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*Local Food and Farm Program  
Final Report to the Iowa Legislature  
June 2015*

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## About the report

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This is the 2015 report to the Iowa Legislature regarding the Local Food and Farm Program. The program was established in August 2011 as part of the Local Food and Farm Initiative. It will empower farmers and food entrepreneurs to provide for strong local food economies that promote self-sufficiency and job growth in the agricultural sector and allied sectors of the economy. The goals of this program are to accomplish the following:

- Promote the expansion of the production of local foods, including the production, processing, distribution and marketing of Iowa products.
- Increase consumer and institutional spending on Iowa-produced and marketed foods.
- Increase the profitability of farmers and businesses engaged in enterprises related to producing, processing, distributing and marketing local food.
- Increase the number of jobs in this state's farm and business economies associated with producing, processing, distributing and marketing local food.

The program is a collaborative effort among the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship,

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, ISU's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

This report covers activity from July 2014 through June 2015. Titles highlighted in orange were funded through the Leopold Center's Marketing and Food Systems Initiative. Titles highlighted in green were funded through the Leopold Center and ISU Extension and Outreach.

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### Local foods production:

- Provides opportunities for beginning farmers to start up with lower capital investment (smaller equipment and fewer acres are needed),
- Promotes strong conservation practices that improve food security and resilience,
- Helps develop new markets and economic opportunities, and
- Provides opportunities for children to connect to their food sources, promoting healthy eating habits.

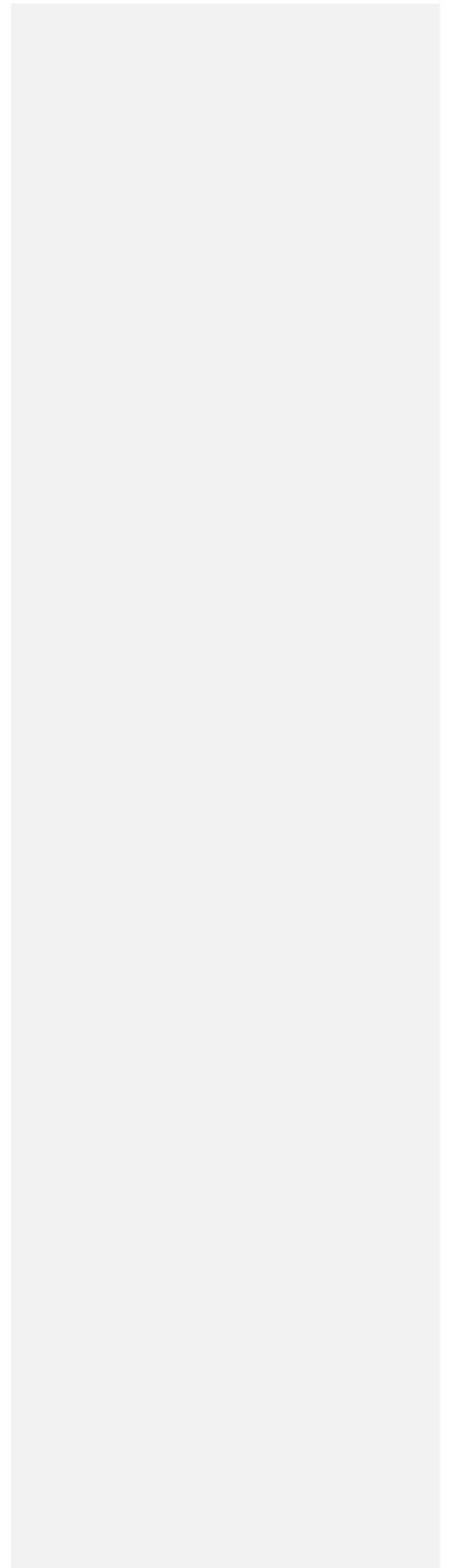
The legislative funds from the Local Food and Farm Initiative (LFFI) support these opportunities, and allow Iowans to participate in the creation of a vibrant and sustainable local food economy. Projects and initiatives fall into four categories, or “priority areas”: 1. Beginning farmers, 2. Economic development, 3. Community development, and 4. Evaluation.

**Priority # 1: Beginning farmers.** According to the 2012 USDA Census of Agriculture, 18 percent of Iowa farmers are over 65 years old, and only 4 percent are under 35 years old. Who will farm our land in the future? The Local Food and Farm Initiative has leveraged support for publications and programs geared toward beginning farmer training (refugee incubator farm, resource guide for beginning farmers, prison farm training program).

**Priority #2: Economic impact.** Although there is general consensus that local foods are gaining in popularity, between 2007 and 2012 the number of farms making direct-to-consumer sales (DTC) increased only 5.5 percent (compared with 32 percent between 2002 and 2007), with no change in DTC sales totals. That DTC sales did not increase may be due to growth in non-direct sales of local food (through intermediated marketing channels like grocery stores or institutions) that are not measured by the Census of Agriculture. This was highlighted in a February 2015 study of food hubs. Iowa local food leaders who were surveyed identified 31 new and emerging food hubs or centers of food hub-related activity in Iowa. LFFI funds supported the development of tools to enhance farmer profitability (technical assistance, workshops, reports on recordkeeping and benchmarking, online food safety training), research on food hub financial viability (multiple publications and presentations, as well as the development of the Food Hub Managers Working Group), and consumer outreach (CSA guide).

**Priority #3: Community development.** There are a variety of participants facilitating food system change, including producers, farm laborers, nonprofits and their employees and volunteers, community activists, ISU Extension and Outreach staff, and more. Bringing the right players to the table and then gaining consensus on moving forward is not achieved overnight. The LFFI has supported the facilitation of communities of practice (RFSWG, IFSWG), assisted communities in building relationships and strategically planning their steps toward a sustainable food system, and implemented programs helping communities design their own food system.

**Priority #4: Evaluation.** Iowa’s Regional Food Systems Working Group (RFSWG) has been tracking local food purchases by institutions, retail stores and restaurants for the past three years. Their data show that institutional and intermediated markets such as grocery stores and restaurants are eclipsing direct-to-consumer local food sales and creating additional jobs. Systematically gathering information on the context, processes, and outcomes of local food system work informs the decisions and actions of partners who can then more effectively support the food systems. This also involves communicating the importance of relevant evaluation, and assisting groups in doing so.



