

BACK TO BUSINESS IOWA PODCAST

A partnership of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and America's SBDC Iowa

SEASON 2 | EPISODE 1: Iowa Retail Initiative Champions Event

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Description: *Lisa Bates, state specialist with the Community and Economic Development Program at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, discusses her upcoming event for leaders and planners in retail businesses development, where they will learn strategies to implement in their local communities.*



[music]

Steve Adams, host 00:10

Hello, and welcome to the Back to Business Iowa podcast from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. This podcast is a collaboration between Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and the programs including Community and Economic Development, Farm, Food and Enterprise Development, and the Iowa Small Business Development Centers. These podcasts cover relevant topics for businesses and individuals related to education, research and technical assistance during and post COVID-19.

Steve Adams, host 00:55

Hi, I'm Steve Adams, field specialist three at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, part of the Community and Economic Development unit and your host. Hello, and welcome to 2021. Thanks for coming back to listen to us. We had a little holiday break, but we're back. Today we're going to be talking about the Iowa Retail Initiative and the Champions program with our guest Lisa Bates. Lisa is the design extension specialist with ISU Extension and Outreach, also part of the Community and Economic Development unit. Thanks for joining us today, Lisa.

Lisa Bates 01:30

Thanks to you for having me today.

Steve Adams, host 01:32

Nice to have you back by the way, a returning guest. So Lisa, before we dig into the Iowa Retail Initiative, tell us a little bit about your role as a Community and Economic Development unit team member.

Lisa Bates 01:47

Sure. I am a state specialist with Community and Economic Development. That means I serve the statewide and I work a lot with the Iowa Retail Initiative. But through that I also get to work with a lot of different people within the Community and Economic Development unit and also across different units of Extension and Outreach. So I get to work with great people like Steve here, and I also get to work with people from Farm, Food and Enterprise Development. I get to work with people in Human Sciences. So a lot of things that deal with retail with food, food retail, I really get to fill up my time doing this great work across the state.

Steve Adams, host 02:27

Well, we appreciate that as well. So what is the Iowa Retail Initiative or IRI program?

Lisa Bates 02:35

Yeah, the Iowa Retail Initiative is really structured to respond to some feedback and needs assessments that we've collected over the years concerning assistance for local retail across the state of Iowa. The IRI program, which we like to call it, looks to strengthen the local support networks really to look at equipping local retailers for success in their business. And we achieve this by providing training, tools, resources to those local networks in the community.

Steve Adams, host 03:07

The history of the program, how far back does this go?

Lisa Bates 03:10

Well, this goes back quite a few years, probably to 2014 when we worked specifically with students and student groups out in communities with local retailers. And then we brought it under the umbrella of Extension and Outreach, where we really have found that small businesses are essential to a community's quality of life. And to really generate a healthy retail environment, we need retailers, they need to have the community leaders and decision makers working with them.

Lisa Bates 03:39

The IRI was founded by the Community and Economic Development unit of Extension and Outreach, and it strategically addresses those independent retailer needs that we've found across the state. And the support networks within a community for retailers is key to a healthy community economy. Therefore the Iowa Retail Initiative program its first target is strengthening those networks through this IRI Champions portion of the program.

Steve Adams, host 04:05

There are a couple pieces to the IRI, though, there's Champions and isn't there also another piece to that, Lisa?

Lisa Bates 04:13

Yes, I think the Champions is the first portion that we have communities go through and then after that they can take next steps, including coaching sessions, which work with retailers one on one, and also the snapshot, which really looks to take an inventory of existing conditions within your community. And it's a train the trainer process that we go through for the snapshot.

Steve Adams, host 04:35

Excellent. Excellent. Well, I see you have an event coming up in February. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Lisa Bates 04:42

Absolutely. On February 5, on that Friday, we're having a special one-day IRI Champions session. It's going to be held virtually, so anyone really across the state can attend easily. And this special offering of the IRI Champions is really thanks to the 2021 ISU Community Food Systems annual event that's held on February 12, the week after, and it's sponsored also by Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.

