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FROM THE MANAGER

Powering a Purpose

Coming together to feed the need



Bruce W. Mueller

At Wheatland Electric Cooperative, Inc. (WEC) we know that real change happens when communities come together — and that's exactly what we've seen through our **POWER THE PANTRY** campaign. Over the last 11 years, with your help, we've collected nearly 214 tons of food — that's 427,980 pounds! That's an incredible number, and it shows just how much our communities care.

As this campaign has grown, so has our focus. We've learned that cash donations go even further. With money, our local food banks can buy exactly what's needed — things like meat,

cheese and other perishables that can't be donated in a box.

Cash also reduces waste and storage needs, giving food banks the flexibility to meet real-time needs in the most efficient way. It's a smarter, more impactful way to fight hunger.

That's why WEC has made a pledge to contribute **\$50,000** annually to support Power the Pantry. But we're not stopping there. Our goal is to double that impact by encouraging our members, business partners and local communities to match those funds through donations, school competitions and other local efforts. Together, we can stretch every dollar and make sure our local food banks have the resources they need to feed those who rely on them most.

This campaign is a powerful reflection

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Feeding the NEED

How the Kansas Food Bank is powering pantries across western Kansas

Inside a quiet warehouse in Finney County, a powerful effort is underway to fight hunger across western Kansas.

But unlike a traditional food pantry, this facility isn't open to the public.

Instead, the **KANSAS FOOD BANK** (KFB) in Garden City serves as a distribution center for partner food pantries and other agencies across 31 western Kansas counties.

Today, one in eight adults and one in six children in western Kansas suffer from **FOOD INSECURITY** — a condition defined as not having consistent access to enough food or nutritious food to meet basic needs.

In 2023, the Kansas Food Bank

purchased and renovated its Garden City warehouse as part of a nearly \$5 million investment that also included racking, cooler and freezer space, and delivery trucks. Now serving as a western hub for the organization's statewide operations, the facility began deliveries to partner agencies last fall.

In less than a year, the KFB is revolutionizing the way food is distributed across Western Kansas — bringing more fresh nutritious food to underserved areas and streamlining delivery operations across the rest of the state.

Together, with the Wichita facility, the KFB's network supports more than 700 partner agencies across 85 of Kansas' 105 counties.

These agencies — including pantries, soup kitchens, schools, health clinics and mobile sites — help provide fresh, nutritious food to struggling families, seniors and children, particularly in the state's most rural communities, where the need continues to grow each day.

"There's a lot of need in Western Kansas — more than people think," says Lisa Knoll, who serves as community and donor relations for the KFB in Garden City. "Out here, access matters. And now, with this facility, we can meet people where they are."

FIGHTING HUNGER TOGETHER

Since deliveries began last October, the KFB facility in Garden City has already distributed over 750,000 pounds of

food, serving about 2,725 households per month.

Established in response to local economic hardship, the KFB first opened its doors at a warehouse in Wichita in 1984, serving 16 agencies in Sedgwick County at the time.

The following year, KFB joined forces with **FEEDING AMERICA**, the nation's largest network of food banks, and began rescuing and redistributing food that would otherwise be discarded by big-box retailers — laying the groundwork for a statewide hunger relief network.

KFB has grown its reach dramatically across the Sunflower State through careful logistics and deep community partnerships.

In 2004, KFB launched the **FOOD 4 KIDS** backpack program to address weekend hunger among schoolchildren. The initiative now serves more than 6,600 children across more than 360 Kansas schools, discreetly sending food home with students each Friday during the school year.

Then, in 2012, the KFB introduced the **BOB BOX** program — endorsed and supported by the late Kansas Senator Bob Dole — to serve food-insecure seniors with dignity and little to no red tape.

"Seniors are proud. They don't want to ask for help — or talk about income or need," Knoll says. "So, we said, let's do Bob Boxes, because seniors in Kansas love Bob Dole!"

Staff at the Kansas Food Bank in Garden City pose with WEC's Alli Conine, director of member services and corporate communications (far left), on July 7, 2025.





Kathleen Dowling (right) of the Greeley County Food Pantry talks food deliveries with WEC's Alli Conine in Tribune on Nov. 15, 2024.

ADDRESSING RURAL HUNGER

In rural areas, food insecurity can be even more acute than in urban areas. Contributing factors include lower wages, limited transportation, and sparse availability of fresh, affordable food.

Nearly 40% of the 31 western Kansas counties (including Scott, Wichita, Greeley, Hamilton Kearny, Finney and Gray counties) served by KFB's warehouse in Garden City are considered **FOOD DESERTS** — geographic areas where residents have severely limited access to nutritious food options.