## Background/context

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### Local foods in Iowa

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Agriculture plays a central role in Iowa's economy. The rising demand for local food is evident in Iowa, and is engaging an increasing number of people (producers, processors, food system practitioners, etc.) in the food system. The national average for direct-to-consumer sales of food increased from \$116,733 to \$144,530 per farm between 2002 and 2012.<sup>i</sup> A state-wide economic impact study of local food sales showed that the same group of food buyers spent an additional \$1.5 million more in 2014 than in 2013.<sup>ii</sup> In 2013, a sampling of Iowa farmers reported that they employed 110 people (34.1 of them in FTE jobs) for every \$1 million in sales.<sup>ii</sup>

Iowans spend more than \$8 billion on food each year and it is estimated that only 14 percent of that food is grown within the state.<sup>iii</sup> In fact, Iowa has many fewer acres devoted to growing vegetables and fruit than the national average. Research by Iowa State University (ISU) economist David Swenson concluded that Iowa has 83 percent fewer acres devoted to vegetable production than the national average. In addition, Swenson found that Iowa has 94 percent fewer acres devoted to the production of non-citrus fruit. As a result, the majority of fresh fruits and vegetables consumed by Iowans must be imported from other states and countries.<sup>iii</sup> Swenson's research describes the current state of agriculture in Iowa and the steps needed to develop a vibrant and sustainable food economy. Increased production of fruit and vegetables coupled with a decrease in food imports could result in a corresponding increase in jobs and incomes for many Iowans. Despite the increase in local foods activities, there is still much work to be done. Swenson suggests that there needs to be an increase in direct-to-consumer sales as well as sales in the retail and institutional sectors. Furthermore, he stresses the need for more food system localization infrastructure, research and development and incentives.<sup>iv</sup>

Local food production provides:

- Opportunities for beginning farmers to start farming with lower capital investment (smaller equipment and fewer acres are needed),
- Opportunities for diversified farms that improve food security and resilience,
- New markets for existing farmers, and
- Opportunities for children and adults to connect to their food sources, and to explore healthy eating habits.

Local food systems encourage job creation, economic development and stronger, healthier communities. The interest in the sales of local foods is not limited to fruit and vegetable producers. Conventional farmers who raise corn, soybeans, cattle and hogs also may be interested in local food markets as a way to diversify their operations or help a son or daughter begin his or her own agricultural enterprise. Greenhouse and high tunnel production have the potential to expand year-round fruit and vegetable production in Iowa. Increased local food production, marketing and processing ultimately result in more jobs. A 2010, six-state research project examining the potential value of an increased fruit and vegetable industry in six states (Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin) studied the potential benefits of increasing production of 28 fruit and vegetable crops and projected increased consumption of in-state produce. The analysis indicated that under this scenario farm-level sales would reach about \$61.4 million, with a potential retail value of \$230.1 million and creation of a total of 657 farm-level jobs, compared to the 131 jobs currently generated from this acreage under corn and soybean production.<sup>v</sup>

In a March 2013 report, David Swenson considered Iowa's shrinking labor force, indicating that economic growth will be limited if the current trends in Iowa's workforce are not addressed. Members of Iowa's workforce are leaving the state in increasingly high numbers in order to maintain an economically stable household. When a family leaves the state, the household leaders also take their children; leading to losses in the existing workforce as well as potential members of the agricultural work force and knowledge base. This draining of young workers from the labor force has social consequences because young people represent Iowa's future, i.e., the individuals who will later become local government representatives or agricultural producers.

For local food systems to gain traction and momentum, food system stakeholders and players need to be supported. As an institution, we can act as facilitators, conveners and partners to support communities in their food systems goals and objectives. As Brian Raison (2010) said, "we must continue to function as educators, but we don't simply impart data from on high. Instead, we need to become better partners. We need to come along side and facilitate helping communities discover the knowledge and talent and expertise that exists within their group. Then, we need to help them develop it."<sup>vi</sup>

## Local Food and Farm Initiative

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Taking into account the increasing importance and potential benefits from developing local food systems, the Iowa legislature asked the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture to develop an “actionable” plan to create a more vibrant local food economy. The Iowa Local Food and Farm Plan was developed in 2010 by gathering and assessing input from more than 1,000 individuals. The resulting document outlined 29 operational recommendations organized in six sections:

- Business Development and Financial Assistance
- Processing
- Food Safety
- Beginning, Minority and Transitioning Farmers
- Assessing Progress
- Local Food Incentives

The Iowa Local Food and Farm Plan was presented to the Iowa legislature in January 2011 and in July 2011 funds were approved in the state’s agriculture and natural resources budget to establish the Local Food and Farm Initiative (SF-509). The purpose of this Initiative is to “empower farmers and food entrepreneurs to provide for strong local food economies that promote self-sufficiency and job growth in the agricultural sector and allied sectors of the economy.” Because many other partners are working successfully on Processing, Food Safety and Assessing Progress, the Local Food and Farm Initiative focused on Business Development and Financial Assistance; Beginning, Minority and Transitioning Farmers; and Local Food Incentives. While the Iowa Local Food and Farm Plan was not explicitly referred to in the legislation, the goals of the Initiative and the recommendations from the Plan were integrally related. This work began in 2011 and will continue with renewed support and funding approved in the 2015 legislative session.

**Comment [1]:** Is this sentence still relevant? How many years does funding approved in the 2014 legislative session provide?

**Comment [2]:** 2015?

## Program areas

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### I. Beginning farmers

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#### Mission and goals

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#### **Goal: Increase the number of beginning farmers growing food for Iowa and support for beginning farmers' assistance networks.**

According to the 2012 USDA Census of Agriculture, 18 percent of Iowa farmers are over 65 years old, and only 4 percent are under 35 years old. Who will farm our land in the future? Rural communities are in decline, losing schools and local jobs: only 16 percent of the total U.S. population lives in rural areas. Young people are showing a renewed interest in small-scale diversified farms, while consumers are looking for more local food options. Local food production provides opportunities for beginning farmers to start their operations with lower capital investment because they can begin with smaller equipment and fewer acres. However, these factors do not mean that it is easy to start a farm business. Research and programs to support beginning and aspiring farmers are needed.

