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Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture

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Sharing the Lessons Learned: 2013 Iowa Local Food Conference

Abstract

This is a synopsis of presentations at the [2013 Iowa Local Food Conference](#). Breakout sessions focused on three challenges related to local foods—Business Incentives, Beginning and Minority Farmers, and Food Incentives—and offered success stories from national and Iowa-based speakers.

Disciplines

Agriculture



Sharing the Lessons Learned: 2013 Iowa Local Food Conference

March 19-20, 2013, Ames, Iowa

Hosted by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture's Marketing and Food Systems Initiative, Local Food and Farm Initiative and the Iowa Food System Working Group

Breakout sessions focused on local food successes and challenges in three areas: Business Incentives, Beginning and Minority Farmers and Food Incentives. Here are summaries of presentations and lessons learned by our Iowa storytellers.

Watch videos from the workshop, or view their powerpoint presentations, on the event website:
www.leopold.iastate.edu/news/calendar/2013-03-19/iowa-local-food-conference-road-map-resilience

May 2013



Business Incentives



Main speaker: Sue Futrell, Director of Marketing

Organization: Red Tomato

Contact: sfutrell@mchsi.com

Her story: Red Tomato is an innovative non-profit marketer of fresh fruits and vegetables for a network of 40 farms and grocers in nine northeast states. The company used to own trucks and distribute products, however, since 2003 the company has managed a virtual supply chain, partnering with small trucking companies. Most work now concentrates on brand development and development of marketing and point-of-sale materials to tell the farmers' story. About 65 percent of Red Tomato sales involve EcoApples, apples grown on 22 orchards that are third-party certified as following advanced Integrated Pest

Management and ecological practices. A new program, Local Fresh 24/7, is now in its second year in which products get to markets within 24 hours of harvest. "We start with farmers at the table and the growers know what the retailer pay us and what the consumer is being charged; it's a transparent supply chain," Sue said. "The Dignity Deal is a level that if growers are paid less than this, they lose their dignity. It's not a formula but a process and way of doing business."



Iowa Storyteller: Nick McCann, Food System Value Chain Coordinator

Organization: ISU Extension and Outreach, Winneshiek County

Contact: nemccann@iastate.edu

His story: Nick works with food businesses in northeast Iowa on business planning, product aggregation and distribution, logistics and specific issues such as meat processing. One of the issues he has been researching are ways to increase margins (sales price) in a retail market where perishable niche products are either out of stock or retailers are forced to mark down prices for quick sale when expiration is near. He found that when a company increases frequency of deliveries often there was a 50 to 100 percent increase in

sales, accompanied by a 10-35 percent increase in margins.

Lesson learned: Businesses specializing in local food may have the flexibility to offer more frequent deliveries and similar services that larger, out-of-state companies cannot.



Iowa Storyteller: Gary Huber, Manager

Organization: Iowa Food Cooperative

Contact: gary@iowafood.coop

His story: Gary has been working on a grant from the Leopold Center to develop a shared-use kitchen and processing facility at the Mickle Neighborhood Resource Center in Des Moines, the site of a nursing home that closed 20 years ago. In spite of the fact that the facility's new owners (a local nonprofit) want it to be used by the community and interest by farmers and local food businesses, the project would require at least \$150,000

investment in equipment and meeting city codes, plus development of facility use protocols and rates, liability and licensing, and management of the operation. At this point, he has more questions than answers and estimates a 50-50 chance that the project will launch.

Lesson learned: You need to be persistent.



Iowa Storyteller: Ray Hansen, Director

Organization: ISU Value Added Ag & Rural Development Program

Contact: hansenr@iastate.edu

His story: Ray's program offers business consulting services and helps conduct business feasibility studies. He outlined the five ways to evaluate a business: Economic impact (does it make sense?); Market analysis (how big is the market and how much can we penetrate?); Management (who is involved and what are they good at?); Technical feasibility (Is it the right size and do you have the production and processing capabilities?); and Financial (Do you have the capital, especially for unintended expenses?). Ray offered examples of a company raising hybrid striped bass in a former swine facility, and a facility that aggregated local produce for 10 camps along the Des Moines River.

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Lesson learned: The successful businesses we work with are able to identify their strengths as well as their limitations, which are allocated to other sources. Flexibility is key.



