

6-2013

# Local Food and Farm Program: Final Report to the Iowa Legislature

Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture

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## Recommended Citation

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# Local Food and Farm Program: Final Report to the Iowa Legislature

## **Abstract**

This is the final report to the Iowa legislature that describes the [Local Food and Farm Initiative](#) (LFFI) program during its second year and progress in business development/financial assistance, beginning and minority farmers, and incentives for local food productions. The report outlines other work by the Leopold Center and Extension's Iowa Food System Working Group that contribute to LFFI.

## **Disciplines**

Agriculture

# Local Food and Farm Program Final Report to the Iowa Legislature June 2013



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Extension and Outreach

June 2013

## About this report

This is the final report to the Iowa Legislature regarding the Local Food and Farm Program. It was established in August 2011 as part of the Local Food and Farm Initiative to work on four broad goals:

- Promoting the expansion of local food production, processing, distribution and marketing of Iowa food.
- Increasing consumer and institutional spending on Iowa foods.
- Increasing the profitability of farmers and businesses engaged in local food enterprises.
- Increasing the number of jobs associated with local foods.

The program is a collaborative effort between 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 2012 through June 2013.

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**Table of contents**

Executive summary ..... 4

The case for local foods in Iowa ..... 5

Iowa Local Food and Farm Initiative (LFFI) ..... 6

Updates on the LFFI project areas funded for 2012-13 ..... 7

Project area 1: Business development and financial assistance ..... 7

Project area 2: Beginning, minority and transitioning farmers..... 10

Project area 3: Local foods incentive ..... 10

The Iowa Food System Working Group (IFSWG)..... 12

Marketing and Food Systems Initiative (MFSI) of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture  
..... 14

Plan of work..... 14

The program team..... 16

Local Food and Farm Program Council..... 17

## Executive summary

The demand for fresh, local food is increasing both throughout the country and within the state of Iowa. This demand comes from farmers' market customers and Community Supported Agriculture enterprises (or CSAs), schools, hospitals and other institutional buyers, food distribution companies, food retailers, hotels, and restaurants. All of these members of the food system supply chain are increasingly concerned with choosing local products to supplement their inventory and product offerings. The work being done with legislative funds from the Local Food and Farm Initiative (LFFI) is helping to meet this demand and to create a more vibrant and sustainable local food economy in Iowa.

This report contains an overview and work summary of the Local Food and Farm Initiative and identifies the most notable outputs and outcomes of the LFFI programming. The LFFI has developed many mutually beneficial partnerships with other local foods organizations. The relationships that the LFFI has fostered with the Iowa Food System Working Group and the Marketing and Food Systems Initiative of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture are particularly strong and fruitful, thus, notable outputs and outcomes of the work being done by these two groups, as related to the LFFI programming, are described in the contents of this report.

The activities of these three groups are varied and range from holding conferences and developing local foods curriculum for Iowa State University Extension and Outreach to aggregating and distributing resources and funding local foods-related projects. A key component of the work being done in these three groups is the facilitation of new partnerships. Mutually beneficial relationships are being created in Iowa throughout the supply chain to increase the production and purchasing of local foods. These partnerships have yielded mentorship programs for beginning farmers, the creation of a food hub in northeast Iowa, the introduction of locally grown foods into Iowa school districts and many other successful outcomes.

The LFFI looks forward to a future of sustainable funding by enacting a long-term plan that will be developed by Iowa State University and community organizations. In addition, continued funding will allow the LFFI staff to hold a 2014 local foods conference. An evaluation of the LFFI projects is planned and will be done by the evaluation team at the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. This evaluation will identify strengths and weaknesses in LFFI programming that will allow the food systems team to provide adequate and sufficient support to all of the stakeholders in Iowa's local food systems. The continued work of the LFFI programming will benefit the state of Iowa in a myriad of ways, improving socio-economic and environmental aspects of life through the development of a more sustainable and efficient local foods system.

## The case for local foods in Iowa

As one of the largest United States agricultural production sites, Iowa possesses unique advantages and potential to grow the state's local food economy. Almost three-quarters of Iowa's land already is vested in agriculture, and commercial and conventional farming infrastructure dominates the landscape. With the support of federal programs, complementary initiatives in neighboring states, and the clout and capacity of a strong network of committed farmers and community leaders, Iowa is well positioned to expand its leadership in agriculture through intentional investments that will grow the local food economy.