#### Overview of 06/2014-06/2015

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#### ➤ **Tactic 1: Training programs**

##### **1.1. Resource Guide for Beginning Farmers**

The *Resource Guide for Beginning Farmers* was published in July 2015. It compiles dozens of existing training resources for beginning and aspiring Iowa farmers into one concise curriculum. The goal of highlighting and organizing these existing resources was to establish a basis for beginning farmer training across Iowa, and provide a platform of resources for beginning farmers. This 48-page guide is divided into three parts:

- Production practices, from soil and composting to small farm equipment and whole farm planning;
- Post-harvest handling, including food safety and seed saving; and
- Business planning and basic farm finances.

Each of the three segments contains multiple modules covering different sub-topics. Each module is organized by learning objectives and includes a narrative, hands-on activities (when applicable) and links to worksheets and additional resources. The publication also includes appendices listing useful organizations and programs that support beginning farmers and helpful contacts.

The publication is designed to be used by those interested in hosting a farmer training program as well as by beginning farmers who need assistance to locate existing resources.

<http://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/A-Resource-Guide-for-Beginning-Farmers>

##### **1.2. Small farm business development incubator for refugee farmers, M2014-02**

This project focused on developing the appropriate marketing tools, training and strategies best suited for this type of incubator farm and the beginning farmers it serves. The project objectives were to:

1. Provide training and exposure for a minimum of two marketing options for eight to 12 Advanced Market Farmers (AMFs) as they explore which marketing avenue is best suited to their skills, abilities and business development needs.
2. Offer training on proper recordkeeping to establish a baseline on first-year profits.
3. Help each participant establish a savings account and develop a pattern of saving at least 20 percent of the profits to be utilized for expenses in subsequent years of training.

As a result of the project there are beginning farmers who previously lacked land, market, and training access who are now contributing to the availability of sustainably grown produce in their local communities. They also enhance the agricultural diversity of Iowa's produce offerings by growing many of their native vegetable varieties. The project offers a model for assisting farmers with limited English proficiency to establish and grow their farming enterprises in communities throughout the state by providing tools and market strategies that have proved useful in the Des Moines area.

<http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/grants/m2014-02>

#### ➤ **Tactic 2: Prison farm and training program**

The Landscape Architecture Program and Local Foods Team worked with inmates from Iowa Correctional Institution for Women (ICIW) in Mitchellville to design and implement production gardens on their prison campus. In April 2015, eight women inmates helped students from the Landscape Architecture program design garden and prairie plots on the campus, with input from the ISU Extension and Outreach Local Foods Team. This resulted in a 'master plan' for the prison, which guides the work of ICIW inmates and staff, ISU College of Design and ISU Extension and Outreach.

In June 2015, a crew of 10 women inmates, assisted by Landscape Architecture students and faculty as well as ISU Extension and Outreach staff, broke ground and planted four garden plots (1 acre).

#### Next steps

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#### ➤ **Tactic 1: Training programs**

Many people who are interested in small-scale, diversified farming do not come from an agricultural background. Not only does this complicate their access to material resources (land, equipment, etc.), but they also may lack basic farm knowledge and support networks. Unlike other states (Michigan, Oregon, Minnesota, etc.), Iowa offers no formal training or certification program for beginning farmers. It is essential that we support an agricultural future for Iowa that includes a wide array of production options and conservation practices. Our projects include gathering a group of statewide stakeholders (mostly farmers) to design and implement a beginning farmer program, a type of accredited, apprentice opportunity combining in-class teaching and hands-on learning. An accredited training program would help beginning farmers not only gain the knowledge and tools to start farming, but also build credibility for investors and bankers, and help veterans use GI Bill benefits.

#### ➤ **Tactic 2: Prison farms**

The success and excitement of planning and planting the gardens at the Iowa Correctional Institution for Women has encouraged us to increase its wingspan. This program will evolve in

the winter of 2016 to become a full-fledged educational program, including production, health and wellness, and job skills training. Although there are other similar programs across the country, none have documented their course. The steps taken, successes, challenges and best practices of this project will be recorded in order to share with other correctional facilities across Iowa.

➤ **Tactic 3: Outreach to ISU students**

Most student associations related to beginning farmers at Iowa State University focus on 'conventional' farming. Our goal is to increase the awareness of ISU students of the benefits (economic, environmental, etc.) of alternative agriculture enterprises. This will be done through strategic marketing and communications, publications, presentations, and presence at relevant conferences.

### Mission and goals

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**Goal: Assist individuals, businesses, and organizations to make informed decisions about developing sustainable food businesses, through technical assistance and educational programs.**

In January 2015, the Economic Research Service (ERS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture released a report providing an overview and analysis of the growth, changes and challenges to local and regional food systems.<sup>i</sup> Researchers observed that after a decade of rapid growth in the local food economy:

1. Consumer interest in farmers markets and CSAs may have reached a plateau.
2. The local food economy is maturing, and other markets for local food are expanding rapidly. This would include larger-volume mainstream markets such as grocery stores, institutions such as schools and hospitals, and food hubs.

The growth in local food wholesale volume can be observed both nationally and in Iowa. For example, according to the USDA, the number of school districts with farm-to-school programs that use local foods increased 430 percent from 2006 to 2012.<sup>vii</sup> Moreover, a 2014 report by the Leopold Center<sup>viii</sup> showed that in 2013, grocery stores sales accounted for 68 percent of tracked local food sales in Iowa.

Selling more local food to wholesale purchasers requires special kinds of supply chain businesses that are equipped to deal with small farmers. In some cases, aggregation and distribution businesses called *food hubs* are providing the product to these “intermediated” or institutional markets. The ERS reported that since 2006, the number of food hubs has increased by 288 percent to 302 outlets throughout the country.<sup>iv</sup> A February 2015 study of food hubs surveyed Iowa local food leaders, and identified 31 new and emerging food hubs or centers of food hub-related activity in Iowa.<sup>ix</sup> New processing businesses also have emerged to service small farm production.

### Overview of 06/2014-06/2015

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#### ➤ **Tactic 1: Farmer profitability**

##### **1.1 Recordkeeping and insurance benchmarking for Iowa fruit and vegetable producers, Years 1 and 2 M2014-11, M2013-08**

The objectives for this project were:

1. At least 40 Iowa fruit and vegetable farms will know how to keep detailed production and sales records.
2. Ten farms will have recorded and submitted production and sales data for actual fruit and vegetable production in Iowa.
3. Information will be published detailing production and sales history by individual crops as well as by whole farm revenue. This will provide important information for organizations working to improve Iowa’s fruit and vegetable industry as well as for lenders that consider providing loans to fruit and vegetable producers.
4. Project events and outcomes will be promoted to a broad audience to increase awareness of the need for better crop insurance for fruit and vegetable production in Iowa.

