

Mini-Grants to Local Food Producers – Final Report 2008

The Northeast Iowa Food and Farm Coalition (NIFF) with assistance from the County Economic Development offices awarded \$1400 in mini-grants to local food producers. These grants were available to help producers with new or expanding local food production, processing, marketing or distribution in the five northeast Iowa counties of Allamakee, Clayton, Winneshiek, Fayette and Howard.

The grant funds were used for start-up or expansion costs related to planting new crops that will be sold for local consumption, such as grapes, nuts, fruits or vegetables.

In 2008, \$5992 was awarded to 20 producers. The grant money was used as capital to leverage an additional \$108,242 in funding.

This grant opportunity is part of a much larger effort of the Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative to promote and encourage the procurement and consumption of local healthy food and active lifestyles for youth and families in the five-county region. These grant dollars are being made available through funding provided by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, the Regional Food Systems Working Group and Wallace Foundation Funds.

ALLAMAKEE COUNTY

Farm Stand Marketing

Bob Raymond of Lansing received \$500 to develop a brochure for his farm stand outside of Lansing and for advertising. Currently his farm stand building is up but not finished. Challenges included shortage of time to complete and a non-functional compressor for the cooler. He plans to have the stand fully operational in 2009. He is been marketing in Iowa and Wisconsin and plans to erect signage on county highways in April.

Garden Expansions

Bobbie Young of Waukon and Kathy Kruse of Dorchester each received \$100 to expand a garden to attend the farmers market and possibly sell to a coop.

Young used the grant to buy asparagus plants, tomato plants and other seeds for her garden. The greatest obstacle this year was the weather. They sold their produce to family and fellow employees. They plan to sell more next year and have a better idea of what to plant.

Kruse used the funds for seeds and plants. She shared her garden produce with family and friends and recruited her grandchildren to help pick, weed and tend.

Expand Poultry Production

Ryan and Kristine Jepsen of Dorchester received \$500 to expand pastured poultry production on newly certified organic farm. They entered the growing season intending to raise three batches of 500 organic Cornish cross broilers on pasture using sheltered incubation (3 weeks) and a rotational grazing system (3-4 weeks). They built six chicken tractors/huts from some new materials and some salvage, purchased waterers and heat lamps, and constructed an incubator enclosure in their barn. However, 2008 proved to be a difficult year for early production, with temperatures consistently below freezing well into late May. About 2/3 of the birds went directly to Oneota Community Food Co-op in Decorah as "parts" --

processed and packaged as breasts, wings, and thighs. The remaining 1/3 of the batch have been direct-marketed.

In the future, they will raise only one batch of 300 broilers in early summer. They began marketing more directly to Luther College for their series of local-food meals, New Pioneer co-ops in Iowa City, Gateway Market in Des Moines, and several other restaurants both north and south of their farm. They also succeeded in helping other area farmers of organic, grass-fed cattle and pastured pork to market their product through them -- they source animals when their supply is limited, paying a fairer price than families could get elsewhere.

Marketing Locally Grown Food

The 66 Café received \$200 to assist with the marketing of their locally grown menu items. Farm fresh eggs, bacon, ham and sausage links are a special touch on their breakfast menu. They include fresh fruit with every plate. Their biggest challenge has been rising food costs. Now that they have been ordering locally grown food for the past year, they know what is available and they will be able to use more of those products compared to products ordered from the big distribution centers.

CLAYTON COUNTY

Expand Honeybee Production

Bill & Louise Johnson received \$500 to purchase additional equipment for honeybee production. They plan to double production to 10,000 lbs of honey per year. The Johnson's purchased 35 packages of bees, 150 honey supers, bottom boards and inner covers and telescoping covers for the hives. They purchased a machine to fill honey straws and produced lemon flavored honey for the cold season. Bill attended school to learn how to graft queen bees which will be a tremendous savings when he splits hives. The honey is sold through the farmers markets and the demand for Johnson's honey is growing each year.

Acreage Expansion

Phil and Charlotte Waldbeser received \$500 to plant 5 acres of organic fruits and vegetables. They also purchased a new BCS Model 948 walk-behind tractor with spading, tilling, mowing, chipping, dump box and shredder attachments. The tractor provided the tools needed to raise the fruits and vegetable on the four acre farm. The produce was sold at Oneota Food Coop, Elgin and West Union Farmers markets.

Greenhouse Improvements

Christine Miller received \$500 to install lights in greenhouse to increase growing season and production. Organic heirloom produce was sold to consumers within a 22 mile radius of McGregor. Their plan is to start growing their growing season earlier next year with the additional lighting in their heated greenhouse. They also extended their outdoor garden area and plan to increase it again next year. At this time they are planning to grow organic produce and sell directly from the farm to consumer. Their grocery store is being planned for 2010 upon having enough produce to meet demand.

FAYETTE COUNTY

Production Expansion

Francis Martin of Wadena received \$375 for expansion of vegetable plantings. In addition to the cost of plants, a new engine was purchased for existing rototiller. His sales increased from last year. He experienced a larger harvest and income increased even with the weather challenges seen this past season. He has seen a wider customer base. He also started participating in the Food & Farm meetings.

