



October 2025

Extension Council Elections to Be Held October 14th

It's election time for the Shawnee County Extension Council, with council members set to be chosen for 2026. **Voting will take place on Tuesday, October 14th, at the Shawnee County Extension Office, 1740 SW Western Avenue, from 8am - 6pm.** Enter the upstairs meeting room from the outside upper southwest door.

The Extension Council election gives all Shawnee County residents, 18 years or older, the opportunity to elect Extension Council members for a two-year term. Twenty-four elected Shawnee County residents make up the Extension Council, which is charged with the responsibility of working with Extension Agents to develop and conduct educational programs in the areas of Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, Community Development, and Family and Consumer Sciences.

Six members serve on the program development committees (PDC) for each of those areas. Extension staff and council members appreciate your support and hope you will take time to vote in the upcoming election.

Extension Council Election Candidates

Agriculture & Natural Resource

Charlotte French – Charlotte works for The Kansas Rural Center as their Communications Coordinator helping to reach farmers and food system workers across the State. She was raised on a farm where they grew corn, soybeans and wheat and kept a herd of black angus cattle. Charlotte participated in 4-H and is now a 4-H parent within the Rossville Rustlers. She serves on the Shawnee County Farm and Food Advisory Council, and recently reinvigorated the Rossville Community Farmers Market.

Her work with extension has been mostly personal with calls from 4-H projects to various weed and tree issues. Charlotte enjoys helping design new projects and helping her community.

Charlotte has assisted in planning workshops for beginning farmers, women in farming, people interested in food hubs, and other programming that you may find at the Kansas Rural Center's annual conference. For youth, she has created an egg incubation curriculum, which was used at her daughter's preschool. She spent a Summer making adaptive art projects for children with special needs for USD 425. Charlotte has completed the Kansas Association of Conservation and Environmental Educators EEDoubleCourse, which outlines several curricula for students to expand their learning around ecology.

Charlotte believes that we can do more outreach and education on conservation and sustainable practices, highlighting how they can help farmers mitigate issues such as erosion, water use, and expensive inputs. This could take the form of success stories, seminars, or by helping farmers test their soil and evaluate their landscape to tailor the best management plan for each individual

Sara Gillespie -

Sara is a high school vo-ag teacher at Shawnee Heights High School. She has been teaching for 11 years. She and her husband own 80 acres in Shawnee County with cattle, horses, and hay crop. Sara was a member of Shawnee County 4-H for 7 years and was involved in several projects.

Sara has helped with YQCA training for Douglas County and also helped coach hippology teams for both Shawnee and Douglas counties. She is also the FFA Advisor and has coached numerous teams in the organization.

Chad Bullock -

Chad is the Managing Member of Premier Farm and Home, LLC in Topeka. He has a degree from Kansas State University in Agriculture and a secondary in Natural Resource and Environmental Sciences. He has volunteered with Shawnee County Extension before, and served as Extension Board President in 2015.

Chad has volunteered or accepted speaking fees for a variety of institutions including Extension and Kansas Pest Control Association. He has also presented to a variety of grade school classes on growing seeds and planting herbs.

Chad sees a lack of basic horticulture skills for growing things in our community. As our community becomes somewhat disconnected from our Agriculture roots, he sees a need to educate in order to develop basic horticulture skills and interests in the residents of Shawnee County.

Community Development PDC

Christi McKenzie

Christi is the Director at the Rossville Library in Rossville. She serves on the Rossville Community Foundation Board, Safe Routes to School Committee and the Rossville Senior Citizens Center Board of Trustees. Christi has partnered with several Extension Agents to provide programming at the Library, including summer STEM, Insects and Trees. She has volunteered as a greeter for the VITA program at the Library. Christi has served on the Extension Board and on the Community Development PDC.

As the Library Director, Christi prepares and presents many programs for adults, youth and preschool. Programs include Story Time for preschool, Outreach to RGS kindergarten and preschool classes, crochet, children and adult book clubs, BINGO for children and adults, game nights and after school snack attack. She partners with many people to bring a more diverse and unique programming, including Kaw Valley USD 321 Play Café, My Gym, Extension Office, Police Department and RHS art department. She co-sponsors the RHS Student Leadership Team focusing on servant leadership.

Christi feels mental health specifically for community connectedness for youth and seniors. She also feels that heart health should be addressed through the programs extension offers.

Lisa Pfannenstiel-Garrison -

Lisa has an extensive background in human resources and leading large nationwide departments at Hill's Pet Nutrition, she is deeply committed to community involvement. Her passion lies in supporting initiatives that cultivate the next generation of leaders, focusing particularly on youth development and building foundations for successful careers. The Extension Office is a trusted resource for her on all topics it covers. Lisa has actively volunteered in 4-H and Community Development

programs, she is a proud member of the Shawnee County Extension Education Foundation, and currently serves on the Extension board.

Growing up in a farming family in Western Kansas, the Extension Office was an essential resource, offering science-based solutions during challenging environmental conditions. As a new 4-H parent, she was an adult learner and found the Extension Office incredibly valuable for her growth within the program, including courses in food, agricultural sciences, and community development. With a passion for giving back, Lisa led a 4-H club in Shawnee County for 15 years. She continues to seek opportunities to present various topics to youth in 4-H programs and other local organizations, aiming to enhance their development and passion for pursuing their career aspirations. Additionally, she has been an adult educator in her professional career for nearly 30 years, specializing in change management, coaching essentials, first-time manager training, and technical support.

