

2008 NIFF Producer Meetings

“Locally Grown Food Grows Local Dollars”

Feb 25, Elma (H), 17 participants
Feb 26, Waukon (A), 18 participants
Feb 27, Decorah (W), 40 participants

Feb 27, Elkader (C),
Feb 27, Fayette (F), 27 participants
Feb 28, Decorah (W), 45 participants

Webcast #1:

What did you learn from this information? Did you learn anything new?

- If people knew where to get food, they'd buy it. (W) Excited that people are willing to purchase local food if it is made available to them (C). There is interest in buying local food by consumers and institutions (W). Awareness on the part of the communities is higher than first believed to be. (C)
- Average farm is smaller than the rest of the state. (W)
- We're a strong ag area (W,A)
- We lead the state for organic production. (W,A)
- Only 1% of food is currently purchased locally; prospect for more (W,H,A)
- 51% of food dollars being spent for food consumed at home was encouraging. (F)
- Potential for growing food in NE Iowa is different than rest of the state. (W)
- There is more marketing going on in the 5 county region than people are aware of; surprising. (W,F,C) Marketing seems to be the key to success. (F)
- CSAS were new. Didn't know that food was available this way (H)
- There are lots of opportunities out there – producers need the outlet or market at the time that they are harvesting. (F) There is an enormous potential for sales (F)
- Thirty years ago one could hear the same thing – but can local producers meet the need? (F)

What are the assets and strengths for our area toward developing a local food system?

Assets Related to Land

- Diversity (W)
- We still have strong communities with downtowns and schools. (W)
- We have the geography and terrain that is well-suited to growing food (W)
- “Food Shed” expands our capabilities (W)
- Lots of willing and able producers (H,F)
- Size of farms and the lay of the land (C,H)
- Small family farms already working together. (F)

Assets Related to Markets

- Larger food Co-op (W)
- Proximity to Organic Valley (W)
- Organic Conference in La Crosse (MOSES) (W)
- Our proximity to the Twin Cities – only 2 ½ hours by truck (W)
- Strong Farmer's Market and a willingness to buy (W,F)
- Willingness of Schools to buy local. (W)
- Producers rely on off-farm income (H)
- Buyers interested in local food if address barriers (H)

- We have people who are willing to pay more for locally grown food; high number of consumers (W,F)
- Natural beauty of the land and its attraction to people who want a more relaxed lifestyle (C)
- Variation of production methods and opportunities to enter into the market because of that. (C)
- We have a strong base of people interested in these new opportunities. (F)

Are we missing information in this picture?

Information related to production

- Is it possible to grow produce all year round? (W)
- Producers need clear guidelines because depending on product, market, packaging and quantity, levels of inspection and licensing differ. (F,A,W,H,C) Can ISU host some type of small scale processing seminar – including the necessary inspections, licensing, technologies, etc.
- What is the diversity of production? What can we feasibly grow here? (C)
- How can we extend the life of product? (H,C)
- Our county (Fayette) could support more CSA's – one north and one south? (F)
- Producers – what are they producing, when is it available (W)
- Extend the growing season – what infrastructure is needed (hoop houses?) (W)
- Capital needed for infrastructure (W)
- What types of fruits and veggies can we grow? How do we start with a modest amount? (W,F)

Information related to processing and distribution

- Do we have information on where processors (meat, dairy, fruits, & vegetables) are in the region and those closest to us? (W)
- How will we distribute the food? (W)
- Who sells food for our region besides the Farmer's Market and the Co-op? (W)
- USDA regulations on processing are difficult (in order to sell by the piece, federal inspection are required. Not all of our processors are federally inspected – only state inspected) (F) Need clarification on rules for selling to institutions (H,A,F)
- Processing and storage are big issues. (There was additional discussion here regarding coordinating storage – it was brought up that Oelwein and Independence both have empty facilities that have cold storage capability – Tyson's old plant in Oelwein was one – how can we as producers work together for the benefit of a local system?) (F)
- Need more info on Processing – versatility
- How big do you need to build a plant? (A)
- Processing needs to be locally owned. Farmer coops? (A)

Information related to consumption

- Information on whether food is safer. (W)
- Educate people about what they can or can't buy. (W)
- Need the will to buy organic and/or local...need to know the benefits. (W)
- What local products are people most likely to buy? (A)
- What do people want to buy? How much?(A)
- What is consumer's motivation to buy local? (A)
- Demand for food – type, where, when (W)
- LF doesn't have to be organic or natural-local is valuable too (A)
- Are households willing to pay more? (A)

Information related to marketing

- Is it possible to set up a Marketing Group for Producers – a Marketing Co-op for all food? (W, A)
- Bringing producers and buyers together in the same room (W)
- What types of marketing should we do? (A)

Webcast #2:

What opportunities can you see for producers around local food production in NE Iowa? What's possible here?