Steve Adams, host 05:13

So who would benefit the most from attending a program like this on February 5, Lisa?

Lisa Bates 05:20

Yeah, so when we look at the IRI Champions, we're really intending it for leaders and planners in business development, but also anyone who works to support small businesses in their community. And that could be formal positions or informal positions. So typically, we have representation from people in economic development, chambers of commerce, city councils, county extension staff, local foundations, as well as anyone who's engaged as local influencers and volunteers within their community.

Steve Adams, host 05:52

Excellent. So are there particular topics that are going to be covered at this event that people ought to know about?

Lisa Bates 06:00

Absolutely. Some of those topics that we will include are including understanding and strengthening those important connections across your community, really identifying and understanding your existing retail district and how to plan for future retail needs, looking at the role of your local government and how they are a key partner in the future, retail districts, how to assess the amenities of a healthy retail district, how to maximize the use of social media in your retail district, and how food systems play a critical role in the success of a healthy retail environment.

Steve Adams, host 06:40

So what do you see as the major benefits of participating in the IRI Champions program?

Lisa Bates 06:46

So participation in the Champions portion of the session will really leave participants with resources, tools, and strategies that they can take back into their own communities and implement. So throughout the day, the strategies participants will learn range from easy or shorter-term impact all the way to longer-term planning and impacts. And connections and identification of action steps is a key part of the Champion sessions. So we really love to provide those resources that are actionable depending on the priorities of your community. So it's really able to be catered to the specific needs of your community, and what your community offers already and wants to plan for the future.

Steve Adams, host 07:31

Well if I wanted to register for this event to attend this program, how would I do that, Lisa?

Lisa Bates 07:37

So you can do it a couple different ways. You can either go to the Farm, Food and Enterprise Development unit of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. You can also reach out to me directly and I can provide you a link to that registration. My email is lbates@iastate.edu.

Steve Adams, host 08:01

Pretty simple, lbates. Is there a deadline on this registration?

Lisa Bates 08:07

Yeah, we're trying to have all registration in by Friday, January 29. So it's a pretty quick turnaround for everyone. If you happen to be a late one, we might be able to accommodate you. But getting in by January 29, you know, provides you a seat at the table.

Steve Adams, host 08:23

Very good. Is there a limit to the number of attendees for this event, Lisa?

Lisa Bates 08:28

We do have a total number of 30 participants. So I couldn't tell you where we are right now honestly, in our seats, but we do have a limited number. So we encourage you to register as soon as you can.

Steve Adams, host 08:40

Okay, so if someone were to have any questions regarding this event, and you gave us your email address, is that the best way to get ahold of you?

Lisa Bates 08:49

That really is the best way to get ahold of me, honestly, yep.

Steve Adams, host 08:55

So if I've got just general questions about IRI, again, just use that email address imbates@iastate.edu, and you could you could get back to us on that, right?

Lisa Bates 09:07

Absolutely. You can also visit the Community and Economic Development website and you can take a look at not only the Iowa Retail Initiative program, but the many services, processes, tools and resources that we have available through Community and Economic Development.

Steve Adams, host 09:24

Well that's super. So hey, thanks again for joining us as a returning guest. Anything else we need to know, Lisa?

Lisa Bates 09:32

I don't think so. I hope to see you at the Champions session on February 5, and it's great for communities of all sizes to participate and really look to strengthen the foundation of support for their community's retail.

Steve Adams, host 09:47

Well best wishes for a successful event on February 5. So thanks again for being with us, and if you have any questions about this Back to Business Iowa podcast, please feel free to contact me, Steve Adams, at stadams@iastate.edu. And as always, thanks for listening. If you've enjoyed listening to this podcast, please consider posting a review on Stitcher, Spotify, Castbox, the podcast at Apple, Google, or on whichever platform you find your podcast. Reviews, ratings and comments are all appreciated, and will help us build a better podcast. So whether it's a one star, or a five star review, we value your input and opinion.

Steve Adams, host 10:34

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