

Key Points Learned About Agriculture Related to Local Food Systems

Northeast Iowa Food and Farm Coalition

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- For the past 50 years, US agriculture has been moving toward fewer and larger farms and increasing specialization. This type of growth has been slower in NE IA due to its topography and rolling hills.
 - Diversity of farms means more business operators and their families involved in community life.
 - Means more food choices
- When we look at the farmland in NE IA, we see that 78% is used for crop production. (2002 Ag Census)
 - 46% of the region's acreage is for corn and soybean production and 2% is harvested for oat grain.
 - 10% is timber with largest areas in Allamakee (26%) and Clayton (17%) counties.
 - 5% of the farmland is in pasture and
 - 7% of the farmland has another classification
- Northeast Iowa farms are smaller than those found in the flatter, central region of Iowa. (2002 Ag Census)
 - 6420 farms in the 5 counties
 - Average farm size: 253 acres to 309 acres. State average =350 acres
 - Producers in the project area are more directly connected to agriculture than the large commodity farmers found in other areas of the state.
- Total sales of agriculture products in this area total \$685 million dollars each year. (2002 Ag Census)
 - 63% of the farm income is from livestock production compared to the state average of 50%.
 - Three of the counties are in the top five for hay production. The 5 counties account for 13% of the state's hay and forage crop.
 - 15% of Iowa's corn silage production acres and tonnage.
 - 19% of Iowa's oat grain crop.
 - Home to 72% of Iowa's dairy cows which are owned by 3,000 dairy farm families
 - 9% of the beef cattle in the state can be found in NE IA.
- Farms in this area are leaders the state in direct food sales.
 - Sold \$915,000 of food directly to consumers. 2/3s of these sales were from Allamakee and Winneshiek counties. (2002 Ag Census)
 - Two new restaurants, 5 established restaurants and 2 institutions started buying and serving local food in 2007 (NIFF Coalition Base-Line Survey, Aug 06-Sep 07)
 - Increase in the number of local food events or activities where local food has been served and the number of people served. (NIFF Coalition Base-Line Survey, Aug 06-Sep 07)
 - Increase in the number of producers expanding and/or growing food and fiber enterprises in Northeast Iowa. Mini-grants were awarded (\$2,940) to 14 producers to leverage \$134,723.60 in funding to expand or start food and fiber enterprises. (NIFF Coalition Base-Line Survey, Aug 06-Sep 07)
 - Food Co-op membership has grown by 350 members in the last 12 months and they will soon open a new store that is triple their original size. Approximately 23% of their items sold are from local food producers. (NIFF Coalition Base-Line Survey, Aug 06-Sep 07)
- This area leads the state in organic production with \$3.5 million in sales. (2002 Ag Census)
 - 10% of the certified organic farms in the state
 - Majority of farms in Allamakee (2nd), Howard (6th) and Winneshiek (1st) counties.
 - 26% of the total organic sales for the state of Iowa.
- The NE IA Food & Farm Coalition was formed in April 2006 to support the development and marketing of locally grown agricultural products to enhance the lives of local citizens and to help farmers capitalize on the strengths in the region. One of their projects was to put together a local food directory which lists direct marketing farmers and their products. (NIFF Coalition Local Food Directory, 2007)

- Over 29 farmers direct market meat or eggs
- Over 45 farms produce fruits or vegetables (the number does not include Amish/Mennonite farms)
- 3 CSAs in the region

NE IA is a region of food consumers.

- Population 86,520 people (2000 Census)
 - 3312 square miles
 - The largest towns in each county are Cresco (3945), Decorah (8210), Waukon (4191), Guttenberg (1976) and Oelwein (6683).
 - There are 19 school districts in the area with 16,946 students in grades K-12.
 - School age youth represent 20% of the area population.
 - The area also has three post secondary education facilities that enrich cultural and educational opportunities, but county health assessments note that rural isolation is still considered a significant barrier to the health and wellbeing of residents. Even though the majority of residents live on farms away from small town infrastructure, over eighty-five percent of families with children under age five have all adult family members working outside the home. Many are running farming operations in addition to their factory or 'town' jobs.
- Residents in this area earn 1.29 billion dollars each year (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2002).
 - \$193 million dollars is spent on food
 - \$84 million dollars (44%) spent on food eaten away from home
 - \$109 million dollars (56%) spent on food to each at home
 - Meat, poultry, fish and eggs - \$24 M
 - Fruits and veg. - \$22 M
 - Cereals and bakery products - \$15M
 - Dairy - \$13 M
 - Other food products - \$35M
 - Direct food sales from area farms are approximately \$1 million per year. This means current local food sales account for less than 1% of the total food sales. Imagine if 2% of those food sales could be from local sources...how about 10%?
- Where do people buy their food?
 - There are 22 full service grocery stores and 7 smaller stores located in the area. These stores include a community coop with organic and local food and 3 ethnic grocery stores (Jewish and Hispanic).
 - There are over 60 convenience stores in NE IA. Convenience stores are typically the main food source in the smaller communities. These stores will meet the emergency food needs of the residents even though food at convenience tends to be processed and low in nutrition.
 - There are 16 Farmers markets that operate in the summer months—generally May through October. Most of the markets are open one day a week for 2-3 hours.
 - 3 CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture) in the area.
 - Several grocery stores in the region that will carry local food when in season.
- Are people in NE IA ready to commit to buying local food? The NIFF Coalition worked with Iowa State University's CD-DIAL to conduct a survey in 2007 of 533 area residents. (Consumer Household Survey, 2007)
 - 71% had heard of *locally produced food* before receiving the questionnaire
 - Of those who had heard of this concept, 58% usually shop local, if available
 - The farthest distance respondents are willing to travel to obtain *locally produced foods* is 30.1 miles
 - 51% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement "I trust farmers/producers in my local area to grow and offer safe food"
 - 48% "Would purchase *locally produced foods*, but unable to find them"
 - 52% "Will go out of their way to purchase *locally produced foods*"

- 76% of respondents reported they would be more likely to purchase *locally produced foods* if they were available in their local grocery store
- Majority of respondents interested in buying local food
- When deciding where to purchase food, 77% gave importance to the statement “Offers fresh meats, dairy, or produce grown in my local area”
- 66% were willing to pay a little more for *locally produced food*
- Are institutions interested in local food? 140 institutions were surveyed. (Institutional Survey, November 2006)
 - 41% said locally grown food would be appealing to their customers.
 - 57% said they currently use locally grown food
 - 61% said they are not purchasing or stopped purchasing local food products
 - Due to lack of access or availability
 - Had not been approached by local farmer/processor
 - Did not know who to contact
 - 35% said state codes and regulations were a barrier
 - Price of local food is a barrier
 - Once barriers are removed, 85% said they would purchase local food.
 - Buyers reported they would be willing to pay 12% more.

Summary Points of Agriculture in NE IA

- We have learned that we have been able to keep smaller farm sizes because of diversified farms and livestock production.
- The smaller farm sizes are more adaptable, but still struggle in the global commodity markets. NE IA farms are unique and dynamic.
- We learned the NE IA has great potential to produce food for its residents. There is a long history of food production in the area and yet annual direct marketing sales are less than 1% of the total food expenditures each year.
- We learned that the consumers and institutions are ready to support a local food system. Both have indicated that they would purchase more locally produced food if it was more readily available. Some of the barriers to the use and integration of local foods have been identified.