Iowans spend more than \$8 billion on food each year and it is estimated that only 14 percent is grown within the state.<sup>1</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 Dave 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>2</sup> Swenson's research describes the current state of agriculture in Iowa and the steps that need to be taken to develop a vibrant and sustainable food economy: increased production of fruit and vegetables coupled with a decrease in food imports would 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, Swenson stresses the need for more food system localization infrastructure, research and development and incentives.<sup>3</sup>

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 operations have the potential to expand year-round fruit and vegetable production in Iowa. Increased local food production, marketing and processing means 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 a 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>4</sup>

Dave Swenson recently (March 2013) completed a report regarding 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. As a result, when a family leaves the state, the household leaders aren't the only workers lost; when children accompany their parents upon moving, Iowa loses potential members of the work force. This loss of young workers also has social consequences because these young people represent Iowa's future, i.e., the individuals who will later become local government representatives or agricultural producers.<sup>5</sup>

Enthusiasm for local and sustainably produced foods in Iowa continues to grow. Evidence can be found in the increasing number of community supported agriculture farms, farmers markets and restaurants that serve these foods, and supermarkets that sell locally grown foods. In fact, the demand for local food is so high that many buyers cannot find enough local products to meet their needs. The rising demand for local produce, meat and dairy is evident in Iowa and throughout the upper Midwest.<sup>6</sup> In addition, interest in the farm to school movement is increasing, and there is significant and exponential growth of school gardens.<sup>7</sup>

As of May 2011, there were more than 100 organizations and programs including state, federal, university and private groups engaged in helping build Iowa's local food economy.<sup>8</sup> ISU departments, including ISU Extension and Outreach (ISUEO) and the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture (LCSA) are working to share the multitude of resources currently available and to develop other tools to help with the challenges and opportunities still facing those interested in producing and procuring local food. Furthermore, ISU contributes a significant amount of funding and support to the Iowa Food System Working Group (IFSWG) and the Marketing and Food Systems Initiative (MFSI) of the Leopold Center. The work being done by these two organizations provide strong and complementary support to LFFI programming. Notable outcomes and outputs of IFSWG and MFSI projects related to LFFI work and funding will be briefly described later in this report.

## Iowa Local Food and Farm Initiative (LFFI)

### Overview of the LFFI

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 accumulating and assessing input from more than 1,000 individuals. This document outlines 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 of the same year, 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." 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.<sup>9</sup> This work began in 2011 and will continue with renewed support and funding from the 2013 legislative session.



## Outputs and outcomes of the LFFI

The LFFI programming has yielded a variety of outputs and outcomes since its inception. In March 2013 the LFFI hosted a local foods conference at ISU, entitled *Iowa Local Food Conference Road Map for Resilience: Empowering Iowa's Local Food Economy*. National speakers shared their experience and expertise in each of the three focus areas. Local, hard-working heroes told their stories, sharing how they are changing the face of the local food scene in their own communities. Specific and significant time was set aside for networking, to create connections among these professionals to share ideas and resources. Videos, presentations and other resources from the March 2013 conference can be found online at the Leopold Center's website.<sup>10</sup> The Leopold Center and the Iowa Food System Working Group published a synopsis of the presentations and breakout sessions of the 2013 conference which is now available as an online resource.<sup>11</sup>

More than 100 people attended the conference and the response was overwhelmingly positive. According to evaluation results, on a scale of 1-5, the attendees who filled out the survey gave the conference a rating of 4.2 on average when asked if they were able to apply what they learned at their workshops to their work in the future. The attendees described the value of their experiences at the conference, including the following comment:

"I have to tell you that the conference was inspiring, well-planned and well-executed. We appreciate all the hard work that so many put into the conference. We came away with a wealth of enthusiasm which can be fueled with the resources available from all of you who have blazed the trail before us."

Others commented on the development of new professional relationships, including mentorship and the sharing of resources.<sup>12</sup>

## Updates on the LFFI project areas funded for 2012-13

The Local Food and Farm Initiative ended its second year with a focus on three areas for the group's future work:

- Business Development and Financial Assistance,
- Beginning, Transitioning and Minority Farmers, and
- Local Food Incentives.

