REGIONAL/LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS

Role of Extension

The discussion on the role of Extension centered on three components: communicate, coordinate, and train.

As a system, we need to:
Communicate what is going on, who is involved, define what regional/local food systems are, etc. We need to meet more often to share what is being done and what needs to be done. The more we communicate and coordinate efforts, the more impact we will have.

Put together key messages and facts. Facts may include resource guides outlining Iowa Inspection and Appeals, local health inspectors, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, and other agency processes and regulations. The resource guide also may include a listing or mapping of experts, FAQ's on how to make 10-40 acres, small dairy, etc. work (profitably), and training opportunities for us and others (e.g. farmers), among other things. The resource guides should include more decision tools and business development generic templates. This resource guide along with key messages and facts can be used for new group development.

Develop a web presence where all this communication can take place. The website should list all activities indicating where people can plug in. The website also should allow access to the calendar for reporting. We need to look at the types of websites out there already. Should the regional/local food system be a community of practice on eXtension or an ISU stand-alone?

Coordinate grant and other activities to increase outcomes (reduce duplicative efforts). Coordinate with ourselves as well as other states. Regional/local food systems work is not an Iowa effort. Wisconsin put together an information piece describing the 5-tiers of food production focusing on different scales of production and each tier’s individual needs. We need to align ourselves with what other states and organizations are doing.

Train ourselves and others on what we find through communication and coordination efforts.

Key Issue
Concern that expanding local food production may cause rifts within communities between local and commercial (conventional) agriculture.

Response – focus on diversity and opportunities to plug in wherever you feel comfortable. Focus on the value of the individual market.