Des Moines Ag Urbanism Impact Report

Community Food Systems Program
Iowa State University Extension and Outreach
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Introduction

This report was developed to provide an overview of the Ag Urbanism process (now Community Food Systems) that was completed in Des Moines, Iowa. This report discusses the coalition process, development, implementation and impacts of determined priority project areas within the community.

Evaluation Methods

Virtual interviews were completed with coalition members in the spring of 2020, four years after the completion of the Ag Urbanism process. The purpose of the interviews was to evaluate the process in its entirety, as well as the community impacts of the priority projects. This report features analysis and excerpts from the interviews. All information shared by interviewees is kept confidential.
COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEMS

Planning, Consulting and Design

The Community Food Systems Program (CFSP) is a multi-phased, multi-year program housed within the Agriculture and Natural Resources, Local Foods Team, and the Community Economic Development units for Extension and Outreach. The program strategically partners with the Community Design Lab for design assistance throughout the process.

This program partners with communities to develop and design their local and regional food systems. Devoted to long-term community empowerment and lasting impacts, the program requires deep community engagement over two phases:

Phase 1: Research + Coalition Development
- Develops trust within communities and generates a place-based coalition name, vision, mission and core values
- Assesses existing conditions and goals for the community food system
- Determines priority projects through facilitated evaluation

Phase 2: Design + Implementation
- Designs priority projects as a project team
- Creates momentum and capacity for program development and implementation of projects

The CFSP Program has created definitions for food systems sectors and community assets that allow for cross-cutting research within the first phase of the process. Additionally, CFSP Program operating principles are followed and encouraged within coalition meetings and priority projects.

Community Food System Sectors
- Production: Science, art, or occupation that involves cultivating land, raising crops, feeding, breeding, or raising livestock as well as hunting, fishing, or foraging
  - may include: gardening/ specialty crop production/ urban farming
- Transformation + Processing: Transformation of raw ingredients, physically or chemically, transforming into a value-added market
  - may include: value-added processing/ freezing and canning/ butcher shop
- Distribution + Marketing: Moving product from farm or processing site to consumer; including distribution and sales
  - may include: grocery stores/ food hubs/ food boxes / CSA
- Consumption + Access: Opportunities for an individual to gain access to food in a physically safe, financially viable, and culturally competent way
  - may include: restaurants/ food pantries/ food trucks/ meal assistance programs
- Resource Management: Efficient and effective deployment and allocation of community and business resources as it relates to land, water, soil, plants, food and created materials
  - may include: conservation programs/ food waste recovery/ composting

Community Assets
- Social Equity: offering same status and equal access to social goods, services, property and freedom of speech
- Education: promoting experiences and programming related to food systems and health for a deeper understanding and increased opportunities to build skills
- Wellness: health status of a community, and individuals that live in it, as it relates to access to affordable and effective options for quality of life
- Environment (built and natural): surrounding conditions that include both natural environment and built space in which a person or animal lives
- Policy: principles or actions that have been adopted by governments, businesses and individuals
- Economy: wealth and resources of a community or region that relate to the development and consumption of goods and services

Operating Principles
- Equity and Inclusion: equity in all parts of decision making; works against inequities seen; and at any chance, try to bring disenfranchised groups to the decision-making process
- Communication and Collaboration: Open and honest communication, completeness and authentic conversations
- Respect: Acceptance of differing opinions, and willingness to come to a compromise when needed
- Collective Action: Set and work towards common goals determined by the coalition
- Shared Purpose and Participation: Sincere participation and shared-purpose amongst the groups in meetings and activity
Community Food Systems Framework

**Food System Sectors**

**Production:** science, art, or occupation that involves cultivating land, raising crops, feeding, breeding, or raising livestock as well as hunting, fishing, or foraging.

**Transformation + Processing:** transformation of raw ingredients, physically or chemically, transforming into a value-added product.

**Distribution + Marketing:** moving product from farm or processing site to consumer; including distribution and sales.

**Consumption + Access:** opportunities for an individual to gain access to food in a physically safe, financially viable, and culturally competent way.