Iowa Storyteller: Marc Strobbe, Farm Viability Coordinator

Organization: Practical Farmers of Iowa

Contact: marc@practicalfarmers.org

His story: Marc was one of several PFI staff who explored the challenges and opportunities for farmers who want to "scale-up" operations. As part of a special project of the Local Food and Farm Initiative program coordinated by the Leopold Center, PFI staff interviewed 15 Iowa growers and 12 wholesale buyers with experience in wholesale

markets for local produce. The biggest concerns from producers were how to extend their season, safely process produce, find the right equipment, set prices and deal with labor issues.

Lesson learned: We need the food system entrepreneurs making all the links (between wholesale markets and farmers). Project findings are in a publication, Scaling-Up at: <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs-and-papers/2012-10-scaling-up-growers-buyers-barriers-benefits-wholesale-local-foods>

Beginning and Minority Farmers



Main Speaker: Diane Endicott, Founder

Organization: Good Natured Family Farms Alliance

Contact: allnatural@ckt.net

Her story: Diane founded the Good Natured Family Farms alliance, a partnership of more than 100 farms in Kansas and Missouri that share the core values of the small family farm. She and her husband raise cattle and chickens on Rainbow Farms in southeast Kansas, and operate a federally inspected processing plant. The Good Natured Family Farms label has brands in every category: meat, produce, dairy and bakery. Combining farms under one label makes it easier to find grants and funding, build a successful track

record and recognition, and buy in bulk. It also helps create capacity to meet market demand. Diane is piloting a program to GAP certify in groups. Her farm sells "donor chickens" at a higher price to people who want to support local farming.



Iowa Storyteller: Leigh Adcock, Executive Director

Organization: Women, Food and Agriculture Network

Contact: leigh@wfan.org

Her story: WFAN, a community of women with about 3,000 members across the U.S., seeks to create agriculture that is healthy, just, sustainable and promotes environmental integrity. They work to link new farmers with mentors in the "Harvesting Our Potential" program, and to create internships for young women to get hands-on experience at an Iowa farm during the growing season. Adcock says that women have been drivers behind

the local food movement and diversifying farms, and that the number of women in farming continues to rise. “Women expressed a great need for a network of their own so they could talk about the issues they were facing,” Adcock said. Some funding for this project comes from the Leopold Center.

Lesson learned: Women and beginning farmers learn best from one another.



Iowa Storyteller: Linda Naeve, Program Specialist

Organization: ISU Extension Value Added Ag & Rural Development

Contact: lnaeve@iastate.edu

Her story: Naeve leads High Tunnel 101 workshops to help families “expand a farm without changing its size on a map.” She told success stories from families who took the workshop: 1) Expanding with a high tunnel allowed one family’s son to return to the farm while in college and get started in agriculture; 2) A family with young children created a viable horticultural business with farm stands and markets, allowing the parents to stay at home; 3) A single woman whose sole income came from a CSA suffered reduced field production because of bad weather – the high tunnel allowed her to keep the CSA going

rather than canceling the shares and refunding the money.

Lesson learned: High tunnels can be an effective way to expand and diversify a farm operation.



Iowa Storyteller: Andy Larson, Small Farm Sustainability Specialist

Organization: ISU Extension and Outreach

Contact: allarso1@mail.iastate.edu

His story: Larson described the resources and programs available to beginning farmers through ISU, Practical Farmers of Iowa, Women, Food and Agriculture Network, and others. He has found that beginning farmers need four things: 1) a business plan, 2) first-hand experience, 3) financial capital, 4) resource base (land). Access to land is currently difficult with high prices. “People are starting to think very creatively about access to land and what to do on that land,” he said.

Lesson learned: New farmers have resources they can tap when facing the challenges of starting a farm.



Iowa Storyteller: Jason Grimm, Food System Planner

Organization: Iowa Valley RC&D

Contact: jason@ivrkd.org

His story: Beginning farmers have huge opportunities to start neighborhood or urban farms in cities, because there is a big customer base. Jason told several success stories: 1) Growing Power in Wisconsin created a farm on a city block that was entirely asphalt, producing goats, chickens, fish and mushrooms as well as vegetables; 2) Cedar Rapids developed flooded land along the river for urban farming; and 3) Portland, Oregon has an urban farm protected by a conservation easement that includes a public trail, a dog park,

rainwater harvesting and solar panels. Jason calculated that five acres with two dozen crops can support 189 people and create \$65,000 in profit. In Ames, 62 new urban farms at 5 acres each would create 310 jobs.

