

## Community concern or issue: lack of *Local Organic Food Sources* in Salina

### How does this issue impact citizen health or the environment?

Traditional mass production of food has become completely dependent on pesticides and chemicals, known to have negative impacts on local ecosystems as well as impacting water supplies in surrounding communities and those downstream of large production operations. In the 1950s, production and use of chemicals such as DDT became widespread. In some instances the chemicals impacted entire food chains, causing many species of animals (birds especially) to suffer and in some cases almost became extinct. Organic agriculture is an ecological production management system that promotes and enhances biodiversity, biological cycles, and soil biological activity. It is based on minimal use of off-farm inputs and on management practices that restore, maintain, and enhance ecological harmony.

### Existing controls or standards

EPA established the National Organic Program (NOP), a marketing program housed within the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service, the agency that sets marketing standards. The NOP mission is to develop and implement national standards that govern the marketing of organically produced agricultural products to facilitate commerce in fresh and processed food that is organically produced, and to assure consumers that such products meet consistent standards.

### How is this issue impacting Salina?

Potential impacts from limited access to organic food may be increased incidence of cancer, chemical sensitization, or allergies. Limited access can be caused by lack of adequate local production and/or availability to consumers for many reasons. Gardening is one of the nation's most popular pastimes, with immediate and long-term health benefits, but not everyone has the physical capability or a suitable space to grow one's own garden or orchard.

Salina has a very modest community garden program in one area near the edge of town, which has traditionally had a waiting list for space every year. More of Salina's dollars could stay in the community if more food was produced locally. Those on limited incomes typically have the least access to local, organic food.

### What factors and behaviors contribute to this problem?

Consumers have long been accustomed to food that “looks” perfect--no blemishes, few “bad spots,” discoloration, etc because of the controlled environment in which these products are grown with standardized fertilizer and pesticide practices, selected and bred-for genetic strains of plants, and some genetically engineered plants. Consumers can often be seen in stores “picking over” these nearly “perfect- looking” products, further supporting the issue of consumer-driven demand for produce that looks perfect, as opposed to being grown organically. Local produce is not readily available since what has become conventional-production agriculture dominates the area. Most of the produce marketed in Salina is shipped in from out of state and even outside the country. Also, the area farmers’ market and the tiny Prairieland Market are open on a limited schedule. The farmers’ market is currently open air.

### Potential solutions – how can the community help with this issue?

Citizens need to be informed of opportunities for purchasing local foods. The Salina Food Policy Council puts out a printed guide of 23 local producers that practice sustainable food production. In addition, the Prairieland Market carries organic foods from about 15 local producers, as well as many organic products from producers and manufacturers out of the area. Citizen demand for organic products will drive producer change to organic food production.

NOTE: This fact sheet was taken from an issue paper developed by Marge Streckfus and Joan Ratzlaff.

The detailed fact sheet can be accessed at [www.sbeap.org/CARE](http://www.sbeap.org/CARE)