**Resource Management:** efficient and effective deployment and allocation of community and business resources as it relates to land, water, soil, plants, food, and created materials.

**Community Assets**

**Equity:** offering same status and equal access to social goods, services, property, freedom of speech; including equal opportunity for access to a healthy and good quality of life.

**Education:** promoting experiences and programming related to food systems and health for a deeper understanding and increased opportunities to build skills.

**Wellness:** health status of a community, and individuals who live in it, as it relates to access to affordable and effective options for quality of life.

**Environment** (built and natural): surrounding conditions that include both natural environment and built space in which a person or animal lives.

**Policy:** principles or actions that have been adopted by government, businesses, and individuals to guide decisions and achieve rational outcomes.

**Economy:** wealth and resources of a community or region that relate to the development and consumption of goods and services.
The Des Moines Ag Urbanism Steering Committee was comprised of the following individuals and organizations. Additional partnering organizations existed for individual priority projects.

**Des Moines Ag Urbanism Steering Committee**

- Aubrey Alvarez  
  Eat Greater Des Moines
- Melanie Asbe  
  Easter Seals of Iowa
- Whitney Bouma  
  Des Moines Botanical Gardens
- Daniel Boswer  
  Lutheran Services of Iowa
- Emily Boyd  
  Community Housing Initiatives & Viva East Bank
- Hillary Burbank  
  Lutheran Services of Iowa
- Ralph Chiodo  
  Forest Avenue Outreach
- David DeForest Colvig  
  City of Des Moines
- Ana Coppola  
  Polk County Health Department
- Linda Gobberdiel  
  Eat Greater Des Moines
- Beth Hicks  
  Hometown Pride & Viva East Bank
- Gary Huber  
  Iowa Food Cooperative
- Sandy Huisman  
  Des Moines School District
- Amy Joens  
  FoodCorps Iowa
- Craig Leaming  
  Iowa Department of Public Health & Church of Hope Mission Groups
- Callie Leau Courtright  
  City of Des Moines Parks and Recreation
- Amber Lynch  
  City of Des Moines Planning
- Zach Mannheimer  
  Des Moines Social Club
- Neo Mazur  
  FoodCorps Iowa
- Kelly Marble  
  City of Des Moines Neighborhood Engagement Intern
- Chris McCarthy  
  UnityPoint Health
- Julia McGuire  
  Des Moines Backyard Beekeepers
- Andrea Nelson  
  Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, Polk County
- AJ Olson  
  Central Iowa Shelter
- Nate Osmundson  
  City of Des Moines Parks and Recreation
- Jessica Sheets  
  Polk County Public Health
- Arthur Southward  
  Easter Seals of Iowa
- Siobhan Spain  
  Mainframes Studios (formerly Des Moines Arts) & Family Farm
- Tony Thompson  
  represented Iowa Food Cooperative
- Diane Weiland  
  The Wallace Centers of Iowa
- Bethany Wilcoxson  
  Des Moines Metropolitan Planning Organization
Des Moines Ag Urbanism

The Ag Urbanism (now Community Food Systems) process began in Des Moines in 2014. Des Moines was one of the first three communities to participate in the process. The coalition began as the Des Moines Ag Urbanism Steering Committee, which transitioned leadership in 2016 from Eat Greater Des Moines to Julia McGuire and became the Central Iowa Food Systems Coalition. Iowa State University Community Design Lab was the facilitator throughout the process. The first year of the process included an assessment of food system development in Des Moines. This investigation was completed through steering committee meetings, mapping, research and analysis. The following two years focused on priority project development.

Priority Project Development

After the first year of vision development and assessment, the Steering Committee determined five priority projects in 2015. Each project had a dedicated project team, including both internal coalition members and external partners.

**Des Moines Public Market**
Development of a year-round public market, consisting of an urban farm, restaurants, shared workspace and various scales of entrepreneurial vendor shops.

**UnityPoint Health Iowa Lutheran Hospital Edible Landscape**
Design and development of a public, edible landscape that combines form and function to create a practical and aesthetically pleasing environment.

