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Beyond Pesticides

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Kansas City Launches Pilot Project to Adopt Organic Land Management at Two Demonstration Sites, Neighborhood Park and Athletic Complex

KANSAS CITY, MO, and WASHINGTON, DC, December 4, 2024—Kansas City, MO, in alignment with their mission to improve the quality of life, health, and wellness of the community, announces the launch of two organic land management demonstration sites through the Parks and Recreation Department, in collaboration with the environmental nonprofit organization Beyond Pesticides and underwriting for technical support from Natural Grocers. The program provides in-depth training to assist community land managers in transitioning two public demonstration sites and the knowledge necessary to eventually transition all public areas in a locality to these safer practices.

Beyond Pesticides, which contributed to the writing of the *Organic Foods Production Act of 1990* creating the U.S. Department of Agriculture organic program and which operates the [Parks for Sustainable Future program](#), collaborates with communities across the country to transition parks, playing fields, and public and private spaces to organic land management. The group brings to the project expertise in land management practices that focus on enhancing soil microbial life to cycle nutrients naturally; this approach, used by organic agriculture, naturally produces nutrients for plants, resulting in more resiliency and a reduction in water use. With horticultural expertise from the firm Osborne Organics, the organic land management plan for both sites will focus on the adoption of soil management practices that support healthy resilient grass without the use of petrochemical pesticides and fertilizers.

“We are excited to be working with Kansas City on organic land management practices that protect community health and the environment, including bees, butterflies, and birds, and support efforts to mitigate climate change and biodiversity decline,” said Jay Feldman, executive director of Beyond Pesticides. “Organic practices eliminate fossil fuel petroleum-based products and sequester atmospheric carbon in the soil, combating the climate crisis.”

“Working with Beyond Pesticides is an important step in implementing our Parks and Recreation Sustainability Plan. Part of that plan calls for implementing an Integrated Pest Management System,” states Stephen Van Rhein, environmental manager for Kansas City Parks and Recreation. “Beyond Pesticides program will help train our staff to understand how we can have great athletic fields while building healthy soil and using only organic methods.”

Jen Schroeder, a Kansas City resident whose passion for eliminating harmful chemicals from our food, homes, and environment is inspired from her young son, learned about Parks for a Sustainable Future from her frequent shopping at Natural Grocers. She decided that the program was a perfect fit for Kansas City.

“When my son was an infant, he suffered from a myriad of ‘mysterious’ reactions that doctors couldn’t explain or resolve,” describes Schroeder. “After significant effort—and heartache—I realized that synthetic chemicals in our food,

water, and environment are major triggers for his reactions. From there, I learned how harmful these chemicals are for all of us, even if we cannot pinpoint the direct cause.”

“In spring 2022, I remember thinking, ‘How are we going to get outside once ‘Mosquito Joe’ starts spraying pesticides and lawn companies start applying herbicides and fertilizers?’” recalls Schroeder. “So, I called Kansas City Parks and Recreation to find out what chemicals were being used in our parks and ask whether the City would consider reducing—or even eliminating—the use of those chemicals. I am so grateful I connected with Stephen Van Rhein. He was empathetic to my concerns, and we brainstormed ideas for reducing lawn chemicals used in public green spaces.”

“This is so exciting for my family and for our City,” said Schroeder. “Knowing that Arbor Villa will be a healthy space for my kids to run around barefoot and play brings me such joy and peace of mind. I hope this initiative grows to include all of our public green spaces in KCMO, and that Johnson County Parks and Recreation (and other cities throughout the Metro area) see this initiative and want to join!”

Kansas City is committed to maintaining healthy green spaces through its sustainability plan, and this commitment is now strengthened by a partnership with Beyond Pesticides. This collaboration focuses on implementing environmentally friendly practices that reduce harmful chemicals in park maintenance, ensuring safer community and local wildlife spaces. By prioritizing natural alternatives and sustainable landscaping techniques, KC Parks aims to preserve the ecological health of its green spaces while promoting long-term environmental stewardship. KC Parks and Beyond Pesticides are fostering a healthier, more sustainable urban environment for future generations.

- [Arbor Villa Park](#)—Located in Park District 3 in the South, the site is a beloved one-acre neighborhood park featuring a playground surrounded by natural grass turf, tennis courts and an upcoming renovation to an aquatic feature. *1 East 66th Terrace, Kansas City, MO, 64113*
- [Pleasant Valley Road Athletic Complex](#)—Located in Park District 1 in the North, this 27-acre park hosts 4 baseball diamonds and one adaptive softball field. The basketball courts are not part of the demonstration site for the project. *6401 NE Pleasant Valley Road, Kansas City, MO, 64119*

The Parks for a Sustainable Future program is supported by Natural Grocers, who underwrites the horticultural consultation services, including testing of soil biology, development of a plan with recommended practices and materials, as well as ongoing collaboration with staff.

In addition to Natural Grocer’s Five Founding Principles, "organic" is at the heart of the company. Natural Grocers only sells USDA-certified 100% organic produce and has always been active in promoting and protecting the integrity of the organic label. The stores are Certified Organic Food Handlers, which means all stores are inspected annually by an organic certifying agency to ensure that we are only using organic-approved processes and cleaning products. This certification and commitment to selling only 100% Certified Organic Produce, guarantees integrity from farm to table.

Alan Lewis, Vice President of Advocacy and Governmental Affairs at Natural Grocers, stated, "We are thrilled to see Kansas City launch the organic management project, which we feel is important to a healthy community. We know from long experience that land managers are happily surprised by the naturally weed-free landscapes and the cost savings due to lower water use. The biggest benefit, of course, will be for families, neighbors, and friends who will have safer green spaces for hanging out and playing sports." Natural Grocers operates in Missouri, Kansas, the Midwest, and the West.

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Beyond Pesticides is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization headquartered in Washington, D.C., which works with allies in protecting health and the environment with science, policy, and action to lead the transition to a world free of toxic pesticides. Learn more at <https://www.beyondpesticides.org/>.