The baseline production data collected through this project has created an actual production history for fruit and vegetable crops in Iowa and allowed producers to compare their yields to those of other Iowa farmers. In addition, crop insurers report they have used the actual production histories to improve crop insurance options for fruit and vegetable farmers in Iowa. <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/grants/m2014-11>

### **1.2 Development of an online food safety training for employees of university farms or school gardens, M2013-12**

With an increasing number of foodborne illnesses associated with unprocessed produce, the risk of sparking a disease outbreak falls to the school district and university that serves the food. A critical need exists to develop specialized food safety training that will result in behavior change by produce growers and mitigate risk for the school district and university. The project objective was to develop two specialized one-hour, on-farm food safety educational modules and user manuals. Their use will lower the risk of having a foodborne outbreak due to lack of knowledge and training for workers.

<http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/grants/m2013-12>

### **1.3 Iowa CSA farms: 2015 Statewide List of CSA Farms and Organizers Serving Iowa.**

The Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) sales model offers an appealing way for farmers to reduce risk and guarantee cash flow by pre-selling seasonal “shares” of farm produce directly to consumers. In 2015, the LFFI continued to promote CSA farms by publishing “Iowa CSA Farms: 2015 Statewide List of CSA Farms and Organizers Serving Iowa.” The updated list identifies 85 CSAs that market in Iowa, an increase from 75 farms the previous year and 49 farms in 2006. Release of this popular directory each spring is accompanied by a statewide press release, encouraging Iowa consumers to purchase from a CSA in their area.

The LFFI program also contributed to a book chapter on Community Supported Agriculture in “Hunger in the Heartland: A Resource Guide for Alleviating Hunger in your Community, No Matter Where You Live,” by Debra Landwehr Engle and Rachel Vogel Quinn, released in November 2014. The book offers examples and suggestions on how Community Supported Agriculture programs can help fight hunger and improve food education.

<http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs-and-papers/2015-04-iowa-csa-farms>

#### **➤ Tactic 2: Food hubs**

A *food hub* is defined by USDA as “a business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution and marketing of source-identified food products, primarily from local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail and institutional demand.” Food hub businesses help fill gaps in the supply chain between local farmers and markets that previously were inaccessible.

A 2015 survey analyzed by Local Foods team members identified as many as 16 local food hubs and 31 “centers of food hub-related activity” in Iowa. The 13 food hubs that responded to the survey had purchased \$4.5 million in local food from more than 450 Iowa farmers, supporting 40 jobs. Because the concept of a food distribution business model that prioritizes small and mid-sized farmers is still fairly new, food hubs and their supporters continue to seek guidance on how to manage successful, economically sustainable operations.

LFFI-supported project objectives included:

- research on how to improve the business and operational efficiency of food hubs;

- collaboration with the Iowa Food Hub (located in West Union) to document lessons learned;
- training for food and agriculture professionals on food hub models; and
- creation of a learning community of food hub managers.

Publications created:

- **Iowa Food Hub Local Food System Toolkit Series**
  - **No. 1. “Developing a Worksite Food Box Program.” July 2014** <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs-and-papers/2014-07-local-food-system-toolkit-1-worksite-food-box>
  - **No. 2. “Managing Cash Flow for a Low-Capital Food Hub Start-up.” June 2015** <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs-and-papers/2015-06-toolkit-2-managing-cash-flow-low-capital-food-hub>
- **Food Hub Development in Iowa: Lessons learned from a study of food hub managers and regional coordinators.** <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs-and-papers/2015-02-food-hub-development-iowa>

Presentations given:

- “Food Hub Update.” Regional Food Systems Working Group Meeting. October 2014.
- “Production Planning for Aggregators and Farmer Groups.” Webinar for National Good Food Network hosted by Wallace Center at Winrock International. Jan. 6, 2015.
- “Food Hub Finances: An overview.” West Virginia Small Farm Conference, Feb. 27, 2015
- “Food Hubs in Iowa: An overview.” Agriculture and Natural Resources Professional Development Conference, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, April 2, 2015.

### ➤ **Tactic 3: Food entrepreneurs**

#### **3.1. Shared Use Kitchen Planning Toolkit**

This publication released in September 2014 is a guide to starting a shared-use kitchen as an affordable venue for new and existing value-added food production entrepreneurs, farmers and caterers. The 44-page toolkit includes insights from five shared-use kitchens operating outside Iowa, as well as perspectives from several people who are starting their own facility.

<http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs-and-papers/2014-09-shared-use-kitchen-planning-toolkit>

#### **3.2. Planning grant for the establishment of a food enterprise center, M2014-10**

The project sought to determine the level of community interest in creating a food enterprise center (FEC) and/or food hub to serve Johnson and Linn County food entrepreneurs and local farmers. The project investigators studied selected FECs and food hubs around the country shown to have had a demonstrated impact on the expansion of local food use in their communities. Project investigators used these organizations as models in networking and education sessions with area farmers, food entrepreneurs and businesses, and government and economic development leaders.

<http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/grants/m2014-10>

### ➤ **Tactic 4: Farm to institution**

#### **4.1. Implementing a seasonal cycle menu for public schools featuring Iowa-grown and processed foods, M2013-09**

Funding from the Leopold Center was used to launch a three-year Farm to School project in six pilot schools. It focused on a four-component program: 1) cross-age nutrition education, 2) food service education, 3) teacher education, and 4) school gardens. School food service directors have many factors to consider when they create menus: cost, preparation, product availability, nutrition requirements, etc. The Northeast Iowa Farm to School Cycle Menu provides a roadmap for using Iowa-grown foods while taking cost, preparation, availability and nutrition into consideration. Implementing the Northeast Iowa Local Foods Cycle Menu should remove much of the guesswork for a school food service director when using local foods in the cafeteria. The Cycle Menu meets the nutrition requirements of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act and has been tested for two years in both large and small rural school districts. It should be noted that the menu is focused on local foods available in northeast Iowa. Availability of products, especially produce, will vary across the state. School districts can be significant markets for local food producers who are able to produce a consistent supply of quality products. A cycle menu also would be an effective method to increase local food use in other food service operations such as colleges or hospitals.