**Des Moines Food Box Program**
Development, planning, and aggregation of a local food box that included produce, dairy, baked goods and value-added products.

**Awareness Campaign**
Creation of a new logo and marketing elements for building awareness of local foods.

**Garden Education**
Incorporation of garden education regarding community, school and public garden spaces for production.
Des Moines Ag Urbanism Project Diagram

This diagram features the priority projects and their various outputs that were developed by the Des Moines Ag Urbanism Steering Committee as part of the Des Moines Ag Urbanism (now Community Food Systems) process with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. The Steering Committee determined five priority projects: Des Moines Public Market, UnityPoint Health Iowa Lutheran Hospital Edible Landscape, Des Moines Food Box Program, Awareness Campaign, and Garden Education.

CENTRAL IOWA FOOD SYSTEMS COALITION
2016 - 2018

The Central Iowa Food Systems Coalition was formed in 2016 after a transition from the initial steering committee. This coalition existed from 2016 through 2018 and continued food systems development efforts initiated through the Des Moines Ag Urbanism process, as well as new projects.
The Des Moines Public Market project focused on the development of a year-round public market, consisting of spaces for an urban farm, restaurants, shared work space, and various scales of entrepreneurial vendor shops. This project began with numerous public meetings to understand the need and goals of farm and food businesses, partner organizations, and general consumer interest. From those meetings, initial site feasibility studies were conducted to confirm a potential location for the public market leading to additional partners with the City of Des Moines and Greater Des Moines Partnership. Precedent research based on existing public markets was conducted followed by the development of a business plan and an economic contribution/impact study. You can view the Public Market Precedent Report here: bit.ly/3tBC9c0

During this process, site-specific analysis and schematic designs were created to depict what the site could look like and confirm the space needed to allocate all potential uses.

Areas of interest for the market development included education, farmer and food entrepreneur vendor space, farming area, outreach, and sustainability. Multiple locations were assessed in the downtown Des Moines area. It began with a review of the Kaleidoscope mall on Walnut Street, with significant conversations and project development during 2016 to 2017. In 2018, a new site in East Village was pursued due to increased market opportunity there. When both locations were unable to work, a final look at the Des Moines Social Club was reviewed to transition a portion of the building into a public market.

However, in early 2020, the project team decided to not move forward with renovations to the Des Moines Social Club site, and plans have been put on hold for the Public Market in Des Moines.

**Continued Efforts**

This project was unique for the Ag Urbanism process as it allowed for reflection on the needs of project management. Courtney Long continued project management and support through 2020 for public market research, planning, and coordination.

“The Public Market project led to new partnerships and new players.”

— Coalition member
UnityPoint Health Iowa Lutheran Hospital Edible Landscape

**Project Team** | Chris McCarthy, UnityPoint; Emily Boyd, Viva East Bank; Beth Hicks, Viva East Bank; Ivan Wooster, Lutheran Hospital; Julie Hempel, City of Des Moines Parks; David Jahn, Public Works Municipal Arborist; Callie Leau-Courtright, City of Des Moines Parks; David DeForest Colvig, City of Des Moines Real Estate; Chelsea Lepley, Capitol Park Neighborhood Association; Todd McBride, Capitol Park Neighborhood Association; Aurthur Southward, Easter Seals of Iowa; Craig Lemming, Church of Hope.

The UnityPoint Health Iowa Lutheran Hospital Edible Landscape focused on the design and development of a public, edible landscape that combined form and function to create a practical and aesthetically pleasing environment. The Iowa Lutheran Hospital (ILH), managed by UnityPoint Health, is a “community” hospital due to its historical interactions and proximity to the neighborhoods in which it is located.

This project sought to support the East Bank Neighborhoods and increase health outcomes and quality of life for residents. It promoted consumption of fruits and vegetables among area residents and offered therapeutic activity for UnityPoint Health patients and families.

The project began with focus groups with ILH as well as public input to understand needs for a garden space. Site designs included various areas for raised garden beds, pollinator habitats, and general recreation activities.