In 2021, to help address access, the KFB launched www.kansasfoodsource.org — the state's first county-by-county map and database of emergency food resources.

And in 2022, KFB became a key partner in the Sunflower Foundation's **FOOD IS MEDICINE** initiative. Working with federally qualified health clinics, the program helps patients with chronic conditions, like diabetes and hypertension, gain access to healthy food as part of their care.

To support this mission, the Garden City facility is focused on a major goal as it nears its one-year operation milestone: doubling its distribution of fresh produce across Western Kansas, where roughly **23,150 KANSANS** face food insecurity daily.

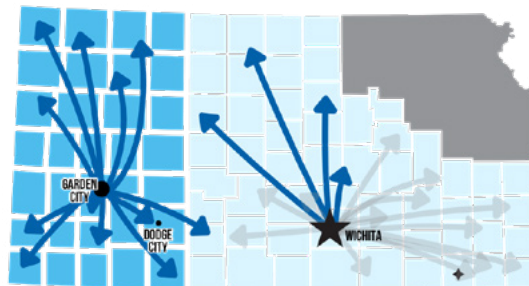
"One-third of your (food pantry) participants are there because they have high medical or high medication costs," Knoll says. "If we can push out more produce, we'll hopefully get people into a better position health-wise."

EXPANDING REACH AND IMPACT

Prior to the development of the food bank in Garden City, the KFB team in Wichita would provide monthly deliveries to serve Kansas' westernmost counties.

But routes were stretched thin, capacity for food storage locally was extremely limited, and there was no room to add new partner agencies or reach more people, despite growing need.

"Adding the Garden City facility not only serves our 31 western Kansas



Kansas Food Bank delivery routes from warehouse facilities in Garden City and Wichita.

WHO REALLY RELIES ON FOOD ASSISTANCE?

Food insecurity affects people from all walks of life — not just the jobless or unhoused. Here's a snapshot of those served by local food pantries across Kansas:

AGE BREAKDOWN

- ▶ 20% are seniors (60-plus)
- ▶ 35% are children (under 18)
- ▶ 45% are adults (19-59)

DEMOGRAPHICS

- ▶ 85% identify as White
- ▶ 9% identify as Hispanic/Latino
- ▶ 1% identify as Black

MILITARY SERVICE

- ▶ 12% of households include a veteran

WORK AND INCOME

- ▶ 47% have at least one working adult
- ▶ 30% work full-time
- ▶ 52% earn \$15,000 or less per year

TOUGH CHOICES

In the past year, families had to choose between:

- ▶ Food and utilities — 42%
- ▶ Food and medical care — 34%
- ▶ Food and housing — 8%

SOURCE: KANSAS FOOD BANK

Continued on page 12D ▶

IN WESTERN KANSAS

1 IN 8
NEIGHBORS
ARE FOOD INSECURE

1 IN 6
KIDS
ARE FOOD INSECURE

23,150
TOTAL
FOOD INSECURE
POPULATION

39%
OF SERVICE AREA IS
CONSIDERED A
FOOD DESERT

SOURCE: KANSAS FOOD BANK

Feeding the NEED

Continued from page 12C ▶

counties better, but our Wichita facility is also able to better serve the remaining counties and focus on them more,” Knoll adds.

Conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure are common among adults seeking food assistance, Knoll said, yet many clients leave food pantries with shelf-stable items like mac and cheese or ramen — foods that stretch a budget, but don’t necessarily nourish the body.

“Protein, dairy and produce — those are the first things cut when families have to make the budget work. Those are the items we’re working hardest to provide,” she added.

FRESH DELIVERIES

Inside the Garden City warehouse, a large 2,100-square-foot walk-in cooler stores up to three semi loads of fresh produce. Recent shipments include



New cooler space at the Kansas Food Bank supports more fresh food deliveries across western Kansas.



Kansas Food Bank Warehouse Manager Robert Gonzales directs deliveries at the new site.

carrots, squash, apples, grapes and peaches — which is a much better variety than what was available before, according to Knoll.

The facility also boasts a 1,400-square-foot freezer and two full-time truck drivers (with plans to add a third) delivering daily to various locations across the KFB’s 31-county western Kansas footprint. An additional full-time staff member serves as the warehouse manager to coordinate operations at the 19,000 square-foot facility.

Local cold storage for produce has proven transformative — ensuring more fresh produce deliveries.

