



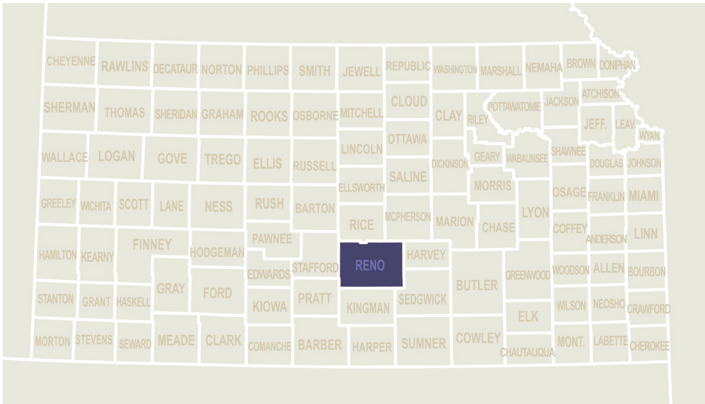
High tunnels at Teck Farms.

Background

The City of Hutchinson, known by the locals as “Hutch,” sits along the Arkansas River in the Great Bend Sand Prairie region of South Central Kansas. It is the largest city in Reno County, with a population of over 40,000.

The city was built in 1871 by the Santa Fe Railway. Following the discovery of large salt deposits in 1887, the mining industry boomed in Hutchinson, giving it the nickname “Salt City.” The 250 million-year-old salt deposits, which are part of the Permian Wellington Formation, are still mined today. The public can tour old mines, or even participate in bike rides or running races, 650 feet below ground.

In the early 1900s, Hutchinson became home to the Kansas State Fair. Today, the fairgrounds span 280 acres. Each year, the 10-day event attracts around 350,000 visitors.



About the Community

CITY POPULATION*	41,146
COUNTY POPULATION*†	61,998
MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME*	\$46,661
MEDIAN AGE*	39 years
CHILDREN LIVING BELOW POVERTY LEVEL **	19.6%
FAMILIES LIVING BELOW POVERTY LEVEL **	8.8%
LOW INCOME & LOW ACCESS TO GROCERY STORE **†	7.5%
PEOPLE WITH LOW ACCESS TO A GROCERY STORE **†	23.8%
CHILDREN WITH LOW ACCESS TO A GROCERY STORE **†	5.2%

*ACS 2018, **Kansas Health Matters, †US Census Bureau

The Issue

Chris and Shawna Tecklenburg moved to Hutchinson in 2002. Chris is an ecological site specialist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and at the time, Shawna was a massage therapist. Although neither grew up on a farm, both had a passion for food and the outdoors. So, after moving to their second home in 2008, the two decided to start their own garden by designing and building a high tunnel in their backyard.

Eight years later, when the 5 ½-acre property across the street went up for sale, the Tecklenburgs saw an opportunity. Entrepreneurial and innovative by nature, Chris and Shawna had a vision for this land to improve their local food system: many parts of Hutchinson and the neighboring city of South Hutchinson are considered food deserts, meaning residents must travel long distances to access affordable, healthy food. In fact, South Hutchinson has no grocery store at all.

The Tecklenburgs dreamt of buying the property and starting an urban farm that would increase the community's supply of fresh, healthy food. Not only that, but they also imagined the urban farm as a hands-on educational center to demonstrate the importance of a healthy ecosystem and show how food is grown for children, students, and adults.

But how would they make this dream a reality?

Glenwood Gardens Health and Wellness Foundation

In 2016, the Tecklenburgs established Teck Farms LLC, and in 2017, they started the Glenwood Gardens Health and Wellness Foundation. The nonprofit's mission is to promote "a healthy way of life through education of growing and consuming nutritious food." They do this through hands-on learning experiences and demonstrations for kids and adults.

The dream for the foundation had formed, but the fruit of the foundation sprang from a birthday party, when their daughter and her friends helped pick carrots from the farm. The guests were thrilled to learn how carrots grew in the ground. "They ate [them] like it was going out of style," the Tecklenburgs shared. When friends came over to play, many wanted to start seeds and set transplants into the ground. As a result, some of these friends even planted gardens at their own homes with their parents.

According to Chris, the experience of watching a child learn where and how their food is made was priceless. "That is motivation for the foundation. Because it was like, there is a missing link between agriculture and education within our society and in our world. Not just community."



