



WKREDA

WESTERN KANSAS RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ALLIANCE

Western Kansas ...
Where Life Works!



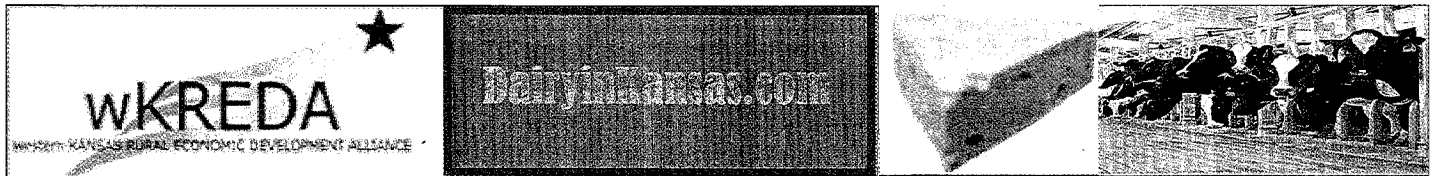
got a job!

www.westernkjobs.com

The idea to create a workforce development program began almost four years ago, with the calamity of hurricane Katrina. Although Kansas was not directly impacted by this disaster, conversation by wKREDA members began to explore the issue of assisting displaced workers from Katrina by finding employment opportunities within Kansas companies needing additional employees. Due to logistics and other uncontrollable challenges, this workforce realignment did not occur; but through the process, a discovery was made that many companies in western Kansas had a similar challenge... finding employees. Since companies cannot grow without a viable workforce, wKREDA members determined the pursuit of assisting with workforce recruitment was vital to western Kansas. This pursuit led to the creation of the Workforce Initiative committee (commonly called the "We Have Jobs" (WHJ) committee.

The starting point for the workforce initiative was to development a job opportunities website. This website provides the central idea behind the initiative. A virtual site for workforce (job seekers) to search for opportunities and a location for western Kansas business to list job opportunities was born. The website gets about 20,000 hits a month from all over the nation and world. Job seekers can register on-site to be automatically updated as to when specific or general jobs arise in the region. Businesses using this service have been truly amazed at the successful results. In many testimonies, not only did the business find a qualified worker, but the local community acquired a new family.

The second portion of the initiative focuses on promoting the website www.westernkjobs.com. This marketing is done with business card size magnets and "Welcome Home" brochures. In all the promotional avenues, the website with the slogan "Discover Western Kansas ~ Where Life Works" carries the concept through professionally made videos, marketing items, billboards, magazine articles, alumni groups, and other face to face marketing avenues. Although the concept was relatively simple, it has been very successful in spreading the word internationally and nationally about the business environment potential of western Kansas.



DairyInKansas.com is a cooperative effort between the Kansas Department of Commerce Rural Development Division, Agriculture Marketing, and the Western Kansas Rural Economic Development Alliance (wKREDA). The wKREDA Dairy Committee is responsible for helping to recruit and retain dairies for Kansas. wKREDA is a consortium of 56 counties in Western Kansas that collaborate on economic development projects that benefit the region.

Revitalizing the dairy industry was an early mandate for wKREDA, and those efforts have been very successful. While dairy farming and production had been strong in the region historically, many family farms had been sold off or shuttered in recent decades. But everything that made western Kansas good for dairy production—land, cost of living, climate—was still intact and just needed a little promotional push.

The push was wKREDA's traveling road show that put Kansas dairy land in front of farmers from coast to coast. Families pulled up stakes to come to a region with plenty of room, not only to set up a farm, but to expand in just about any direction.

WKREDA - Representing 54 counties in western Kansas

Cherokee	Rawlins	Geosaul	Notion	Phillips	Smith	Jewell	Republic	Wash- ington	Ma- shall	Ne- maha	Boonville	Boonville	Boonville
Sherman	Thomas	Gard	Graham	Frooks	Oshorn	Michalek	Clair	Clay	Ellis	Scott	Scott	Scott	Scott
Valley	Logan	Conce	Trego	Ellis	Russell	Lincoln	Lincoln	Lincoln	Lincoln	Lincoln	Lincoln	Lincoln	Lincoln
Greene	Wich- ita	Scott	Lane	Mass	Finney	Hodge	Ed- wards	Kiowa	Stallard	Reno	Hayes	Madison	Madison
Hart	Kearney	Finney	Hodge	Ed- wards	Stallard	Reno	Hayes	Madison	Madison	Madison	Madison	Madison	Madison
Sho- ron	Graham	Gay	Ford	Clay	Stallard	Reno	Hayes	Madison	Madison	Madison	Madison	Madison	Madison
Mon- tgon	Steward	Masade	Clark	Co- mande	Barber	Hager	Sumner	Cowley	Chau- tauque	Chau- tauque	Chau- tauque	Chau- tauque	Chau- tauque

WKREDA's mission is to work together for the common good of western Kansas. The purpose and objectives WKREDA shall be:

- To promote the exchange of ideas and information among members to enhance their effectiveness in their local organiza- tions and the WKREDA region; and
- To provide its members educational, legislative, and credit/financial opportunities and other resources to assist in local and regional and rural development efforts; and
- To revitalize western Kansas through cooperative, community and rural development activities.