The following three sections of this report describe these project areas in detail and the work that has been done.

### Project area 1: Business Development and Financial Assistance

#### Background, rationale and relevance

The Local Food and Farm Initiative has focused its work on investigating and studying business development models for the creation of food hubs. Commercial distributors and retailers require large quantities of produce from a few business entities in order to simplify business

transactions. One way to meet the needs of distributors and retailers is to aggregate produce from multiple farms at a single location for packing, processing and shipment. These facilities, known as food hubs, act as brokers between farmers and distributors or retailers. In a May 2013 press release, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack noted the need for a comprehensive, multi-year *Food, Farm and Jobs Bill* that would provide the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) with the program support needed in order to continue making investments in local and regional food systems.<sup>13</sup> The USDA estimates there are currently more than 220 active food hubs across the country. These groups have successfully leveraged state, federal and private investments, including a variety of USDA funds, to develop and expand their businesses. The USDA has developed an online portal dedicated to food hubs featuring news, cutting-edge research and publications related to food hubs and other innovative food distribution models.<sup>14</sup>

Food hubs not only have the capacity to provide effective and efficient means of aggregating and distributing product but also the ability to communicate information between growers, distributors, consumers, researchers and government officials. Food hubs may provide means for better educating growers about Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), state food regulations, business opportunities, and consumer preferences. Food hubs also offer researchers easy access to data that provides evidence of their contribution to the state's economy, information on production, marketing activities, labor needs and capacity.

Local foods industries increase the quality of life in rural communities by providing job opportunities, keeping money circulating in the community and expanding access to fresh, healthy foods. The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Ohio State University and the USDA have all recently published reports recognizing the need for increased production of local foods and identifying the lack of infrastructure as a key limitation.<sup>15 16 17</sup>

Thanks to the leadership of ISUEO personnel including Teresa Wiemerslage and Nick McCann, the Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative (NIFFI) has been able to show how access to local food is impacting the local economy and job market. They estimate that in a six-county region:

- Local food sales to institutions have grown exponentially in recent years, including more than \$1.18 million in local food purchases by institutions in 2012. Luther College, with Sodexo's leadership, has reached the college's goal of buying over one-third of all food served on campus from local producers.
- Farmers are reporting increased sales. In 2012, 24 farms (or farm groups) reported \$7.3 million in sales.
- Between 2008 and 2012, 47 food system-related jobs were created and 39 new local food producers and enterprises were started in the region.
- Sixteen schools purchased \$20,236 of food from Northeast Iowa farmers in the 2012-13 school year. The NIFFI has tracked \$75,600 in local food purchases by Northeast Iowa schools since 2008.<sup>18</sup>

### **LFFI-funded projects**

In 2012, the LFFI funded two projects that dealt with food hubs. The investigators of the project held a workshop to encourage a community-based conversation among stakeholders in North Central Iowa using information from *The Red Tomato*, a seasoned, decentralized food hub in Massachusetts. The workshop brought together buyers and producers to learn about current

Iowa local food hub projects and solicited input from both groups of stakeholders based on current institutional sales experience.<sup>19</sup>

Sally Worley and Marc Strobbe of Practical Farmers of Iowa were funded by an LFFI grant that outlined the health of Iowa's wholesale fruit and vegetable system, providing guidance for future progress of this marketing model.<sup>20</sup>

In 2013, the LFFI began funding a study led by Nick McCann of Winneshiek County Extension and Outreach. The goal of this project is to help local food businesses become more competitive through vendor-managed inventories; results and an evaluation of the project are pending.

### **LFFI-related funded projects**

Three researchers affiliated with the Leopold Center currently are studying food system localization and publishing their work to advance food hubs in Iowa through LFFI-related funded projects.

Most of the information related to food hub development in Iowa and the United States is currently available only in "case study" form. Joanna Hamilton, a graduate student at Tufts University and former LCSA student intern, is working on an MFSI-funded project to synthesize and analyze food hub information in Iowa. Her research is expected to be available by the end of 2013. In Iowa, there are five designated food hubs: three different types with varied organizational structures and business purposes. Hamilton's work will shed some light on the strengths and weaknesses of each.