Chris Tecklenburg gives a tour of a high tunnel.

The Process

TIMELINE

2002

The Tecklenburg family moves to Hutchinson, KS.

2008

The Tecklenburgs move across the street from the property that will later become Teck Farms. At this home, they build their first high tunnel.

2016

The Tecklenburgs purchase 5 acres of land across the street and have their first growing season.

2017

Construction of four high tunnels begins.

2018

Construction of four high tunnels is complete. In December, Teck Farms applies for KHFI funding to build a post-harvest facility.

2019

The Tecklenburg family moves to a new home on the farm property. In March, construction of a post-harvest facility begins and is stalled due to flooding.

2020

Construction of a post-harvest facility is complete.

First, the couple learned as much as possible: they toured City Bity Farms of Kansas City and spoke with other market gardeners; they completed the Ice House Entrepreneurship Program and attended other workshops throughout the state; they visited the Merc Co+Op and Sunrise Project in Lawrence; they visited the K-State Research & Extension Center-Olathe; they read books by Eliot Coleman and Jean-Martin Fortier. Next, they sought support from the community and found enthusiastic partners in the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Heal Reno County Coalition, the Hutchinson Community Foundation, the Reno County Health Department, and the Pathways to a Healthy Kansas initiative through Blue Cross and Blue Shield.

Eventually, after extensive information gathering, planning, and relationship-building, Chris and Shawna were ready to buy the land and start Teck Farms in 2016.

A lot happened in the years since. By 2018, the Tecklenburgs constructed four more high tunnels through cost share programs from the NRCS, covering about 2 acres of land, where they grow tomatoes, peppers, lettuce, okra, cucumber, zucchini, pumpkins, watermelon, cantaloupe, strawberries, asparagus, beets, and radishes. With this expansion, the Tecklenburgs needed a larger storage and handling space. In 2020, with funding from the Kansas Healthy Food Initiative (KHFI), they completed construction of a 1,200 square foot post-harvest facility, complete with sinks, three walk-in coolers, and an office. The facility allows them to wash, dry, and package produce before delivering to local grocery stores.

The urban farm is situated in a residential area along a main arterial road on the western edge of Hutchinson. Currently, the Tecklenburgs primarily sell to individuals from their on-farm produce stand. Other retail outlets that they have supplied include Smith's Market and Back to Nature. Selling to local grocery stores and having an established permanent on-site farm stand are goals for Teck Farms in 2021.

Chris and Shawna are learning as they go and making big plans for the future. They received cost share for three additional high tunnels and were approved for a grant from KHFI to build a permanent produce stand. They are now researching the possibility of a mobile market to reach other parts of town and are ambitiously waiting for the opportunity to hire more employees, accept SNAP, and build an educational facility. The Tecklenburgs consider their farm to be a model for strengthening local food systems, and eventually, they want to help establish urban farms in other cities.



Teck Farms tomatoes to be sold at Smith's Market.

Lessons Learned

✓ Create a long-term vision guided by a mission statement.

With so many visions for the farm, Shawna and Chris have developed a mission statement to guide their immediate decision-making. To help keep track of their progress toward achieving their vision, the Tecklenburgs write everything down and keep notes organized in three-ring binders. “This is a dynamic and ever-changing endeavor. Gotta write this down. Have a vision, mission, and goals,” says Chris.

✓ Be patient.

Teck Farms has been many years in the making. Before getting started, Shawna and Chris took their time researching, finding resources, and getting other partners involved. The farm started small and has been slowly expanding over time.

✓ Build strong community relationships.

Shawna and Chris acknowledge that none of this could have happened without partnerships. They consider Teck Farms to be a collaborative effort. For the Tecklenburgs, the most rewarding part of the business is building personal relationships and serving their community with high-quality products.

Project Successes

The Tecklenburgs have been able to make their dream a reality through dedication, patience, and community relationships. Their new post-harvest handling facility allows produce grown at Teck Farms to stay fresh longer, opening up new potential markets where the Tecklenburgs can supply high-quality, nutritious food.



Post-harvest facility constructed with KHFI funding.

KHFI Impact



1,200 square-foot processing facility on site



3 new walk-in coolers to properly store produce



Greater access to fresh, locally-produced food

Icon Credit: The Noun Project by Atif Arshad, Lnhi, and Eucalyp.



1239 North Hendricks, Hutchinson, KS



Teck Farms

www.teckfarms.com

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