WKREDA
 P.O. Box 980
 Hays, KS 67601

PHONE: 800.982.3501
 WEBSITE: discoverwesternkansas.com
 JOBS WEBSITE: westernkansasjobs.com
 DAIRY WEBSITE: dairyinkansas.com

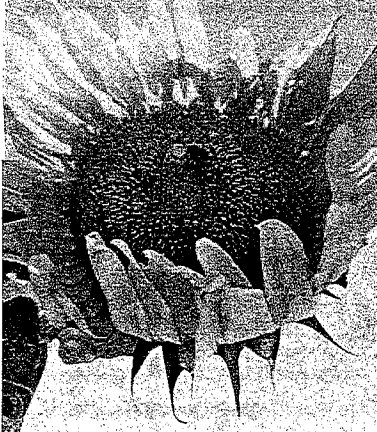


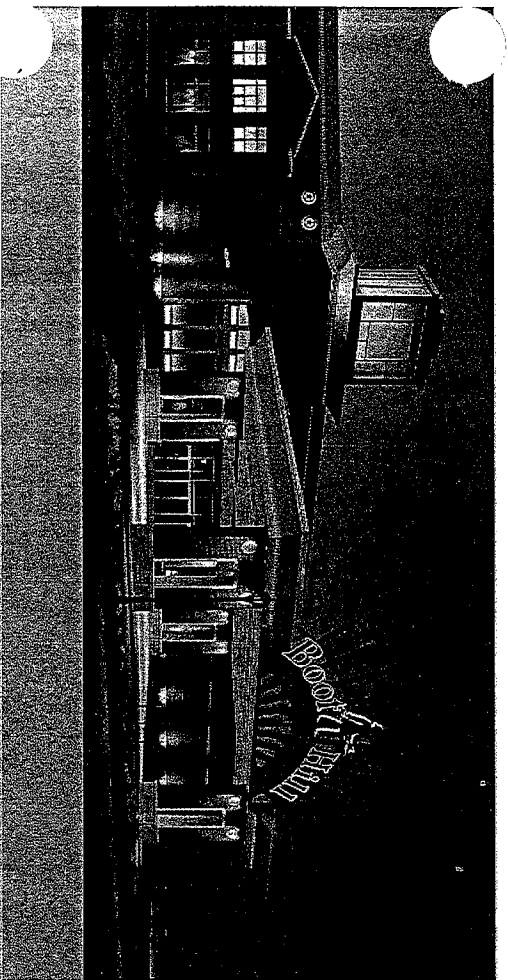
western Kansas Rural Economic
 Development Alliance

Opportunities as big as you think

WKREDA 2011 Legislative Overview

- Who We Are
- Job Recruitment
- Dairy Initiative





“The biggest advantage gained by belonging to and participating in WKREDA is the networking with peers who are experiencing the same challenges and opportunities. When we come together, we oftentimes discover ways to address issues that we wouldn’t have discovered on our own.”

Neal Gillespie,
WKREDA President

WKREDA 2011 Legislative Overview

Who We Are

The Western Kansas Rural Economic Development Alliance (WKREDA) was formed in 1994 to become a single, unified voice that could address the economic development concerns for a 54-county region, almost half the state.

While the communities and counties were many, the problems were all the same—loss of young people to more populated areas, stagnant local economies, and little influx of new residents and businesses. By pulling together, the founders of WKREDA knew they could better tackle issues faced by the entire region.

“Most of the assistance we had access to was more logically available to larger places, so we got together and realized that if we could group our resources, we could market ourselves with a lot of passion. That’s what drove us then, and what does so now,” said Steve Miller, senior manager of special projects at SunPower Electric Power Corporation and a founding member of WKREDA.

Seventeen years later, WKREDA has grown to encompass ongoing educational programs from its members, an annual trip to the state capitol to ensure

Our Dairy Initiative

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The push was WKREDA’s traveling road show that put Kansas dairymen in front of farmers from coast to coast. Families pulled up stakes to come to a region with plenty of room, not only to set up a farm but to expand in just about any direction.

“They had a lot of good programs that gave us a lot of help when we moved from Pennsylvania,” said Tom McCarty, who along with wife, Kathy, and their four sons, relocated in 1999 to Thomas County. “We had a lot of contact with WKREDA when we were looking at different locations in western Kansas. Where we’re from, the biggest problem was the lack of ability to grow. This part of the world gives you a lot of opportunity for that, which leads to more efficiency.”

