

LOCAL FOOD LEADER CERTIFICATION

2023 SUCCESS STORY



LOCAL FOOD LEADER CERTIFICATION INCREASES PRACTITIONER CAPACITY AND SKILLS FOR FOOD SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT ACROSS FOUR STATES.

In the last decade, local food systems have spurred interest in stimulating community development and local economies by contribution to local farm viability, promoting healthy eating habits among consumers, and addressing community food security and resilience (Schipanski et al., 2016); this interest grew dramatically throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The Local Food Leader (LFL) workshops increased capacity for local food practitioners working in food systems and successfully taught skills for local food practitioners and community capacity for developing local food systems in four states.

In 2023, the Community Food Systems program hosted Local Food Leader 101, two-day, in-person workshops in four states: Florida, Iowa, Michigan, and Texas, in partnership with local agencies. The Local Food Leader (LFL) certification is an individual skill development program for beginning local food practitioners and local food supports and is focused on community food systems development. The goal of the certification is to increase capacity for local food practitioners working in food systems around the U.S. LFL was developed in 2016 to teach professional development skills in Iowa. In 2020, the certification transitioned to a fully virtual offering due to the pandemic, and in 2022, in-person offerings resumed, allowing for increased participant engagement and enhancement of local food systems organizations and programs.

RESPONSE

A total of 95 individuals participated in the workshops across the four states: Florida, 22; Iowa, 16; Michigan, 18; and Texas, 20. Participants represented diverse fields of work, including local and government agencies, nonprofit organizations, extension, and other public and private sectors. Participants learned various skills, resources, and tools through presentations and activities in the following subject areas:

- Introductions and Common Language
- Working in Food Systems
- Leadership Styles and Facilitation Techniques
- Plans of Work and Professional Development
- Equity and Personal Values
- Introduction to Evaluation

Participants also had the opportunity to engage with other participants through small group activities, large group discussions, and networking.

“*The workshop helped me prepare me for a deep dive into my local food system development.*”

OUTCOMES

Participants had the opportunity to complete a paper evaluation that was distributed at the end of the workshop. Fifty-seven responses were collected, for a 60% response rate. Overall, 89% of respondents were satisfied with the content taught in the workshop, where 91% of respondents felt the introductions and common language, as well as leadership styles and facilitation techniques were the most helpful sections of the workshop. Nearly all (98%) of respondents said they would recommend this program to others, 90% said they obtained new ideas for partnership and engaging partners in food systems development, and 86% claimed they have a better understanding of what working in food systems involves.

Participants expressed a wide range of takeaways aspects they will change in their work due to completing the LFL workshop. Participants shared intentions of utilizing facilitation techniques, evaluation practices, and methods of creating more equitable and inclusive programs, as well as striving toward building more collaborative partnerships with community agencies. One participant shared their plan to “promote and engage more with local food markets and farmers. Also being more sensitive to people involved in food systems now that [they are] aware of obstacles and issues.”

The 2023 Local Food Leader workshops resulted in increased knowledge of food systems, methods of engagement, and leadership skills to increase capacity for local food systems development. Ninety-five participants received a certificate of completion in Local Food Leader 101. A handful of participants indicated interest in participating in LFL 201, which expands on skills and curriculum through online modules. Participants that receive a certificate in LFL 201 have the opportunity to further their skills through teaching and hosting LFL within their own organization and local community.

IMPACT

The 2023 in-person Local Food Leader workshops certified 95 participants and successfully taught skills for food systems development. Eighty-nine percent of participants were very satisfied with workshop curriculum, 90% said they obtained new ideas for partnership and engaging partners in food systems development, and 86% claimed they have a better understanding of what working in food systems involves. Ninety-eight percent of participants said they would recommend this program to colleagues, partners, or others.

For more information on the Local Food Leader Certification, contact Courtney Long at court7@iastate.edu or visit go.iastate.edu/QSX7NT

References

Dankbar, H., Long, C., Bloom, D., Hohenshell, K., Brinkmeyer, E., & Miller, B. (2023). Applying emerging core competencies to extension training courses for local food system practitioners. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 12(2), 287–303. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2023.122.007>

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