

Kansas Currents

K-STATE RESEARCH AND EXTENSION NEWS

Central Kansas Extension District

centralkansas.ksu.edu

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Agents:*

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Family Resource
Management

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Nutrition, Food Safety
and Health



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Simply Produce is Coming to Minneapolis!

Gene's Heartland Foods of Minneapolis and Central Kansas Extension District are excited to announce the implementation of a produce basket program! "Simply Produce" offers customers approximately 15 pounds of produce for \$15.00. Produce baskets are available once a month and will contain a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables. Contents will be different for each month. In addition to produce, customers will receive a recipe highlighting basket items, as well as educational materials on food storage and produce handling.

Produce basket distribution that utilizes local retail venues is designed to increase access to healthy fruits and vegetables for consumers, while stimulating positive economic impact and building regional food system sustainability. We are proud to partner with Gene's Heartland Foods to promote this great opportunity for our residents.

Produce baskets are purchased through the grocery store register and must be paid for at time of ordering. The purchase is taxable. The first distribution of Simply Produce baskets will be May 20th at the Community Bible Church. Be on the lookout for ordering deadlines for the May 20th distribution. There will be a mobile pickup line at the Community Bible Church beginning noon-12:30pm.

More information about ordering dates and pick-up logistics will be available soon. Be sure to check our website: www.centralkansas.ksu.edu or e-mail or call Leah Robinson, lmrobins@ksu.edu. We're also looking for volunteers to assist on distribution days. If you're interested in helping, please give us a call 785-392-2147.

Back to the basics? Rising costs may require simpler living

‘Think about current expenses’ and adjust, says K-State’s Kiss.

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service



The recent increase in prices for many of Americans’ everyday expenses may motivate a return to simpler living, said Kansas State University family resource management specialist Elizabeth Kiss.

“We need to think about all of our (current) expenses,” Kiss said, “and decide whether this is a good opportunity to get back to basics and identify our foundation. What is it that we absolutely have to spend our money on right now?”

Kiss said all of us have fixed monthly costs, such as housing; and variable costs, such as food and fuel.

“The variable costs are the ones in the short run that we can modify,” she said. “You can decrease your expenses, or you can increase your income – or a combination of both.”

For those who choose to increase their income to make ends meet, Kiss said there are jobs available in the current labor market, “so if it’s to the point where you are thinking of taking on a part-time job – even for a short time – you have the opportunity to do that. But you still need to be working toward longer-term goals.”

Kiss shared some ideas for decreasing costs:

Groceries

With spring and summer approaching, there are greater opportunities to buy from farmer’s markets. “You can get what you want in the

quantities you want so that you may have less food waste,” Kiss said. “If you have any wasted food, that’s just money in the garbage can.”

Other opportunities to save include:

- Buy products in bulk, especially non-perishable items.
- Use only as much laundry detergent as required for a load.
- Seek lower-cost substitutes for products you already are buying.

Do it yourself

Save costs by taking on some home projects yourself. Some jobs may not be feasible – plumbing can be beyond a simple fix – “but there are some things you can do,” Kiss said. “Cook more from scratch, for example. This time of year, people turn to gardening, which can be an opportunity to increase your access to fresh vegetables, herbs and fruits.”

Avoid impulse buying

“Having a list is a very good way to avoid impulse buying at the grocery store,” Kiss said. “With prices being what they are right now, many of us may not have much flexibility for impulse purchases. You really do have to focus on what your needs are. That’s not to say we can’t have some things we want, but plan for those.”

Do the research on larger purchases

Kiss said anticipating a larger purchase may work in your favor. “If you’re anticipating you’re going to have to replace an appliance within the next 3-6 months, now’s a good time to start doing the shopping part of it,” she said. “Research the prices, brands and models as they are today, so that if I have to do it in a hurry, you know how much you’re likely to spend.”

Prices may increase or decrease in the time you’re doing the research, Kiss said, “but the

longer you have to plan for that expenses, the better off you may be.”