The LCSA's Marketing and Food Systems Initiative also is funding an Iowa State University graduate student, Kevin Duerfeldt, to investigate food hubs in Iowa. Duerfeldt will be reviewing the types of local food aggregation entities found locally and nationally, including food hubs, cooperatives, auctions and others in order to determine what type of resources and on what scale are required of particular types of food aggregation entities. He then will conduct an analysis of aggregation facilities in Iowa.

Laura Kleiman, research associate at the LCSA, is working with Nick McCann, ISUEO specialist, to document and publish materials on the work being done in Northeast Iowa related to food hubs. Kleiman will be focusing on the following deliverables:

- Decision-making tools to assist groups with food hub formation
- Decision-making tools to assist groups with market development of aggregated product
- Specialized discussion pieces for each of these aspects:
  - Marketing to institutions
  - Developing a multi-farmer CSA model for worksites
  - Best practices for increasing delivery frequency to stores
  - Best practices for using store point of sale data to estimate stocking rates
  - Sample business plan to deliver products without owning a truck

## Project area 2: Beginning, Minority and Transitioning Farmers

Many of the challenges facing beginning farmers have not changed over the past several years, such as the rising costs of land, seed, inputs, equipment and the expense of paying for health insurance. These demands are making it even more difficult to make a living as an agriculturalist. This population and their needs was one of the target issues in the original Local Food and Farm Plan. However, ISU has taken a supportive role as opposed to a primary one in this area, because of the intensive work being done by our partners.

### LFFI-funded projects

In August 2012, the Women, Food and Agriculture Network (WFAN) was one of 40 organizations that received a 2012 USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Grant (BFRDP). The grant will support beginning and aspiring women farmers in Iowa and Nebraska over a three-year period by offering business planning assistance, networking opportunities and providing them with mentoring relationships with established women farmers in the region. WFAN received partial funding from the LFFI to help implement their program *Harvesting Our Potential*, an on-farm mentorship program. The program provides the most essential component of an aspiring or beginning farmer's training – hands-on work experience with an established farmer.

### LFFI-related funded projects

Diane Weiland of the Wallace Centers of Iowa received funds to train apprentices interested in starting small farming operations. The Wallace Centers provided four apprenticeships in 2013 at the Henry A. Wallace Country Life Center. These are the highlighted benefits of apprenticeship:

- Practical experience operating a medium-sized organic vegetable and fruit production garden
- Management and mentoring of seasonal employees
- Implementing field day demonstrations
- Participation in the operation of a CSA program
- Opportunities to assist with program development, delivery and evaluation
- Business plan assistance
- \$1,000 to \$1,500 stipend and housing

## Project area 3: Local Foods Incentive

Farm to school programs enable children to have access to nutritious food while simultaneously benefiting communities and local farmers. In addition to supplying nourishing, locally grown and produced foods in schools, farm to school programming encourages and supports nutrition and agriculture education through taste tests, school gardens, composting programs and farm tours. Such experiences help children understand where their food comes from and how their food choices affect their bodies, environment and community.<sup>21</sup>

The Farm to School Network is a nationwide effort that began in the 1990s to connect schools and local farms with the goals of improving access to healthy food, providing educational

opportunities and supporting local farmers. In Iowa, schools may contact Tammy Stotts, Iowa's Farm to School Coordinator, to establish a chapter through the Iowa Department of Agriculture.<sup>22</sup>

According to Stotts, 26 Farm to School chapters exist in Iowa – an increase of nine from 2012. Stotts hosted a statewide conference in July 2013 in Ladora, IA and created a tool for food service directors to manage produce bids from local growers. Stotts also is working on an additional project that will enable schools to pre-order products from local growers; this will provide the growers with the information they need to plan their crops for the next year. Stotts works with Ann Feilman, of the Department of Education, and Angela Shaw, of Iowa State University, to create a food safety training program customized for Iowa growers interested in selling produce to public schools.

