Kansas puts increased emphasis on ‘economic gardening’ as a tool to grow the state’s rural economy

By Carolyn Orr [1]
Tuesday, February 1, 2011 at 12:00 AM

In Kansas, as is the case in many states, the data on job growth are clear: Most new jobs in a local economy are produced by the community’s existing small businesses, rather than by startups or relocations.

Between 1993 and 2008, for example, well over half of the net new jobs in Kansas could be attributed to an expansion of the workforce by existing businesses.

These numbers help explain the greater emphasis being placed in Kansas on the concept of “economic gardening” [2]: an alternative to traditional state growth policies that focuses less on business recruitment, and more on helping home-grown, second-stage businesses.

A pilot project [3] recently launched in Kansas is targeting assistance for these businesses in the state’s rural communities. These businesses are typically past the startup stage and ripe for more expansion, but might lack the resources to reach their growth potential.

About 35 small rural businesses will be involved in this pilot project, which is made possible in part by a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Businesses that have already been accepted into this economic-gardening pilot project come from communities as small as 200 residents; most are from towns of under 5,000 people.

The owners of these establishments will receive technical assistance on how to grow their businesses; examples might include help in identifying market trends, expanding the use of Internet marketing or developing new social media tools. The idea is to provide local entrepreneurs with the resources and information that only large firms have typically been able to access.

Economic gardening also stresses the need to build up the local infrastructure, whether it be local roads and the “information highway,” quality-of-life amenities, or training opportunities for second-stage businesses.

The pilot project typifies the importance that state legislators have placed on helping entrepreneurs. In 2004, with passage of the Economic Growth Act, the Legislature established the Kansas Center for Entrepreneurship.

“The center felt that implementing a pilot project was the best way to research the concept [of economic gardening],” says Steve Radley, the director of NetworkKansas. “We will be following the success of these companies over the next few years to determine the success of the program before expanding it in the state.”

Legislators will be keeping an eye on the progress as well.
The pilot project “is a good example of the actions that the [2004] legislation was designed to encourage,” says Republican Sen. Mark Taddiken.

The Edward Lowe Foundation, a proponent of the economic gardening model and the group that developed the YourEconomy.org website, is involved in the Kansas project as well.

© 2016 The Council of State Governments. All Rights Reserved.

Source URL: http://knowledgecenter.csg.org/kc/content/kansas-puts-increased-emphasis-%E2%80%98economic-gardening%E2%80%99-tool-grow-state%E2%80%99s-rural-economy

Links