Kiss said some homeowners may also be able to save money by asking their insurance agent for a review of coverage.

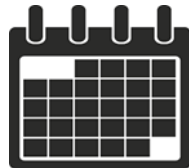
Combine errands

Kiss suggests saving on gas by planning ahead to run several errands on the same trip. She also suggests driving the speed limit, using cruise control and reducing the use of air conditioning and other vehicle accessories. Keep the vehicle well-maintained, including keeping tires inflated appropriately.

“We have so much abundance in our country, so maybe this is a time that we can think about what abundance means to each of us and what satisfies you versus going over the top,” Kiss said.

Financial Calendar

- Create a financial binder to organize and track your expenses, receipts, financial goals, and tax information throughout the year. Having your documents all in one place (whether in print or digitally) can be helpful during an emergency or when you need to quickly access your financial information.
- Spring clean your financial accounts by making sure your beneficiaries are current.
- Pay extra on a credit card balance this month. If you have been carrying a balance, make a plan to pay extra each month so that you can pay off the entire card.



Medicare Corner

If you are dissatisfied with your Medicare Advantage or Part D prescription drug plan for any reason, you can choose to file a grievance. A grievance is a formal complaint that you file with your plan. It is not an appeal, which is a request for your plan to cover a service or item it has denied.

Times when you may wish to file a grievance include:

- If your plan has poor customer service
- You face administrative problems (such as the plan taking too long to file your appeal or failing to deliver a promised refund)
- You believe the plan’s network of providers is inadequate

To file a grievance:

- Send a letter to your plan’s Grievance and Appeals department. Check your plan’s website or contact them by phone for the address.
- You can also file a grievance with your plan over the phone, but it is best to send your complaints in writing.
- Be sure to send your grievance to your plan within 60 days of the event that led to the grievance.
- You may also want to send a copy of the grievance to your regional Medicare office and to your representatives in Congress, if you feel they should know about the problem. Go to www.medicare.gov or call 1-800-MEDICARE to find out the address of your regional Medicare office.
- Keep a copy of any correspondence for your records.

Your plan must investigate your grievance and get back to you within 30 days. If your request is urgent, your plan must get back to you within 24 hours. If you have not heard back from your plan within this time, you can check the status of your grievance by calling your plan or 1-800-MEDICARE.

How Do You Spot a Scam? Listen to How Someone Tells You to Pay

Like spring cleaning for your finances, this is a great time to dust off your knowledge for spotting and avoiding scams. The best way to make a clean getaway from a scam? Listen to how they tell you to pay.



If someone tells you:

- “Pay us by putting money on a gift card and then give us the number on the back.” — That’s a scam.
- “We’ll send you a check, deposit the check, and then send us the money.”— That’s a scam. (That check will later turn out to be fake and you will be on the hook for the money.)
- “You have to pay us by sending money through a money transfer company like MoneyGram or Western Union.” — That’s a scam.
- “Go to a store with a cryptocurrency ATM, put your money in to buy cryptocurrency, and use this QR code to send it to this address.” — That’s a scam.

Scammers have a lot of stories about why you need to pay — like pretending they’re calling from the government, a business, utility, tech company, or even a charity. Or they’ll call about a family emergency. Or maybe they call with an alert about a virus on your computer that needs fixing. No matter what they say, they’ll pressure you to act immediately, and of course, pay them money. When they do, hang up and report them to the FTC at [ReportFraud.ftc.gov](https://www.ftc.gov/report-fraud).

For more information on spotting scams and avoiding them, visit [ftc.gov/scams](https://www.ftc.gov/scams).

Affordable Connectivity Program

The Affordable Connectivity Program is an FCC benefit program that helps ensure that households can afford the broadband they need for work, school, healthcare and more.