<http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/grants/m2013-09>

## Next steps

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### ➤ **Tactic 1: Farmer Profitability**

Our goals are to increase the number of "alternative ag" and value added farmers who use benchmarks to assess their farms, and promote increased profitability of these farms. We will do this by providing opportunities to increase financial literacy, collaborating with other organizations for workshops, presentations, one-on-one consulting and business planning.

### ➤ **Tactic 2: Food hubs**

Our goals are to increase:

1. Total dollars of food hub sales revenue,
2. Number of farmers' access markets through food hubs, and
3. Diversity of producers selling to food hubs (including gender, age and race).

Some of the upcoming publications helping us achieve these goals include "Using Accounting Software for Traceability in Food Hubs". *Expected release August 2015*

In 2014 we partnered with the Wallace Center at Winrock International to begin a national case study on food hub financial management, analyzing historical data from actual food hubs and comparing them to benchmarks. The result of this project will be a Managers' Guide to Analyzing Food Hub Financial Metrics, expected to be released through the National Good Food Network in late 2015. In the upcoming year, we also expect to release two or three additional publications on food hub business models. We will continue to provide support and research for the new Food Hub Managers Working Group, a peer learning network of food hub managers in Iowa, which met for the first time in July 2015.

### ➤ **Tactic 3: Food entrepreneurs**

To increase the number of food systems jobs in Iowa, one of our goals is to increase the number of shared use kitchens, urban farms, food entrepreneur centers, and other areas of local food business development in Iowa, and assist in increasing the percent of local food businesses enterprises that are breaking even or earning positive net income. This will be

achieved through locally-based projects; some falling under the Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit program, and others that connect start-up entrepreneurs and organizations to appropriate resources and contacts.

➤ **Tactic 4: Farm to institution**

Institutions play an increasingly important role in the local food marketing system. Encouraging these venues to buy local and providing the resources and technical assistance they need to do so is a critical requirement if we want to address issues such as food access.

➤ **Tactic 5: Farm laborers**

Farm laborers often are left out of the conversation when talking about local food system development. Our goal is to encourage payment of livable wages for farm employees. The increased volume of local food sales also should increase the diversity of farmers, farm size and structure, the number of acres used for human food production, and the number of small farms and gardens.

#### Mission and goals

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**Goal: Raise the awareness of local food systems opportunities and build capacity for food systems professionals, organizations, and projects.**

“Collaboration is the name of the game when you really want to get things moving on a large scale with an important initiative,” (O’Neill and Zdorovstov<sup>x</sup>) such as local food systems. We can find thriving local food systems across Iowa, helping to enhance our communities’ economies, people, and ecosystems. There are a variety of participants facilitating food system change, including producers, farm laborers, nonprofits and their employees and volunteers, community activists, ISU Extension and Outreach staff, and more. Bringing the right players to the table and then gaining consensus on moving forward does not happen overnight. Collective impact typically requires five conditions that together produce true alignment and lead to powerful results: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organizations.

As outputs are developed, Iowa communities and individuals will become better equipped with the tools, lessons learned, and best practices critical to successful, equitable and sustainable local food system development.

#### Overview of 06/2014-06/2015

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##### ➤ **Tactic 1: Coalition building, RFSWG, IFSWG**

##### **1.1. RFSWG**

Established in 2003, the Regional Food Systems Working Group (RFSWG) is a statewide umbrella network for all Iowans working to build a more resilient regional food system. RFSWG is comprised of 15 geographically-based groups covering 91 Iowa counties. Each group works with different stakeholders—farmers, food-based businesses, non-profits, Extension, RC&Ds, educational institutions and government agencies—to support local food systems development in their region. RFSWG is supported by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.

We have noticed a fairly high turnover rate among local food coordinators in Iowa. In response, we surveyed existing coordinators and those who recently left coordinator positions. Results showed that lack of structure, support, and funding are major challenges for these position holders. Relationships with colleagues in other organizations (such as RFSWG) are highly valued sources of support to coordinators – sometimes more highly valued than the support they receive from their own organizations. RFSWG is valued because it helps build peer relationships and allows local food initiatives to share wisdom with one another.

##### **1.2. IFSWG**

The Iowa Food System Working Group now consists of over 80 campus and field staff and faculty and over 70 county-paid extension staff. These are Iowa State University employees who

currently have some involvement in local food system work. The Steering Committee, made up of 28 members from various colleges, departments and counties, is representative of the broader group. They meet on a quarterly basis to provide updates on programs and projects and to brainstorm on challenges in their work and ask for help from other partners. After nearly two years, this is a group of people who have developed significant levels of trust, so they willingly share information with each other. There have been several collegial relationships formed as a result of participating in this group which have included opportunities to work together on grant proposals, partnership development with internal and external partners on programs and projects, creating awareness around ISU resources related to local food systems, and professional development targeting those working on local food. One IFSWG steering committee member said that *“the material developed [by IFSWG], specifically the fact sheet, has helped me with every grant opportunity that I have been a part of in the last 3 years (over 3 million dollars).”*

### 1.3. Coalition building/strategic planning

Although interest and demand for local food is growing, there are still many hurdles to overcome, including: long-term financial sustainability for local food leaders, infrastructure for the formation of collaborative partnerships to address the systemic changes that need to be addressed, and support to collect, analyze and report on the projects and programs. In northern and southwestern Iowa, community meetings have been convened and facilitated since the fall of 2014 to help begin the process. In both cases, the local leaders requested assistance to initiate the conversations that would lead to the formation of a steering committee that would meet on a regular basis and create working groups to address the different projects and programs. This work focuses on the development of trusting relationships, which often does not yield specific results that are easily measurable. The reason trusted relationships play such a vital role is because the problems being addressed by these groups are not direct-to-consumer education about certain issues or problems. Instead, these groups form in order to work on systemic problems like childhood hunger, community revitalization or increasing markets for producers and educating consumers about the true cost of food.

#### ➤ **Tactic 2: Ag Urbanism Toolkit**

The Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit is a three-year process that promotes public interest design through engagement with community leaders, leading to a holistic food system. Our process involves community coalition building, agricultural urbanism and place-based research, and design technical assistance. We use the Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit to promote local food system revitalization in communities. The Community Design Lab currently is working with six communities to develop holistic food systems.