It’s been a game-changer for volunteers like Kathleen Dowling, who helps run the Greeley County Food Pantry in Tribune.

“When the trucks used to come from Wichita, they’d load the produce the day before, so sometimes it would get damaged. Having the facility in Garden City, we get it a lot fresher now,” she says.

At the small pantry in Tribune, demand fluctuates with the seasons, but the need never disappears.

“The need is always there, no matter what,” Dowling says. “One month we might see fewer families, and the next, it might double. I had a gentleman come in last month and say, ‘I just can’t make it this month.’ He’s a long-time



Lisa Knoll (right), community and donor relations coordinator at the Kansas Food Bank, highlights warehouse storage space inside the new facility.

LEARN MORE AT
WWW.KANSASFOODBANK.ORG

resident who works hard — but he still needed help. We don’t want anyone to be afraid to come and ask for help.”

SAVING FOOD, SERVING PEOPLE

An astonishing 40% of the food distributed by the KFB is rescued from grocery stores like Dillon’s, Walmart and Sam’s Club. Items nearing expiration are picked up, stored and redistributed — often the same day.

This system keeps nutritious food out of landfills and into the hands of those who need it most.

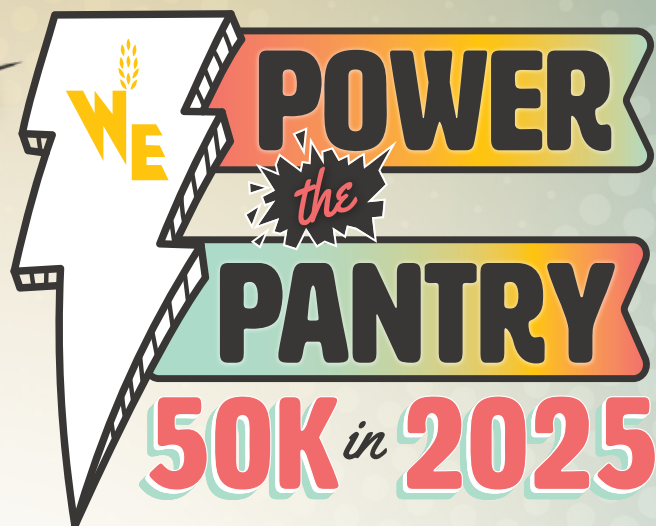
“If you’re disabled or older and can’t travel, your local pantry may be your only food source,” Knoll said. “And out here, rural access matters.”

In the wake of federal funding challenges and looming cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), KFB continues to meet rising needs thanks to a robust donor base and community partnerships.

Support from large companies, alongside private foundations and local businesses, also supports their mission.

As KFB continues to build capacity at its Garden City warehouse, Knoll says the focus remains the same: supporting families, seniors and children in need.

“We’re not here to police what people eat,” Knoll says. “We want them to have options — and hope.”



Fall is just around the corner, and that means it's time once again to **POWER THE PANTRY!**

Thanks to the incredible generosity of our members, last year's campaign raised a **RECORD-BREAKING \$110,287** in monetary and canned donations for **12 LOCAL FOOD BANKS**. We're proud to kick off the 2025 campaign by **DONATING \$50,000** and working to **DOUBLE THAT AMOUNT** through a variety of fundraising initiatives — including our charity golf tournament, the Great Bend school competition, online donations, and member support.

Since launching this effort in 2014, our cooperative has helped collect over **214 TONS (427,980 POUNDS)** of food — a testament to the compassion and commitment of our members.

POWER THE PANTRY reflects our dedication to **CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY**, one of our founding Seven **COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLES**. While the campaign has evolved over time, the mission remains the same: **SUPPORTING OUR NEIGHBORS IN NEED.**

Your help is essential. Visit our website or scan the code to donate directly to your local food bank. Every dollar makes a difference — and enters you for a chance to **WIN PRIZES WHILE DOING GOOD**. Let's Power the Pantry together in 2025!

**DONATE
NOW
AND YOU COULD
WIN!**



Scan QR or turn the page
TO LEARN MORE!

Deniston Successfully Completes Leadership Academy

Kansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc. (KEC) announces the graduation of 23 electric cooperative professionals from the **HIGH IMPACT LEADERSHIP ACADEMY (HILA)**, a comprehensive, results-driven program designed to develop leadership skills among frontline supervisors, managers and executives. Participants engaged in dynamic group exercises, case studies, and leadership assessments tailored specifically for electric cooperatives across our state.