Installation of the gardens was implemented in the spring of 2017, following completion of the Ag Urbanism process. ILH amongst several partners, collaborated with Carver Elementary School and Trees Forever to implement an urban orchard with 15 fruit trees. The following summer, in 2018, ILH built and planted the community garden on the initial site. This project received an Iowa American Planning Association award for grassroots initiative in 2017.

**Continued Efforts**

“The community brought more forward because they knew this [process] was important.”

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Coalition member
There needs to be a rejuvenation of local foods in Iowa. Local growers are concerned with . . . lots of key players shifting or closing.

— Coalition member

Des Moines Food Box Program

Project Team | Linda Gobberdiel, Eat Greater Des Moines; Tony Thompson, represented Iowa Food Cooperative; Cyndi Pederson, Des Moines Social Club; Melanie Asbe, Easter Seals of Iowa; Principal Financial Group; Gary Huber, Iowa Food Cooperative; Siobhan Spain, Mainframes Studios; Shannen Ebersole, Ebersole Cattle; Amber Carney, Carney Family Farm; Tom and Mary Cory, Cory Family Farm; Bob Howard, Country View Dairy; Alison Hill, Daily Bread Bakery; Jeff Hafner, Early Morning Harvest; Zach Couture, Lutheran Services of Iowa.

This project initially began as part of the USDA Local Food Promotion Program grant, received by Eat Greater Des Moines. The food box project started with partnerships with numerous farmers and two primary organizations: UnityPoint Health and Easter Seals of Iowa for employee box distribution. The pilot took place over the summer of 2015 with aggregation of products occurring at the Des Moines Social Club. Partners from Eat Greater Des Moines and Easter Seals helped aggregate produce, dairy, baked goods and value-added products into individual consumer boxes that were then delivered to UnityPoint and Easter Seals. Lutheran Services of Iowa supported in the project as well with produce distribution and sharing their resource of a refrigerated truck.

Following the pilot, additional feasibility considerations were given to an appropriate long-term site for a food box program. This consisted of research involving site visits and case studies, as well as assessments of local sites for piloting the program. Three sites were assessed for appropriate space, storage, and logistics for both producers and aggregators: Des Moines Social Club; Iowa Food Cooperative; and Keo-Site, a building that was being re-purposed. However, no sites moved forward for the food box program.

The Keo-site (now Mainframes Studios), Eat Greater Des Moines and Tony Thompson were actively engaged in the brainstorming and designing of the Mainframes Studios site in 2016-2017. Based on discussions, management needs, and timing, it was determined it was not feasible to move forward with the food box program.

One coalition member discussed the need for partnership and broader networking to further expand the campaign. They believed that a greater impact in the community could have been made if efforts from various entities could, “mesh together.” Potential for partnering with not only various food organizations and businesses within Des Moines but also with other communities in the greater Des Moines area was also discussed as a strategy for furthering this work to promote local foods.
Awareness Campaign

Project Team | Linda Gobberdiel, Eat Greater Des Moines; Ana Coppola, Iowa Department of Public Health; Amy Joens, FoodCorps Iowa.

This project included conceptual designs of a new logo and additional marketing elements for building awareness of local foods. This project team developed the “I’m a [loh-kuh l]” campaign to enhance awareness of local foods within the community.

How to be a [loh-kuh l]

Campaign Logo

Based on discussions, the incorporation of logos from FoodCorps, Eat Greater Des Moines and Iowa Department of Public Health were developed into a design of a broccoli forest with four bullets for activating the local food scene. The design included a logo, graphics, and content on how to be a [loh-kuh l] that was utilized on t-shirts.

In addition to the I’m a [loh-kuh l] campaign, posters for community gardens partner sites were developed as a collective branding strategy to share about connections to both the coalition and broader Eat Greater Des Moines efforts.

Help Support the Cause Today
eatgreaterdesmoines.org

Eat Greater Des Moines Decal

Continued Efforts

From coalition interviews, it was shared that not only awareness of local food is needed in the Des Moines area, but additionally developing partnerships with local food business and organizations that can assist in the promotion of local products in the greater Des Moines area.