A representative example of farm to school efforts is the work being done by the Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative. School policies, customs, and practices have transformed dramatically as a result of policies on school gardens and using school garden produce in the school lunch program. More schools are beginning to source local and healthy foods into school food menus. Furthermore, schools are supporting education, training, and networking to increase the incorporation of safe, healthy, local food into school food programs.<sup>23</sup>

### **LFFI-funded projects**

Penny Brown Huber and Kristen Loria were funded by the LFFI for a school gardens project. After much consultation with individuals and groups, they broke ground at Kate Mitchell Elementary School in the Ames school district in April 2011. At the end of the 18-month pilot project, evaluation results showed that teachers learned a lot about introducing a living garden into their curriculum, and students learned about raising their own food and the value of fresh and healthy produce. Kids who were difficult to handle in the classroom were better behaved in the garden and cooking classes that were started as an after-school program. The project investigators launched a successful farmers market in late September, where the students sold their own produce, gave tours of their garden and raised enough money to buy seeds and plants for the 2012 garden. It transformed the school from being a passive environment for the kids to being an active empowering environment.

Brown Huber and Loria's new project, funded by the LFFI, will expand efforts at Kate Mitchell Elementary and launch a new school garden at a second Ames elementary school. They will provide infrastructure, teacher development, experiential learning components, parent engagement, sustainable volunteer development and increased farm-to-school education.

Flannery Cerbin of the National Center for Appropriate Technology received LFFI funding to collect stories and best practices from Iowa's farm to school movement and then archive the data on a website, [www.iowafarmtoschool.org](http://www.iowafarmtoschool.org). Cerbin documented the 26 recognized farm to school chapters in Iowa, but many more schools are engaged in school gardens, farm field trips, nutrition education and efforts to bring local food into school cafeterias.

### **LFFI-related funded projects**

The MFSI of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture issued two grants related to Local

## Food Incentives.

Hannah Lewis, formerly with the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT), along with FoodCorps members Daniel Schultz and Mauricio Rosas-Alvarez and Des Moines Public School District staff members, Sandy Huisman and Lyn Jenkins, developed a project to add local foods to the summer feeding program in Des Moines schools. This pilot project aimed to increase students' access to and consumption of fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables in the Des Moines public schools. In addition to the lunches the children received through the program, local fruits and vegetables were added as supplements to the meals. Working with a large, centralized school food service that serves 20,000 meals per day can be a daunting undertaking requiring large volumes of any given ingredient. As a result, this project started with small-scale, practical activities that:

- (1) cultivated connections between the school district and local farmers;
- (2) created awareness and enthusiasm among students and staff about locally grown food; and
- (3) created opportunities for project partners to observe and evaluate the costs and best practices for local procurement in order to assess the feasibility of expanding the program.

This allowed the Des Moines farm to school program to expand at a manageable pace and build on successes and lessons learned. The project was followed up with a second MFSI grant to continue the successful efforts of this project.

## Iowa Food System Working Group (IFSWG)

### Overview of the IFSWG

The Iowa Food System Working Group (IFSWG) formed to aggregate and share existing resources on local and regional food system development within ISU Extension and Outreach (ISUEO). This includes development of all five program areas and geographic regions of ISUEO. IFSWG functions to connect ISUEO to civic organizations throughout the state, such as the Healthiest State Initiative and the Regional Food Systems Working Group (RFSWG). The work being done by the IFSWG supports and supplements the efforts of LFFI programming via the sharing of resources and partnership development.

### Outputs and outcomes of the IFSWG

In September 2012 ISUEO held a professional development conference, supported in part by IFSWG. Evaluation results showed that 95 percent of the respondents reported they made new contacts as a result of the conference. Of those, the vast majority (86 percent) made new contacts with ISUEO staff. More than two out of three (68 percent) also made new contacts with non-Extension staff. The conference already has facilitated the development of eight new partnerships.

The IFSWG includes five separate committees with different goals and responsibilities. Below is an outline of the outputs and outcomes of all five committees.

**Curriculum Committee:**

- Identified ISUEO programs from the 2012 ISUEO Program Catalog that relate to local foods and require a curriculum component.
- Updated youth curriculum that will be available for use with Farm-to-School and school garden educational activities. Trainings for educators are planned that will demonstrate how the curriculum can be effectively used with farm-to-school programs and within extra-curricular activities for elementary-aged children.