Opportunities related to production

- Extending the growing season with infrastructure (W,F)
- Networking among producers (W). Producers need to work together for more efficiency. (F)
- Fruit options – local! (W)
- We're in the "bread basket" of the country. We have the labor with high energy to stay competitive. (W)
- Grass-fed beef and dairy exist and are possible production methods (W)
- Community people growing food (W)
- Diversified feed stocks (W)
- More community gardens_(W)
- Need education for younger people to farm. Reach beginner farmers at high school level. This is the biggest challenge (A).
- Need an advisory group for businesses that includes legal advice, financial support, marketing, etc. Ex. UNI small business regional center with ag specialty. Navigators provide help w/ issues related to business development (A).
- Mentor system for beginning farmers with mentors for business and production assistance (A,F,H)
- Need to collect and distribute resources for assistance, ie. MarketMaker (A,F)
- Coops offer opportunity to build on strengths-support and mentoring (A)
- Field days and tours at local farms. ISU is working with produce auction producers on research plots (H)
- Farmers Markets need more producers. Coordinate dates and times so that producers can be part of all? (F,A,C)
- Is Job Sharing an option? (F)

Opportunities related to processing/distribution

- Packing plants exist here. (W) Need slaughter plant- to help local processors (A)
- Storage for fresh produce needed (W,F)
- Local Dairy Processing (W,A)
- Regional Canning, Freezing, and Dehydrating (W,H,A)
- Artesian Foods – we have the raw materials – need the skills
- Branding the food grown in our region (W,A,F,H,C)
- Portable processing unit for vegetable, fruits and meats (W,F)
- Flash freezing (F)
- We need to learn to cook again using local foods! (W)
- Friendly competition to use dried, frozen items (W)
- Local meat processing & inspection (W)
- Smaller kitchens for processing that employ local people. Keep ownership local. Tie consumer education into kitchens (H)

Opportunities related to marketing

- Group buying power (W)
- Group selling power (W,F)
- Specialty items (W)
- Year-round Farmer's Markets (W,F,A,C) Viroqua and Rochester have green market in storefronts all year (indoor farmers market) (A)
- More institutional use of local foods! (W)
- Need more publicity/promotion of producers (where, who, what-how to contact) in newspapers-news releases, cable access, Billboards, BFBL directory, county or area website, marketing includes visitors, stores, restaurants, online (A,H,F)
- Need 3rd party to bridge communication b/w producers/buyers (brokers) (A,F)
- Create a marketing coop for region. Could this be a niche for NIFF Coalition? (A,F,H)
- Develop a regional label—NE IA grown or Iowa Grown (A). Define local. Produce Auction needs its own label (H).
- Food coops work w/ a auction producers (H)
- Some farmers markets have rules against produce from the auction even though it is local (H)
- Produce Auction is an opportunity for institutions to buy larger amounts (H)
- Distribution and marketing are the biggest issues for the produce auction (H)
- Auction has enough producers—need more buyers (H)
- Auction needs to find customers with regular standing orders (H)
- Try to get local food to be part of a community celebration. (C)

Opportunities related to consumption

- Education – all the way around! (W,A)
- Reduce the disconnect between our food and our food source (W)
- Need to get food into grocery stores. People dedicated to LF w/ find it. We need dedicated shelf space even if we need to buy the space. Grocery stores are willing to change—look at the ethnic sections. Grocery stores will stock if asked for product 15 times (A)
- People will respond to educational facts of food vs. commercial messages (A)
- Consumer education on food handling and preservation. Will the new generation take time to preserve food? Yes (H)
- More people realizing what they are putting into their bodies (C)
- Healthy approaches to life including food consumption. (C)

What will it take to create change on this issue?

Cooperation between producers and retailers (C,F)

A sustainable distribution system for each area. (C)

Who will you talk to about this info or what will you do next?

- Talk to other producers about milk bottling (A)
- Marketing group (A,H)
- Talk to local Amish (A)
- Talking to institutions re: meat shares, inventory producers (A)
- Talk to other producers (A)
- Attend organic workshop (A)
- Recruiting producers for coop (A)
- Talk to coworkers (A)
- Talk to grocery store re: where local food (A)
- Apply for producer grants (A)
- Learn more (A)
- Bank willing to support producers/ businesses (H)
- Third party coordination needed (H)
- Be a resource person (H)
- Money is needed