

## Carl Koster - REAP

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

"You reap what you sow." The truth of that timeless proverb has been demonstrated forever. Today we will learn about an organization serving south central Kansas which is helping to sow regional cooperation and reaping the results. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Carl Koster is the Chair of the Regional Economic Area Partnership, or REAP. Carl is a member of the city council in Cheney, which is located near the Sedgwick-Kingman county line west of Wichita.

Carl's grandfather immigrated to the U.S. from Germany in 1884. In 1891, his grandfather bought a farm near Cheney. That land has been in the family ever since, and the farm has grown through the years. Carl grew up here, went to K-State, and pursued a career in video journalism but still lives at Cheney and manages his farmground.

"My family was always public spirited," Carl said. "My grandfather served on the school board and my dad was a township trustee." Carl continued this family tradition. He got elected to the city council in Cheney and went on to serve as mayor for 12 years. He still serves on the city council today.

In 1997, the Mayor of Wichita, Bob Knight, and Wichita city manager Chris Cherches invited leaders of nearby communities to a meeting to discuss creation of a regional organization. Of course, sometimes the relationship between a large city and the nearby small towns can be sensitive. Smaller communities value their independence and don't want to be swallowed up by a larger city. But on a larger scale, Bob Knight and Chris Cherches recognized the need to work on a regional basis so as to be competitive and effective in a global marketplace. As a result, they invited local leaders to this regional meeting.

Carl Koster was one of those who attended the meeting on behalf of Cheney to see what Bob Knight and Chris Cherches had to say. "Most of us (from the small towns) were there to keep an eye on those two guys," Carl said. But Mayor Knight and Manager Cherches made clear that their intent was not to take over the small towns or create more government, but rather to help the region.

At the end of the process, 27 cities passed individual resolutions to support this new organization. It was called the South Central Regional Council of Government. In 1999 the structure was broadened to include county governments as well, and it was renamed Regional Economic Area Partnership or REAP. REAP seems a fitting name for a region which includes Sumner County, the largest wheat producing county in Kansas.

Kelly Bergeron serves as Executive Director for REAP. Carl Koster rose through the ranks to serve as Chair of the REAP Board.

Today, REAP continues to serve as a voluntary regional organization involving cities, counties, and associate members in a nine-county region. REAP has two purposes: To guide state and national actions that affect economic development in the region, and to adopt joint actions among member governments that benefit the regional economy. REAP does so through various task forces, regional forums, and legislative advocacy. It includes a Chief Elected Officials Board which focuses on workforce issues, a water resources committee, and more.

For example, REAP was involved in the Fair Fares initiative which helped bring in discount airline carriers to the Wichita airport. As a result, air fares have become more competitive, saving travelers thousands of dollars and bringing more travelers to south central Kansas. REAP members include the big city of Wichita, plus rural towns such as Mount Hope, population 829, Garden Plain, population 797, and Bentley, population 374 people. Now, that's rural.

For more information, see [www.reap-ks.org](http://www.reap-ks.org).

You reap what you sow. It's true in a wheat field, and it's true in the economic development field as well. We commend Carl Koster, Kelly Bergeron, and all those involved with the REAP program for making a difference with regional cooperation. We hope the seeds of multicounty collaboration can produce a harvest of shared prosperity.

And there's more. Carl Koster's video journalism career took him all the way to the Super Bowl. We'll learn about that next week.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.