The effort is now helping dairies expand into full-scale production for cheese and other products. Partnerships have been formed with local grain and beef operators that are using dairy herds to expand their own operations.

In addition, the Dairy University program brings in national experts to talk about industry trends, giving local economic development officials not yet involved a chance to get into the game as well.

The initiatives have made a substantial positive impact, and the continued efforts should help attract wing old and new industry sector/regain its historical place in the region.

“WKREDA is smart to show off western Kansas as a good place for dairies,” said McCarty.

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“Locating a cheese processing facility in western Kansas is a crucial step to enhancing and continuing the growth of the dairy industry in the region. Having local access to a milk processing facility would reduce transportation costs to existing and future dairies and provide much needed economic support to the dairy industry in Kansas.”

Clare Gustin,
Dairy Team Co-Chair





KANSAS WORKS.com

www.westernkjobs.com

got a job?

Making It Work

By successfully recruiting and retaining different industries and businesses, WKREDA has been able to help grow the region's workforce. The focus now is on finding and keeping good employees for those companies, which should spur even more growth going forward.

"Four years ago, we got together to talk about how all of our businesses needed employees to expand their businesses and how we could help that effort," said Jeff Hofaker, director of Phillips County Economic Development and co-chair of WKREDA's workforce initiative committee. "We began to talk about what we could do in terms of marketing our region, not just for new business, but also for recruitment of a new workforce."

Those early discussions led to a workforce initiative committee, which focused its efforts on a regional approach to recruiting centered around a specialized website.

"It seemed the most reasonable way to put everything together in one very accessible place where we could put a lot of information about our different communities in front of people," Hofaker said.

A grant from the Kansas Department of Commerce's Workforce Investment Act helped fund creation and maintenance of the site, www.westernkjobs.com,

which lists jobs and serves as a hub to which communities can link their sites. A collaboration with Kansas Works that allowed spidering searches from there to include those of WKREDA's website proved beneficial as well.

A plan to generate traffic on the site included outside marketing, such as billboards around the state, visits to career fairs and other targeted efforts above and beyond what WKREDA already was doing. The initiative also heightened the organization's profile within its coverage area, which brought in more communities to the overall effort.

"We provided communities that didn't have a full-time economic development person or office the help to develop local website for jobs," Hofaker said. "These local websites provided much needed grassroots representation and also engaged someone locally to enter the same data into our site."

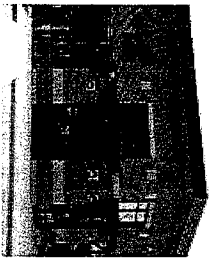
"At the end of the day," Hofaker said, "the connections are being made. Thinking regionally and collaboratively, helping people find jobs—those things are happening. Residents of one county can search and find work forty to fifty or more miles away and still have the benefit of living in a rural area. This keeps people in our state and provides them with options not afforded to them in other areas."

"We have expanded less than 2,000

square feet to over 5,000 square feet, opening our new facility in November

2009. As a result of the expansion, we now have eleven employees on staff and anticipate adding one more yee within the next six months."

Stacie Wenzl,
Wenzl Drug



"My husband, Craig, and I researched

different regions of Arkansas, Missouri, and Kansas to start a new practice. The Wichita County

Economic Development Office helped us decide that western Kansas was in need of a dentist and is a wonderful place to live."

Dr. Joanne Brown,
Great Plains
Family Dentistry



that its members' voices are heard, and multiple tradeshow visits across the country, promoting western Kansas to business and industry groups that are a good fit for the area. Successes include a major uptick in dairy production and a growing manufacturing and distribution sector.

Successes also include the families who have moved back to Western Kansas after realizing the job opportunities, low cost of living, and great overall quality of life.

That quality of life, solid schools, and a hometown feel are what drew Travis and Katie Ruff back to Hanston, where Travis operates Professional Gun Dogs, a full service training facility for pointing and retrieving breeds of hunting dogs. (www.progundog.com).

Access to high-speed internet connectivity allows them to operate a business well beyond Hanston and for Katie to work remotely for a business in Dodge City and be at home with the couple's children.

In 2009, Sean and Monica Kats and their three children also moved back to the region to operate her family's farm and be closer to family, but they soon discovered a whole new side to the Kansas they thought they already knew.

"We were able to find work through Prairie Land Electric while also operating the farm," Sean said. "Our working farm involves a cow-calf cattle operation and commodity crops like wheat for grain, so it's a real working farm."

The Kats, too, say that the area's quality of life just can't be matched, and it's a good place to live, work and raise a family.

"It's certainly different from living in the city, but we really enjoy it here," Sean Kats said. "We're really glad that the farm brought us back."



"It's WKRED's job to create an interest in the region, and it's up to each individual member to create an interest in their community."

Eric Depperschmidt,
Finney County
Economic
Development Corp.