Healthy Harvest, Cass County, and Dubuque are beginning the first year of the Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit process: building a community coalition, researching and assessing their food system, hosting public forums and prioritizing tactic design and implementation. Cedar Rapids, Cresco, and Des Moines are entering their second year of the Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit process and are beginning to design and implement their prioritized tactics to continue to develop and evolve their community food system.

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/communities/content/ag-urbanism-toolkit-helps-establish-local-food-systems>

#### ➤ **Tactic 3: Building capacity for local food organizations/communities.**

##### 3.1. Supporting local food system development in your community

This guide provides local government officials, community activists and others with seven steps to help organize and promote the development of a local food system in your community.

<http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs-and-papers/2015-01-supporting-local-food-system-development-your-community>

### 3.2. Local Food Coordinators

Local Food Coordinators support the development of local food systems by bringing participants together and increasing community awareness through educational and promotional marketing. This publication provides resources to groups and organizations that are developing a local foods coordinator position, including a position description.

<http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs-and-papers/2014-08-local-food-coordinators>

#### Next steps

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##### ➤ **Tactic 1: Coalition building, RFSWG, IFSWG**

Within the next year, we hope that many of the partner organizations working on local food will begin to formalize their relationships by coming together as a loosely formed coalition. This should provide several benefits: fewer individual meetings, more widely shared resources, mutual goal setting, evaluation that includes more data, and more opportunities for professional development and networking with a broader and larger audience. One of the much needed professional development options would be to support “local food leaders” (coordinators or others playing a role in changing the food system).

##### ➤ **Tactic 2: Ag Urbanism Toolkit**

Moving forward, the Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit will continue to work with communities on a two- to three-year design process. An application process offered in February will allow up to three new communities a year become program participants. In addition to the design process, new leadership training programs will be offered and with participation required for team members from each community. This will ensure an understanding of local food systems, coalition development, facilitation and many other necessary tools for local food system development based in unique community settings. An annual conference also will continue to be held in December to offer new communities, interested residents, and other states an opportunity to learn about the tools and processes used through the Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit, as well as for communities to learn and discover together best management practices around the state.

##### ➤ **Tactic 3: Building capacity for local food organizations/communities.**

With more local food coordinators doing work specifically to increase the viability and sustainability of the local food system within their community, it is important to help them get off to a good start. These positions often are new both to the persons holding them and the person supervising the work. A survey distributed in the spring of 2015 showed that coordinators struggle with issues such as sustainable funding, structure and support. Some of the issues will require unique plans and solutions. With RFSWG’s support, we are working towards a holistic support network for coordinators and their supervisors that will include learning groups, workshops, ‘boot camps’, resources, and one-on-one technical assistance. Some of the

upcoming publications include: the Iowa Local Food Organizational Toolkit: Structure, Management and Finance Series.

- Part 1: “Defining your organization’s focus and leadership.” *Expected release Aug. 2015*
- Part 2: “Organizational Structure.” *Expected release Aug. 2015*
- Part 3: “Funding your local food organization.” *Expected release Aug. 2015*

Investigating enabling environments for the development of local food systems will allow us to begin to assess key food systems participants' access to and utilization of various community relationships and resources, and how this affects the ultimate successes within a given food system. As a result of this research, we can begin to identify how various contextual variables within a community lead to a food system characterized by fairness, equity, and inclusion. Further, communities can begin to learn from each other's' mistakes by mitigating contextual variables that can lead to a food system characterized by inequality and exclusion.

➤ **Tactic 4: Farm to School**

As the new host site for FoodCorps, we will be more actively engaged in Farm to School work through supporting their efforts to provide knowledge about, engagement with and access to local food. The Farm to School state coordinator interfaces with the RFSWG and other local food projects. In 2016, a pilot project to support Farm to School programs in schools will display the ability of that program to help schools comply with the nutrition education guidelines that are part of each School Local Wellness Policy. Being the host for FoodCorps will allow ISU Extension staff to learn from FoodCorps members' work and implement similar projects.

➤ **Tactic 5: Food Access**

While focusing mainly on Iowa and surrounding regions, we hope to gain a more comprehensive picture of food insecurity and food access issues across the country. Included in this research will be ways in which the federal government is involved, but also highlighting grassroots initiatives that aim to ensure farmer profitability as well as increased food access. We look forward to working on a grant that will incentivize and engage more SNAP customers at farmers markets.

➤ **Tactic 6: Awareness and outreach**

A Local Foods team website will become publicly available in the fall of 2015. This new local foods portal will increase our visibility and the efficiency of our outreach. The website will include resources, updates on our projects, and a weekly blogpost. Social media outlets will help route interested visitors to our website.

## IV. Evaluation

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### Mission and goals

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**Goal: Systematically gather information (data) on the context, processes, and outcomes of local food system work to inform the decisions and actions of partners to effectively support and evaluate their own work and the food systems work of others.**

Iowa's Regional Food Systems Working Group (RFSWG) has been tracking local food purchases by institutions, retail stores and restaurants for three years. Their data show that institutional and intermediated markets such as grocery stores and restaurants are eclipsing direct-to-consumer local food sales and creating jobs.<sup>viii</sup>

### Overview of 06/2014-06/2015

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#### ➤ **Tactic 1: Building capacity for partners to evaluate their projects**

During 2014-15 local foods team evaluators presented on systems evaluation at the annual ISUEO conference and regularly at RFSWG meetings. These presentations explained the difference between systems evaluation and traditional program evaluation. The former differs from traditional program evaluation in that it measures changes in systems, environments, and policies, whereas traditional program evaluation focuses on individual knowledge and behavior change. Systems evaluation helps us to understand the changing local food system and take credit for one's contribution to those changes, while also recognizing others' contributions.

#### ➤ **Tactic 2: Local foods systems impact in Iowa.**

##### **2.1. 2013 Economic Impacts of Local Foods in Iowa**

This project summarized the statewide impact of the local food industry on Iowa's economy in connection with efforts of the Regional Food Systems Working Group (RFSWG). It is based on data collected in 2013, in cooperation with coordinators of the 15 regional food groups that comprise the statewide RFSWG.

What was learned?