CHAD DENISTON, WEC district manager, participated in this first KEC HILA cohort and graduated during a May 21 ceremony in Wichita, having successfully completed weekly sessions between January and May, all designed to deliver hands-on, practical training rooted in real-world challenges. As District 5 manager, Deniston oversees operations throughout WEC District 5, which includes the majority of Finney County, the eastern portion of Kearny County, and the northwest corner of Gray County.

“One of the most valuable takeaways from HILA was learning how to lead not just from a position of authority, but through influence, accountability, and trust,” Deniston said. “It’s pushed me to grow, not just as a leader, but as a communicator, teammate and problem-solver.”

A team of highly experienced instructors with military leadership backgrounds leads the HILA program, ensuring a



FROM LEFT: Al Butler, instructor; Chad Deniston, WEC District 5 manager; and Lee Tafanelli, KEC CEO; pose for a photo during the HILA graduation ceremony on May 21.

disciplined and results-driven approach. The second KEC HILA cohort launched on May 20.

KEC is a statewide Kansas service organization serving 26 electric distribution cooperatives and three generation and transmission cooperatives. Headquartered in Topeka, KEC represents the interests of and provides needed services and programs to electric cooperatives that serve member-consumers within the state. KEC functions for the mutual benefit of its members, promoting rural electrification and fostering the principles on which electric cooperatives were founded.

WIN 4 TICKETS TO SEE THE
SUNFLOWER SHOWDOWN

KANSAS STATE VS KANSAS

OCT. 25, 2025

DAVID BOOTH KANSAS MEMORIAL STADIUM | LAWRENCE, KS



For every \$20 you donate to your local food bank, you'll be entered to win!

Scan the QR code or visit
www.weci.net/power-the-pantry
WINNER WILL BE NOTIFIED OCT. 10!



ENTER BY
OCT. 9 TO WIN!

Power the Pantry

Continued from page 12A ▶

of one of the Seven Cooperative Principles that guide everything we do: **CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY.** We're not just here to deliver electricity — we're here to uplift the communities and members we serve. When we look out for our neighbors, we all grow stronger together.

If you turn to Page 12B in this month's issue, you'll read more about the **KANSAS FOOD BANK**, which plays a crucial role in this mission. The Kansas Food Bank provides food assistance to many of the hunger-relief agencies right here in our service territory — from local pantries to school backpack programs and senior food boxes. Their work directly supports the very communities we serve, making them an essential partner in helping our members

and neighbors facing food insecurity. In Western Kansas alone, more than 23,000 people are food insecure — and the Kansas Food Bank helps ensure those individuals don't go without.

At WEC, **DELIVERING ENERGY FOR LIFE** isn't just our mission — it's our commitment to improving the quality of life in every corner of our service area. Whether it's providing reliable power or helping put food on the table, we're proud to serve our communities in ways that matter most.

I encourage you to continue reading *Kansas Country Living* over the next few months to learn more powerful ways you can get involved and help make an even bigger impact in your community.

UNTIL NEXT TIME, TAKE CARE.

SAFETY TIP OF THE MONTH

Distracted driving is a common cause of accidents on our highways and interstates. People assume if you're on long stretches of road ahead or driving in a fairly straight line, that it's ok to look away for a moment or two. It's not. Too many highway and interstate driving accident victims have repeated the same sentence afterward. "I only took my eyes off the road for a brief moment." It's always best to keep your eyes on the road ahead and save distractions for later.

EVs & ESPRESSOS

9 - 11 A.M. CT

Perk-up & plug-in
at a location near you!

- 9/17 GREAT BEND**
Avast Ye Java Coffee Truck
- 9/24 SCOTT CITY**
TruNorth Cafe
- 10/1 CALDWELL**
Suzy's Bakery & Coffee Shop
- 10/8 LEOTI**
Wichita Co. Health Mart Pharmacy

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OF EV KNOWLEDGE!

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EV UPDATES!**

**TEST DRIVE OUR FORD
F-150 LIGHTNING!**

SEPT. 12 - OCT. 12

**NATIONAL
Drive Electric
MONTH**

Stay tuned for more event details!



7th Annual
CO-OPS CARE
Charity Golf Tournament

Hosted by



Register
NOW!

All proceeds power our local food pantries!

SEPT. 26, 2025
GOLF CLUB AT SOUTHWIND



**SPONSORSHIPS
AVAILABLE AND
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AUG. 1! TEAMS FILL UP
FAST, SO DON'T WAIT.**

WWW.WECI.NET/COOPS-CARE FOR MORE INFO!

Garden City

**8 A.M. REGISTRATION
9 A.M. SHOTGUN START**

QUESTIONS?

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