

## SUCCESS STORY

# Extension Master Gardeners Support Local Businesses Through Annual Garden and Outdoor Living EXPO Event

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Christian County Cooperative Extension Service



Kentucky Extension  
Master Gardener



Christian County Chamber of Commerce generated a county-wide plan to guide improvements and bring together community partners to achieve progress in education, leadership engagement, infrastructure enhancement, and economic growth. The third wave of strategic planning by the county resulted in the Community Vision Plan 2020 Report. To support the findings of the report, the Cooperative Extension Service in Christian County, utilizing Master Gardeners, developed and hosted a Garden and Outdoor Living EXPO to support economic growth within the county.

“We have a very active chamber group with excellent support from the community,” said Kelly Jackson, Horticulture Extension Agent in Christian County. The initial EXPO was held in 2015 at the Extension Office to provide retail opportunities to local and regional horticulture product and service providers. Each year, the EXPO has grown in square footage, vendor applications, and public attendance. “Vendors told us of the great exposure for their company,” said Jackson. The Master Gardener volunteers had a important decision to make after the initial EXPO.

For the 2016 EXPO, the Master Gardeners voted to “Go Big” because of the overwhelming support of vendors and community. The EXPO moved to the local convention center to further support economic growth for the retail horticulture presence in Christian County. In addition, Master Gardeners voted to chair the EXPO as a group and keep the event free and open to the public. This aligns with the community vision plan of recreational opportunities available to the average Christian County citizen. In addition, they purposely planned a family-friendly atmosphere.

In 2017, over 1,000 local residents interacted with 44 vendors during the 2-day EXPO. Participants commented in an exit interview on their interest in speaking with the vendors, and stated they will be visiting local vendors in the future. For activities such as the successful Hoptown Garden EXPO, Extension programming which supports community decision-making and collaborative initiatives can help lead Christian County to the next level of success.



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