1. Local/regional food commerce is growing, although federal efforts to measure this increase by asking about direct-to-consumer sales are falling short. **Sales to institutional and intermediated markets such as grocery stores and restaurants are eclipsing direct-to-consumer sales and are creating jobs.**
2. **The farmers surveyed likely are operating farms at scales ideal for job creation;** in other words, those that require more labor but are not large enough to generate efficiencies of scale that make it worthwhile to replace people with machinery.
3. **Very modest public investment in the work of regional food coordinators contributes to job creation in Iowa.** Over the past two years, it cost the public \$15,661 to create one full-time job in the local foods sector in Iowa. Compared to the cost of recruiting low-paying retail jobs from outside the state, a wiser investment approach to creating jobs in Iowa is to grow our own in the local foods sector.

4. **This model is working but needs more support.** Networked local food coordinators already have demonstrated they are effective at helping create jobs in Iowa on shoestring budgets pieced together from various sources of funding from government agencies, nonprofits, and the private sector. **Providing a robust and consistent source of funding for local food coordinators promises to generate even greater economic returns to the state of Iowa.**
5. If results were at all representative (the report does not suggest that they are), estimated **local food sales in Iowa may be closer to \$322 million annually as opposed to \$17.5 million** reported by the 2012 U.S. Census of Agriculture.
6. If all of Iowa's estimated 914 grocery stores would purchase local foods at the level (\$407,000) our 22 responding grocery stores did, this would generate \$371 million annually in local food sales alone. Add restaurants to the mix (an estimated 6,000 in Iowa spending an average of \$101,628 each) and Iowa could generate an additional \$610 million in sales annually, for a combined grocery store and restaurant total of **nearly \$1 billion in local food sales.**

<https://www.leopold.iastate.edu/marketing/economic-impacts-local-food-iowa>

## 2.2. Healthy Harvest local food farmer survey

We conducted a survey of local food producers for Healthy Harvest, a local RFSWG group that works in nine counties in north central Iowa. Forty farmers responded to the survey. Results showed their cumulative local food sales were over \$800,000 and they created ten new jobs in 2014. The survey also revealed that the vast majority of respondents anticipated increasing local food production in the next five years despite concerns that the local food market is limited. This indicates that farmers are looking to enter new markets or anticipate that their current markets will grow; a signal that local food farmers expect local food will continue to be a viable sales option for them.

### Next steps

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#### ➤ **Tactic 1: Building capacity for partners to evaluate their projects**

In addition to conducting evaluations, the local food evaluation team works with partners to increase their own capacity to evaluate their work. This work includes:

- Creating a database of evaluation survey questions which can be used by the local foods teams and shared with partners.
- Preparing tools for RFSWG groups to evaluate their coalition building efforts that are appropriate for each stage of the coalition process.
- Working with the University of Minnesota Extension to Families to create an evaluation system for their SNAP Education and coalition building work. This project seeks not only to create an evaluation plan, but to build the capacity of the University of Minnesota's own evaluation team to use systems evaluation

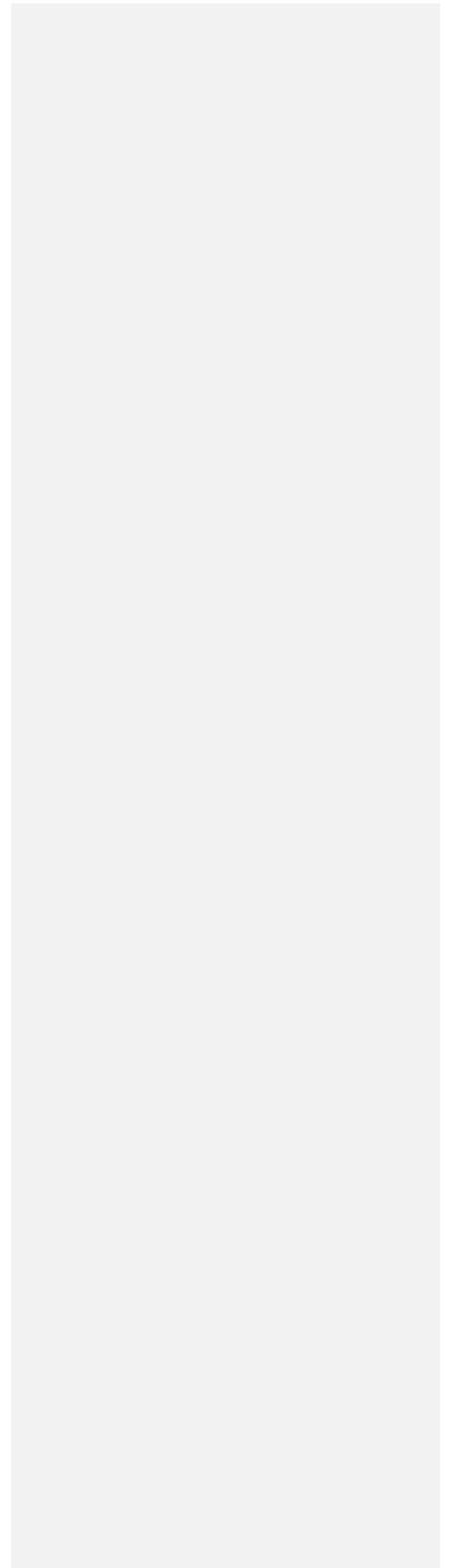
#### ➤ **Tactic 2: Local foods systems impact in Iowa.**

For the third consecutive year, the local foods evaluation team is working with RFSWG to measure the economic impact of local foods in Iowa. Local RFSWG coordinators conducted surveys with local food farmers and buyers in their regions and reported funds they leveraged in 2014. Results will be available in October, 2015.