Doors have opened that hadn't before. He sold a CSA and is looking into the possibility of providing for two local restaurants.

Greenhouse Expansion

Colleen Ohrt of Clermont received \$225 of \$300 for expansion of a hoophouse. Final report was not submitted.

Construction of Packing Shed

Ann Bushman of Fort Atkinson received \$285 toward the construction of a packing shed intended to be used to increase efficiency of post-harvesting crops. They purchased a washer, steel table and sinks, a screen table and dunk wash tank. The packing shed will be used to complete proper post-harvesting techniques.

Construction of Hydroponic System

Scott Smalley of Oelwein received \$340 to support the development of a hydroponics system to grow vegetables in a nutrient solution. They have been using mini trials to better understand the best types of plants to use in this system and along with testing various nutrient concentrations before running with the entire system. Timing of the project is a challenge with no school in the summer. They hope to have the project up and running fully next year. Students are excited about this project and they have plans of putting up a high hoop greenhouse structure to extend the growing season this fall at the high school. They plan to put the hydroponics system in this new structure. As this grant project concludes it serves to be a valuable teaching experience for the students and a great example of entrepreneurship.

New Vegetable Grower

Rick Fink of Maynard received \$100 to defray costs of seed, transplants, and energy costs traveling to and from farmers markets. He believes the project has been a success. He's been able to deliver an excellent variety, quality, and quantity of garden vegetables, to a varied group of customers, ranging from cash, to WIC and Senior Citizen Coupon users. He's also developed some wonderful new vendors/buyer relationships with a number of regular customers. This project has been an excellent springboard for getting started in the truck/garden business. He hopes to continue to develop this business and expand the amount of product he can deliver to the local public for consumption.

HOWARD

Marketing Materials

Artesian Fresh of LeRoy/Chester received \$325 for marketing materials to promote a new local artesian water bottling facility. The total project cost \$3250. Their most notable accomplishment this past year was starting the bottling and marketing of the Artesian Water. The sales have increased markedly, and brand recognition is beginning to be established. Their customer retention is strong, even during this economically struggling period. One of the greatest challenges is coming into a very competitive market and trying to establish a presence. The water industry is vast, and the larger companies offer large financial incentives to businesses who use their products. It is difficult to remain competitive in that arena.

The Howard County Farmers Market Association received \$220 to purchase signage and materials to promote the farmers markets--six of which are new. They developed a flyer and advertising program showing potential customers the days and time the markets were open. They deemed the first year was a success and plan to build on that success next year. They are looking for funding to develop permanent locations for each market. The goal is to have a roof over the market to protect the vendors

and customers. All of the vendors from this year have committed to next year and they expect new vendors. Most of the vendors will be taking a class that allows their market to take coupons.

WINNESHIEK COUNTY

Orchard Expansion

David Sliwa of Decorah received \$300 to expand his orchard with 60 pear trees. He planted Anjou, Bartlett and Bosc pear in with the existing Luscious and Gourmet pears. This year, he removed non-productive trees and prepared the planting site and selected trees to be top grafted. The planting and grafting will take place spring 2009. He is confident that adding varieties already recognized in the local market will increase his business.

Facility Expansion

Eric Sessions of Decorah received \$300 to assist in construction of hoophouse (24' X 96') structure on his farm. The goal is to better control the climate for tomato production and to experiment with other crops (cucumbers and melons) in the enclosed environment. The harvest was sold mostly at the Winneshiek Farmers' Market. He expects to be able to carry the tomato production well into October. He had mixed success with the melons due to disease issues. He plans to transplant tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers and other experiments in the hoophouse this spring to be able to market them 4-6 weeks earlier than their field grown counterparts. Having this second hoop house structure will allow him to rotate crops from my older, smaller hoop house. Total cost: \$5000. Grant award: \$250.

Glen Elsbernd of Calmar received \$300 to buy a brush washer for a new packing shed. He has been able to clean a wide variety of vegetables including beets, tomatoes, watermelon, potatoes, squash and a few other things. The washer has exceeded his expectations and is used up to 4 days per week. In September he received a potato grader and roller inspection table from a friend that now longer needed it. It has been great addition to the packing line. One of the challenges this year was dealing with the elements of his outdoor packing shed. A proper packing shed is in the plans for next season.

Chris Askelson of Decorah received \$200 to enclose a greenhouse which will enable him to start seeds earlier in the season. Being able to enhance production of vegetables for the community has been helpful. This season he planted a wide variety of vegetables. His goals were partially accomplished this season due to the challenging spring weather. Next season he will be able to start plants inside the greenhouse and possibly fill with trays for sale. His most notable accomplishment during the past year was enclosing the greenhouse frame. He plans to learn more about greenhouse lighting and possibly add supplemental lighting to his greenhouse to extend the supply of fresh locally grown organic produce to the community during the winter months.

Poultry Expansion

Jennifer Kohlmeyer of Decorah received \$225 of \$300 to purchase nesting boxes for laying hens and to buy egg cartons and labels. Final report was not submitted.