“There is potential to develop branding, similar to national campaigns, that could be used in businesses to promote purchasing local.”

— Coalition member
Garden Education

Project Team | Aubrey Alvarez, Eat Greater Des Moines; Whitney Bouma, Des Moines Botanical Gardens; Ralph Chiodo, Forest Avenue Outreach; Ana Coppola, Polk County Public Health; Rob Fleming, Carlisle Farm; Adam Hammes, A Garden in Every School; Christine Hradek, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach; Martha McCromick, Next Step Adventure.

This project sought to incorporate garden education regarding community, school, and public garden spaces for production. An event was scheduled at the Des Moines Botanical Gardens that was open to the public to share about various management styles of gardens and opportunities for connecting to community organizations through donations, education, and general outreach.

Survey Results

A total of 40 participants attended the workshop, 28 (70%) of those individuals completed the survey. Of the 28 individuals surveyed, 16 were currently involved in an active community garden (school, neighborhood, city garden, etc.).

When asked about challenges to starting and managing community gardens, the most common responses were financial support, establishing management, volunteer support and educational resources.

Respondents said that having access to food and gardening for a healthier lifestyle were the most common motivation for getting involved in community gardening; and being able to donate food and improve the food system were also frequently shared.

When asked how likely respondents would be to take advantage of certain education resources, workshops and a print/digital how-to manual were the most common responses for utilization.

Respondents indicated that their desired format and time commitment would be hourly workshops. In terms of finding the most value for the educational resource and time commitment, both hourly workshops and a printed manual ranked the highest.

Continued Efforts

A primary goal of this project was to create a manual housed by Eat Greater Des Moines; however, based on research of existing practices, community garden toolkits that had been previously created were shared.
Central Iowa Food Systems Coalition

The Des Moines Ag Urbanism Steering Committee transitioned in 2016 to the Central Iowa Food Systems Coalition, with leadership from Julia McGuire. A common vision, mission, and core values were determined within the transition process.

Our Mission

We support the central Iowa local food system through research and building capacity for food system projects that fill existing gaps of the local food system.

Our Vision

To create a just and welcoming food system that all individuals can have access to.

Our Core Values

Research
Policies, best practices, and evaluating the feasibility of practices in Des Moines.

Education
Sharing best practices and connection to appropriate programs.

Planning
Creating intentional vision for the food system in Des Moines.

Access
Land access and area to grow products.

Advocacy
Advocating for innovative solutions, local foods, etc.
Conclusion

Overarching themes that were apparent through the coalition interviews included awareness, partnership development, and collective efforts surrounding local food and food systems development. One coalition member claimed that the CFS process “helped create connections through the coalition and helped provide food systems development through a process that engages the community.”

Equity was highly valued in the Des Moines community. One coalition member shared their belief that developing a, “community-focused effort is an important part of the process; ensuring proper representation is challenging,” and went on to say that, “this effort was shown in this community and community voices were heard.” However, while equity was seen as an important piece to the process, it was also shared that that this was not always evident within the coalition itself and that, “good representation from various groups” was lacking. It was not shared what specific groups or organizations could have enhanced the inclusiveness of this work.

“The Ag Urbanism process] was a community-focused effort, ensuring proper representation . . . and community voices were heard.”
— Coalition member

Understanding the importance and benefits of partnerships in raising awareness for food systems development was also a major takeaway from the process, as shared through the interviews. “Greater awareness with organizations involved that are thinking about planning and how food systems relate to overall community planning” are necessary for bringing to light food systems issues and to further develop and generate efforts to increase local foods. They believed that a greater impact in the community could have been made if efforts from various entities from the surrounding areas could, “mesh together.” The potential for partnering with not only food organizations and businesses within Des Moines but also with other communities in the greater Des Moines area was also discussed as a strategy for furthering this work to promote local foods.

Moving forward, understanding the importance of partnerships and raising awareness is necessary for developing the local and regional food system. Larger food systems issues are still present in Des Moines. One coalition member shared that, “[Des Moines] needs ongoing efforts, resources, and support.”

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