While Extension possesses incredible expertise across its four pillar programs – agriculture, horticulture, healthy families, 4-H and youth development, and community development – it remains a “best kept secret.” Extension has the power to profoundly impact personal well-being and community growth in Shawnee County. By leveraging this expertise, we can foster a culture of giving, develop our local talent, build resilient communities, and attract new businesses, ultimately leading to a more thriving community.

Lisa's vision is to reimagine how Extension connects with our modern world. How can we, with our superior knowledge compared to Google or generative AI, create a greater and broader impact for more families in our communities?

Keri Graf -

Keri has been the Shawnee County Farm Bureau coordinator for eight years. She works in advocacy, education and event coordination with Farm Bureau. Before that Keri worked at Advisors Excel as the Executive Assistant to the Chief Operating Officer. She has two children and has volunteered with Harvesters and other food pantries throughout the community. Keri is the small business owner of KG designs.

Keri worked in school classrooms with KFB programs and has helped teach other KFB coordinators on technology. She has also done programs on resumes, jewelry making, etc.

Keri believes anytime we can bring agriculture awareness and make it more visible is good. Agriculture education and awareness is important in Shawnee County because Agriculture is an economic driver for our community. Keri loves to

help kids and she is passionate about teaching life skills that they don't necessarily learn in school. She would love to cover topics of career and financial readiness.

Family & Consumer Sciences PDC

Barbara Coultis-

Barbara is the co-owner of Work Smart Computer Services. She also volunteers with adults in literacy and English conversational skills. Barbara has been a representative for the State Extension Advisory Committee, 4-H PDC, executive board, school representative for the District Citizens Advisory Committee, and the Shawnee County Fair Board.

Barbara feels most program areas need to find ways to reach new audiences, and to develop partnerships with other community organizations. In addition, Barbara notes, federal mandates and funding are quickly changing especially in nutrition education for the public.

Laura Moore -

Laura currently works at KDHE in Substance Use Disorder and Overdose Prevention. She is a parent of Shawnee Heights students and member of the PTO. She is a former Jackson County 4-Her and has been involved with Shawnee County Extension as a board member and PDC member for multiple terms.

Laura has led state wide youth traffic safety programs, giving multiple educational organizations across the state managing federal funding.

Laura feels that the issue of mental health in our community should be addressed through Extension programs.

Debra Oakes-

Debra works at the Jayhawk Area Agency on Aging, where she assists older adults in navigating critical services such as Medicare, Medicaid, and other community-based supports. She regularly collaborates with community organizations to ensure individuals receive the help they need.

Debra sees the lack of accessible, practical education about healthy living and eating, particularly for low-income families and older adults, as an area where Extension could be especially impactful. She believes the Extension Office could play a powerful role in expanding healthy families programs,

community gardens, and nutrition education to teach people how to prepare healthy meals.

Debra also sees a natural opportunity for intergenerational workshops within Extension because of its youth and adult programming. She believes these efforts could foster a stronger community with more intergenerational support.

4-H Youth Development PDC

Jill Rice –

Jill is currently the Operations Director for SENT Topeka and the Executive Pastor for Fellowship Hi-Crest. She also serves as the Hi-Crest NIA President. Jill is in on the 4-H PDC and serves on the Extension Board.

Through Jill's work with FHC and SENT Topeka she works closely with the youth in the East and Southeast Topeka community. She works with the Highland Park feeder school system to connect local youth to programming to support their personal life, mental, and physical health.

Jill feels that 4-H and youth development have a great opportunity to provide programming and open doors to learning, leadership development, and community service in some of our most under-resourced neighborhoods. The way 4-H works with the Topeka Way to Work Program and being present at the Boys and Girls clubs is opening doors and opportunities. It is important that we keep bringing resources and opportunities to under-resourced communities that would struggle to access them when they are located outside of their neighborhoods.

Twyla Hernandez-

Twyla is an LPN and has worked for Stormont Vail for the past 20 years. She has served on several committees through her years at Stormont Vail. Twyla has been a 4-H Volunteer for the past 21 years. Some of the roles of involvement have been club leader, 4-H Exchange Chaperone, and parent/aunt volunteer for many 4-H Activities. Twyla has previously been a superintendent for the Visual Arts department. She is also involved with many activities in her church.

Twyla was a 4-H club leader for 4 years, as well as a parent volunteer for 12 years. She currently is an "Aunt" volunteer as she is actively involved with her niece and nephew in 4-H. Twyla has been a 4-H

Exchange Chaperone for the past 7 years. Through her job at Stormont Vail, she has served on several committees to help develop standard work processes to help improve workflow.

Through the years Twyla has seen youth involvement in 4-H decline in our county. She believes by promoting, educating, and working on ways to increase youth participation within the 4-H program will help increase enrollment and participation numbers.

Jeremy Poling -

Jeremy is self-employed. He worked as an IT professional person for 20 years. Jeremy has been a 4-H club leader for 5 years.

Jeremy is on the staff at CUMC, leadership team on Topeka South Rotary and 4-H activities through the last 10 years. Jeremy has experience as an Adjunct Professor at Washburn, where he teaches marketing and sales.

Jeremy sees opportunities for engagement, not in just 4-H youth but for all Shawnee County youth.

K-State Extension is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Program information may be available in languages other than English. Reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities, including alternative means for communication (e.g., Braille, large print, audio tape, and American Sign Language) may be requested by contacting the event contact Candis Stiles, Director two weeks prior to the start of the event October 14, 2025 at 785-232-0062, ext. 110 or email candism@ksu.edu. Requests received after this date will be honored when it is feasible to do so. Language access services, such as interpretation or translation of vital information will be provided free of charge to limited English proficient individuals upon request.

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

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