**Grant Committee:**

- Created an online database for the IFSWG members to serve as a platform for sharing resources related to local foods (including grant writing).
- Developed a reference calendar that compiles information on various grant opportunities related to local foods, granting agencies, due dates and scope.

**Partnership Committee**

- A list of potential core/fundamental partners was established:
  - Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI)
  - Regional Food Systems Working Group (RFSWG)
  - Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS)
  - Iowa State University Extension and Outreach (ISUEO)
  - University of Northern Iowa/Center for Energy and Environmental Education (UNI/CEEE)
  - Iowa Food Systems Council (IFSC)
  - Resource and Conservation Development Councils (RC&Ds)
  - Food Access and Health Working Group (FAHWG)
- A focus group will be convened that will include representatives from these organizations to establish partnership and to share ideas. A working group/committee will be created in order to begin discussion of a statewide 'Buy Local' campaign similar to North Carolina's 10% Campaign or Ohio's 25% Shift.

**Professional Development Committee:**

- Utilized the ISUEO staff directory, the Extension Program Catalog, and the ISUEO Regional and Local Food Systems (RLFS) Inventory to identify which individuals or organizations are conducting work in local foods systems and the nature of that work.
- In conjunction with a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Professional Development Program competitive grant, Committee members hosted capacity-building workshops for regional Extension staff to better understand the ISUEO programming regarding to food system localization.

**Resource Committee:**

- Website development
  - ISU Web Portal - ISU Foods Hub website available at [lowafoodsystem.org](http://lowafoodsystem.org). The purpose of this website is to serve as a hub to direct users to all other ISU websites, videos, blogs, news articles, publications and materials, and other digital content related to local foods. The website was designed as a dynamic page with minimal human input and duplication.

## Marketing and Food Systems Initiative (MFSI) of the Leopold Center

### Overview of the MFSI

The MFSI supports education, conducts research and facilitates partnerships to increase investment and support of local and regional food, fiber and energy enterprises. It has a competitive grant program that issued nearly \$1 million in grants from 2009-2012.

The Regional Food Systems Working Group (RFSWG) was created by the Leopold Center in 2003. The goal of the working group is to provide a forum for the coordinators of Iowa's regional food groups to share information and learn from each other within the social context of local food systems. This type of collaborative work environment is referred to as a community of practice. The MFSI has provided a majority of the funding for this group and it is included in the following discussion of outputs and outcomes of the MFSI. In addition, the MFSI has five new local food system projects targeting work in three areas: local food incentives through farm-to-school programs and sales to institutions, beginning farmers, and business development. The new projects within these areas complement the work already taking place through ISUEO food systems programming. Furthermore, a substantial amount of the MFSI funds and the associated outcomes of the grant work have directly and indirectly supported the LFFI priorities in this mutually beneficial partnership.

### Outputs and outcomes of the MFSI

The integration of the LFFI, the MFSI and the IFSWG has benefitted Iowa's local food system through cooperative efforts, similar goals, and the sharing of resources. All the initiative partners bring some type of unique resource to the collaboration (dollars, people, knowledge, skills, etc.).

Listed below are some of the MFSI's key food systems enhancement efforts in the 2013 fiscal year:

- Managing of Leopold Center-funded competitive grants.
- Developing and administering mini-grants.
- Further transitioning of Value Chain Partnerships and the Regional Food Systems Working Group (RFSWG) to independently functioning organizations.
- Making progress on food system development through the Local Food and Farm Initiative.
- Initiating the development and coordination of the Iowa Food System Working Group (IFSWG) within ISU Extension and Outreach.
- Further connecting local food system participants and organizations through small grant projects.

## Plan of Work

### Resource development

Each time local food system supporters gather, such as at this year's *Roadmap to Resilience* conference, two primary issues emerge. First, the need for a more comprehensive database for



local foods resources was identified. This would function to make vital information accessible to all stakeholders in the field. The second issue is the potential benefits of bringing together a core group of fundamental partners to take local food system development to the next level. This group of partners could develop a plan for a statewide local food campaign that will raise awareness about the many different benefits and challenges surrounding a productive and valuable local food system and the infrastructure necessary to sustain it. The implementation of this dynamic group could result in the creation of a comprehensive website of local foods resources. This group could chart a course, over the next three to five years, to implement changes that will create jobs and provide positive financial benefits, which will, in turn, revitalize many of our rural communities. The main goals will be to strengthen and deepen partnerships and create a business plan to incorporate food hubs as the centerpiece of local foods in Iowa.