The benefit provides a discount of up to \$30 per month toward internet service for eligible households and up to \$75 per month for households on qualifying Tribal lands. Eligible households can also receive a one-time discount of up to \$100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from participating providers if they contribute more than \$10 and less than \$50 toward the purchase price. The Affordable Connectivity Program is limited to one monthly service discount and one device discount per household.

Who Is Eligible for the Affordable Connectivity Program?

A household is eligible for the Affordable Connectivity Program if the household income is at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, or if a member of the household meets at least *one* of the criteria below:

- Received a Federal Pell Grant during the current award year;
- Meets the eligibility criteria for a participating provider’s existing low-income internet program;
- Participates in one of these assistance programs:
 - SNAP
 - Medicaid
 - Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
 - WIC
 - Veterans Pension or Survivor Benefits
 - or Lifeline;

For more information or to apply, go to <https://www.fcc.gov/acp>.

Getting Ready For Food Preservation!

Gardeners are planning what they want to plant this season, and eager to plant early season crops. It's also time to plan for how to preserve your bounty.

Canning supplies are refilling stores. But be a smart shopper and do your homework. There are many counterfeit products that can lead to problems in canning. All of the Ball® products are made in the U.S.A. so be sure to look for that designation on the packaging. The lids will have the Ball® logo and they are silver. If anything is "Made in China" and it looks like Ball® products, they are not legitimate.

Manufacturing of canning products is running 24/7 to get products restocked. Glass is the biggest concern in the supply chain to make jars. Lids are back to pre-pandemic stock numbers.

A new item coming out is a "throw back" to vintage jars. Ball® is making a rose-colored jar to celebrate that vintage color from the early 1900s. They are also coming out with some new storage containers.

If you have a dial gauge pressure canner, it is time to get it tested. Local Extension offices can test the brands Presto, National, Maid of Honor and Magic Seal. We cannot test All American gauges. Contact your local Extension office for assistance.

Learn more about food preservation at www.rrc.k-state.edu/preservation/index.html



Food preservation is a science! Be sure to use current recipes and guidelines for best results.

New To Canning? Let us Help

Canning your own garden produce or farmers market produce can be rewarding and a great way to save your food for later use. But if you are new to canning, it is important to start by getting educated and learn how to can safely.

For canning fruits, pickles, jams, jellies and most tomato products, a water bath canner or large stock pot with a lid and rack is needed. Water bath canners have fitted lids and removable perforated or shaped-wire racks. The canner must be deep enough that at least 1 to 2 inches of briskly boiling water covers the tops of jars during processing.

For canning plain vegetables, some tomato products and meats, a pressure canner is needed. Today's pressure canner may have a weighted gauge or dial gauge, for indicating and regulating the pressure.

With any of these, always read the manufacturer's instructions before canning any food. Also, be aware that some canners cannot be used on glass stovetops. Learn more about water bath canning and pressure canning, and much more at Preserve it Fresh, Preserve it Safe.

LET US HELP!
Contact your local Extension office

K-STATE PRESERVE IT FRESH PRESERVE IT SAFE

Whether you are new or experienced with food preservation... be smart and safe!

www.rrc.k-state.edu/preservation/recipes.html

Food Prep When The Power Goes Out

Warm weather and severe weather are officially here. If you lose power, handling food can be tricky. If you don't have a generator, then consider these options to prepare food without power from University of Minnesota Extension.

Keep a food thermometer handy. Remember these three temperatures when cooking meats: 145° for steaks, roasts, chops; 160°F for ground meat; and 165°F for all poultry. If you have limited fuel for cooking, choose quick-cooking foods to reserve fuel.

Prepare one meal at a time so there are no leftovers. Don't leave food sit at room temperature or in warm environments for more than two hours as this can lead to bacterial growth.

There are options to cook food. A fireplace is handy, but do not use charcoal in a fireplace as it can emit carbon monoxide. Get outdoors and use a camp stove, charcoal grill or gas grill.