V. List of publications released between July 1, 2014 and June 30, 2015

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- Resource guide for beginning farmers, July 2015, Alice Topaloff  
<http://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/A-Resource-Guide-for-Beginning-Farmers>
- Local Food System Toolkit #2: Managing Cash Flow for a Low-Capital Food Hub Startup, June 2015, Savanna Lyons, Nick McCann, Georgeanne Artz  
<https://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/Iowa-Food-Hub-Managing-Cash-Flow-for-a-Low-Capital-Food-Hub-Start-up>
- Iowa CSA Farms - 2015 Directory, April 2015, Savanna Lyons  
<https://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/Iowa-CSA-Farms-2015-Statewide-List-of-Iowa-CSA-Farms-and-Organizers>
- Food Hub Development in Iowa, Arlene Enderton and Corry Bregendahl, February 2015  
<http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs-and-papers/2015-02-food-hub-development-iowa>
- Supporting Local Food System Development In Your Community, January 2015, Ahna Kruzic and Corry Bregendahl  
<http://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/LF2>
- 2014 Local Food Champions, December 2014, Arlene Enderton  
<http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs-and-papers/2014-12-2014-local-food-champions>
- 2013 Economic Impact of Iowa's Regional Food Systems Working Group, November 2014, Arlene Enderton and Corry Bregendahl  
<http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs-and-papers/2014-11-2013-economic-impacts-iowas-regional-food-systems-working-group>
- Funding Opportunities in Local Foods, October 2014, Ahna Kruzic  
<http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs-and-papers/2014-10-funding-opportunities-local-foods>
- Shared-use Kitchen Planning Toolkit, September 2014, Alice Topaloff  
<http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs-and-papers/2014-09-shared-use-kitchen-planning-toolkit>
- Local Food Coordinators, August 2014, Alice Topaloff  
<http://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/Local-Food-Coordinators>
- Local Food System Toolkit #1: Developing a Worksite Foodbox Program, July 2014, Savanna Lyons  
<http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs-and-papers/2014-07-local-food-system-toolkit-1-worksite-food-box>



## **Program Team**

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### **Craig Chase – Local Food and Farm Initiative state coordinator**

Chase, in addition to being the state coordinator, is currently the program manager of the Local Foods team at ISU Extension and Outreach and the program manager of the Marketing and Food Systems Initiative for the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

### **Lynn Heuss – Local Food and Farm Initiative assistant state coordinator**

Heuss is the Local Food and Farm Program assistant coordinator, and a program coordinator at the Women, Food and Agriculture Network.

### **Corry Bregendahl and Arlene Enderton – Local Food and Farm initiative evaluation team**

Bregendahl is an associate scientist at the Leopold Center where she leads evaluation of local and regional food system initiatives and projects, Center-funded programs, and externally funded food- and agriculture-related efforts. She co-authored the Iowa Food and Farm plan and currently is leading evaluation for the Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative, the Regional Food Systems Working Group and the Iowa Food System Working Group.

Enderton joined the Leopold Center as a program assistant in 2013. She assists in evaluation efforts by conducting interviews, creating surveys, analyzing data and writing reports. She is involved in evaluation of the Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative, the Regional Food Systems Working Group, the Iowa Food System Working Group, Leopold Center grant programs, and the Wallace Center.

### **Ahna Kruzic – Graduate Research Assistant**

Kruzic's research interests include the intersections of sustainable agriculture, food, and rural sociology – and identifying variables to success for enabling communities' development of local food system.

### **Courtney Long – Design Fellow**

Long is a Design Fellow with the ISU Community Design Lab and ISU Extension and Outreach's Local Foods team. Her project involvement includes integrating local and regional food systems, community health and wellness, and sustainable infrastructure into community design.

### **Savanna Lyons – Graduate Research Assistant**

Lyons' research focuses on best practices in aggregation and distribution of local foods, with an emphasis on food hub financial management and coordinated production planning among farmer groups.

### **Alice Topaloff – Local Foods team Program Assistant**

Topaloff joined the team in 2014. She participates in projects on value-added strategies, beginning farmers, communication and outreach. Topaloff also assists the evaluation team.

## Program Council

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A local food and farm program council was established by the Initiative legislation to “advise the local food and farm program coordinator carrying out the purpose and goals of the {Initiative}”. The council consists of six members representing different aspects of Iowa’s local food systems. The Council began meeting in January 2012 and includes:

- **Maury Wills**, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship,
- **Tony Thompson**, Iowa Farmers Union,
- **Warren Johnson**, Iowa League of RC&Ds of the Natural Resources Conservation Service,
- **Teresa Wiemerslage**, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and the Northeast Iowa Food and Farm Coalition,
- **Barb Ristau**, Iowa Farmers Market Association, and
- **Marcy Billings**, Loffredos.

The Council is taking a more prominent role in advising how to specifically move forward with the Program and encourage further development of the Iowa local food system in general.

<sup>i</sup> Low, S. et al (2015). Trends in U.S. Local and Regional Food Systems, Report to Congress. *USDA Economic Research Service*. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/1763057/ap068.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Enderton, A. and Corry Bregendahl (2014). 2013 Economic Impacts of Iowa’s Regional Food Systems Working Group. *Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa State University*. <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs-and-papers/2014-11-2013-economic-impacts-iowas-regional-food-systems-working-group>

<sup>iii</sup> Swenson, D. (2011). “Exploring Small-Scale Meat Processing Expansions in Iowa.” *Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa State University*. <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/sites/default/files/pubs-and-papers/2011-04-exploring-small-scale-meat-processing-expansions-iowa.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> Swenson, D. (2011). “Measuring the Economic Impact of Fruit and Vegetable Production in Southwest Iowa Considering Metropolitan Demand.” *Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa State University*. <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/sites/default/files/pubs-and-papers/2011-04-measuring-economic-impacts-increased-fresh-fruit-and-vegetable-production-iowa-considering-metropoli.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> Swenson, D. (2010). “Selected Measures of the Economic Values of Increased Fruit and Vegetable Production and Consumption in the Upper Midwest.” *Department of Economics, Iowa State University*. <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/sites/default/files/pubs-and-papers/2010-03-selected-measures-economic-values-increased-fruit-and-vegetable-production-and-consumption-upper-mid.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> Raison, B. (2010). Educators or Facilitators. Clarifying Extension’s Role in the Emerging Local Food Systems Movement. *Journal of Extension*, Vol 48 No 3. <http://www.joe.org/joe/2010june/comm1.php>

<sup>vii</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture (2013). *Farm to School Census*.

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/census/>

<sup>viii</sup> Enderton, A. and Corry Bregendahl (2014). Economic Impacts of the Regional Food Systems Working Group of Iowa. *Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa State University*. <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/marketing/economic-impacts-local-food-iowa>

<sup>ix</sup> Enderton, A. and Corry Bregendahl (2015). Food Hub Development in Iowa. *Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa State University*. <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs-and-papers/2015-02-food-hub-development-iowa>

<sup>x</sup> O’Neill, K. and Chris Zdorovtsov (June 2014). Using Collective Impact to Build a Local Foods System. *South Dakota State University Extension Community Development*.

<http://www.extension.org/pages/70627/using-collective-impact-to-build-a-local-foods-system#.VcONuvlv6b0>