Several resources have been developed in 2012-13 for stakeholders in Iowa's food system localization efforts:

- A new website launched at Iowa State University focusing on local food systems resources, links, and data, [lowafoodsystem.org](http://lowafoodsystem.org). The portal organizes the many ISU websites and resources into one location. As part of discussions with partner organizations, a new, second website/portal will be considered that would connect stakeholders and their websites. The group of core partners described above will meet in Fall 2013 to review and discuss how to further develop this site.
- Additional professional development opportunities have been offered statewide for county Extension employees and other local food systems service providers, like the Regional Food Systems Working Group members, to share resources to be used in their local food systems work.
- Additional resources such as publications, and curriculum (e.g., food safety training), will be developed and compiled over the next fiscal year.

### **Business development conference**

A Spring 2014 conference focusing on food hubs, food processing centers and other business development ventures is being planned. The focus of the conference will be on successful business development strategies and the outcomes associated with these strategies (e.g., job creation, economic activity, etc.). A document outlining successful examples of food businesses will be developed prior to the conference.

### **Planned evaluation**

Now that the LFFI has launched and had time to develop programming and goals, an evaluation of the initiative is being planned. This evaluation will fully document the outcomes and outputs of LFFI-funded projects and related projects. This evaluation also will help inform us of the strengths and weaknesses of our current programming and what changes need to be made to continue our success.

### **Sustainable funding**

Staff of the LFFI will continue to work toward long-term sustainability, and legislative support is vital to the progress being made toward a resilient local food system. To this end, discussions

will begin in fall 2013 with ISU and community foundations on how to develop a strategy to increase public investment in local food system development work. Once the marketing materials are developed, potential donors will be identified and approached to determine the effectiveness of the materials.

### **Local food system coordinator structure**

A feasibility study focusing on the job duties, funding and other relevant information for determining the number and location of food system coordinators needed will be started in Fall 2013. A review of similar positions in other states (Minnesota, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, and North Carolina) will be conducted and a recommendation will be developed for funding those positions.

### **Additional funding request**

The legislature currently provides \$75,000 to support the administration of the Local Food and Farm Initiative. Proposed funding of an additional \$80,000 would provide dollars to help leverage new projects or partnership incentive dollars to implement programs with NGOs and other organizations involved in this work. Four business plan development projects with funding of up to \$20,000 would be started that could contribute significantly to the revitalization of Iowa's rural communities. The LFFI staff and Advisory Council would develop a call for proposals that fit within the Request for Proposal (RFP) guidelines and intent of the LFFI. An additional \$70,000 would provide funding to cover partial salaries of local food system coordinators.

## **The Program Team**

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

Chase, in addition to being the state coordinator, is currently the program manager of the Marketing and Food Systems Initiative for the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, and lead in the ISU Extension Iowa Food System Working Group, focusing on local food system development and alternative enterprise analysis. He has been devoting considerable time and energy to food systems and fruit and vegetable profitability from a producer viewpoint since 2004.

### **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. At the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition she worked for the passage of the Farm to School legislation within the Child Nutrition Act. She also has worked with Buy Fresh Buy Local, the Farm to School National Network, and the Iowa Farmers Union.

### **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, where she assists in evaluation efforts through conducting interviews, creating surveys, analyzing data, and creating 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, and Leopold Center success stories.

**Laura Kleiman - Research associate at the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture**

Kleiman's responsibilities include aggregating and summarizing local food system research findings for the LFFI, the MFSI, the IFSWG and special projects conducted by researchers and Extension personnel. She also developed resources and a website for the IFSWG Grant Committee.

### Local Food and Farm Program Council

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 met in January 2012 for the first time and includes:

- **Maury Wills**, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship,
- **Rick Hartmann**, Iowa Farmers Union,
- **Warren Johnson**, Iowa League of RC&Ds of the Natural Resources Conservation Service,
- **Teresa Wiemerslage**, Iowa State University Extension & 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 the further development of the Iowa local food system in general.

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