Stock up on foods that do not require any cooking or refrigeration. Examples include peanut butter, canned meats, whole grain chips or crackers, fresh fruit, canned fruit, dried fruit, and many others. Don't forget your pets! They also need nourishment in an emergency.

Handwashing is still important! Use bottled water and soap if running water is not available. Use disposable utensils and plates for easy clean up. Heat water on the outdoor grill to wash other items.

For more information on food safety during a power outage, see www.ksre.k-state.edu/foodsafety/topics/disaster.html

The Sciences of Charcuterie Meats

Cured meat products are relishing in the popularity of charcuterie boards served at events and parties. There are hundreds of cured meats that chefs are inspired to use with cheese, crackers, nuts, and fruits for a flavor explosion.

The Spanish or Italian inspired dry cured meats are a mix of art and science. They use salt, meat chemistry, temperature and environment to create a variety of flavors. The water activity is key to create a shelf stable meat that does not require heat treatment. The water activity, which is the amount of water available for microorganisms to grow within the product, is affected by the moisture content, salt content, and environmental temperature. Some dried sausages have starter cultures added to decrease the pH, or acid content, and add flavor. Dry-cured ham, country ham, and prosciutto are popular meat choices for a tasty charcuterie board.



Pickled Asparagus Problems

A favorite spring garden perennial is asparagus. As weather starts to warm, those tasty fresh shoots will soon be popping out of the ground.

A great way to preserve asparagus is to pickle it for a tangy addition to meals. Here's a pickled asparagus recipe, https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_06/pickled_asparagus.html that is formulated for 12-ounce jars or pint jars from the National Center for Home Food Preservation. Pickled asparagus is safely canned in a water bath canner.

But after preserving your prized asparagus, have you noticed some little yellow/white spots form on the surface? Is it safe to eat?

The answer is yes, it is safe to eat. These little specks are called rutin. According to the University of California Extension, when asparagus is heated with vinegar, the bioflavonoid rutin is drawn out of the asparagus. It becomes insoluble and crystallizes, leaving the spots on the surface of the asparagus. Commercially made pickled asparagus has an additive added to prevent this reaction.

Tips To Dehydrate Stone Fruits

Dehydrated fruit is an easy way to have ready-made snacks or to add a pop of fruit to cereal, yogurt, or homemade cookies. Dehydrating is the oldest food preservation method to remove moisture from food which prevents bacterial growth.

When drying stone fruits, such as apricots, plums, or halves of peaches and nectarines, first rinse them in running water. Remove the pits. The skin can be left on or removed. Pretreat as directed to reduce discoloration. Press the rounded side, or outside, inward to invert the fruit half. This helps expose the inside flesh and the fruit will dry faster. If the skin is still on, place the fruit skin side down on the dehydrator tray. Optimum dehydrating temperature is 140°F while air circulates to pull moisture out of the fruit. Dry until pliable and leathery.

Learn more at www.rrc.k-state.edu/preservation/drying.html

Spring Leafy Greens

A gardening favorite to plant in the spring is leafy vegetables such as lettuce, spinach, arugula, and many others. They provide a lot of crunch and color to any meal. Packed with nutrients, they can help protect you from some chronic diseases.

Handle and prepare all leafy greens safely before consuming as there have been foodborne illness outbreaks associated with these fresh foods. Most of these are never heated prior to eating, so it is important to rinse them under running water. Do not soak in water as this can spread contamination. Research has shown that rinsing in water helps remove most bacteria and dirt. Use these steps.

- Wash your hands with soap and water before and after preparing leafing greens.
- Remove bruised or damaged leaves. Remove outer layers of cabbage and lettuce heads.
- Rinse leaves under running water. Rub gently with your fingers for better results.
- Dry leaves in a salad spinner or with a clean paper towel to remove moisture.



Central Kansas Extension District


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Salina, KS 67401-8196

Address Service Requested

The enclosed material is for your information. If we can be of further assistance, feel free to call or drop by the Extension Office.

Sincerely,



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