is also creating broader community impact. Through strong partnerships, targeted outreach, and hands-on education, residents are gaining awareness, improving access to self-monitoring tools, and identifying hypertension risks earlier. By bringing practical resources into trusted community spaces, Libraries with Heart is strengthening local capacity for proactive health management and providing sustainable solutions in rural areas with limited access to healthcare.

Greenbush Camps

More than 70 youth from the Southeast area went to Greenbush overnight and day camps this year. A collaboration between Southwind and Wildcat Districts and Cherokee County eased the burden of agents, program assistants and chaperones from individual counties.

Kids got to fish, participate in a ropes course, archery, fort making, and canoeing. The 7 - 9-year-olds also got to check out some animal hides, including a full buffalo!



Bringing National Leadership to Kansas: 2026 NACDEP Conference – The Middle of Everywhere



During the past year, Amanda Clasen, Southwind Community Vitality agent, had the privilege of serving on the leadership team as Conference Chair for the 2026 National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (NACDEP) Conference, held June 15–18 in Wichita, Kansas, under the theme "The Middle of Everywhere." The conference welcomed Extension professionals, researchers, and community development leaders from across the United States to learn from one another while experiencing Kansas hospitality firsthand.

This leadership opportunity also allowed Amanda to showcase the strength of Kansas Extension on a national stage. Throughout the planning process and during the conference itself, she collaborated with Extension professionals from across the country while highlighting the innovative work happening throughout Kansas. Hosting the conference in Wichita provided an opportunity to introduce hundreds of visitors to our communities, businesses, culture, and partnerships while demonstrating why Kansas truly is "The Middle of Everywhere."

For Amanda personally, serving in this leadership capacity strengthened her skills in strategic planning, project management, volunteer coordination, and national collaboration. It reinforced the importance of servant leadership, teamwork, and relationship-building while providing valuable experience leading a large-scale national initiative. Those experiences directly enhance the work she brings back to the Southwind Extension District and the communities we serve.



Bressner Pasture Tick Study

The Bressner tick study started as an idea to get Dr. Cassandra Olds, K-State Veterinary Entomologist, onto the Bressner to conduct an unofficial research project: to study the population density and make-up of tick types within the Bressner pasture. Because the Bressner is a native grass pasture, it is burnt each year to help keep the prairie alive. With that being said, the overall tick population is less than that of pastures not managed in such a way. After our first collection, we decided to target at least one pasture in each county in the Southwind District. Another goal of the project is to rule out the presence of the Asian longhorned tick, which transmits *Theileria*, a hot-button topic in today's cattle industry.

From there, the project has evolved to target both cool-season and warm-season pastures. For the warm-season pastures, we would like to find pastures that have and have not been burnt in the prior spring to determine how much higher the tick population is on those unburnt pastures. Any ticks collected will be sent to Dr. Olds for identification. We are excited to get this project up and running!





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