Lesson learned: Urban farms can be successful and sustainable business ventures.

Food Incentives



Main Speaker: Anupama Joshi, Founder

Organization: National Farm to School Network

Contact: anupama@farmtoschool.org

Her story: The Farm to School Network is a strategy for introducing healthy eating, as well as ensuring a better market and income for farmers. Its vision is that food is 1) healthy, 2) fair for everyone involved, 3) affordable, and 4) accessible. Schools are a lucrative market: 31 million kids eat school lunch and 16 million eat school breakfast. Impacts of the program have included: more local procurement, more food eaten and

less wasted revenue in schools, larger budgets for schools, composting and waste management programs, farmer interaction and experiential education. “You can get kids to eat pretty much anything if they’ve grown it themselves,” Anupama said.



Iowa Storyteller: Hannah Lewis, Midwest Regional Office Director

Organization: National Center for Appropriate Technology

Contact: hannahl@ncat.org

Her story: Hanna works for NCAT, the regional agency for the National Farm to School Network. Food Corps joined their efforts in Des Moines in August 2011. Their objective was to teach kids about nutrition and get them to taste vegetables through school gardens. They hosted a School Garden 101 course for teachers, in partnership with Urban Dreams (a nonprofit) and ISU Extension, to show them how to use the gardens in a meaningful way to meet course standards. Twenty-two schools in Des Moines now have school gardens.

Lesson learned: Form partnerships. “The story of Farm to School is a story of many collaborators. It’s a story of multiple heroes coming together in a community,” Hanna said.



Iowa Storyteller: Flannery Cerbin, Food Corps member

Organization: Food Corps

Contact: flannery.cerbin@foodcorps.org

Her story: Food Corps members are public servants that connect kids and adults to healthy food with school gardens, hands-on nutrition education, and better school lunches. The Food Corps program began in 1994 and will be in 15 states next year. Members receive student loan forbearance, a living stipend and health care. Twelve members in Iowa are devoted to working to Farm to School efforts.

Lesson learned: “You are pretty much guaranteed a certain persistence and certain passion with these members. All of the 12 members here in Iowa have a deep devotion and enthusiasm for what they’re doing,” Flannery said.



Iowa Storytellers: Karen Pattison (pictured) and Cayla Taylor

Organization: ISU Extension and Outreach

Contact: kpatti@iastate.edu and cayla@iastate.edu

Their story: People’s Garden is an extension partnership that received a two-year grant from the USDA to study whether school gardens encourage students to consume more fruits and veggies and improve STEM education. There are 17 schools in Iowa involved in the study. Karen spoke of Hawatha Elementary in Lynn County, Iowa as a success story. The school uses gardens for outdoor classrooms (math, science, language arts) and to inspire artwork and poems. Students blogged about the garden in three languages, wrote letters to Michelle Obama about the garden, and began a composting club. Cayla

explained that a survey of educators trained in the “Connecting Learning and Living” program discovered nearly

30,000 youth in Iowa were receiving lessons from the “Growing in the Garden” curriculum and had created and utilized more than 250 local gardens.

Lesson learned: School gardens and garden-based curriculum can inspire learning in a broad spectrum of subjects.



Iowa Storyteller: Teresa Wiemerslage, Regional Program Coordinator

Organization: ISU Extension and Outreach/Northeast Iowa Food and Farm Coalition

Contact: wiemer@iastate.edu

Her story: A 3-year pilot study in northeast Iowa, with Leopold Center funding, looked at how to create a comprehensive Farm to School program in six pilot schools. Program components included youth-led local meals for the community, afterschool and summer gardening programs, school visits to farms and farmer visits to schools. They held “Fifth Season” workshops for food services workers to teach them how to cook and preserve food from school gardens. They have a Homegrown School Lunch Week, where schools can purchase \$300 worth of local food and receive \$300 worth of kitchen equipment of their choice (apple slicers, salad spinners, vegetable dicers, etc.)

Lesson learned: The challenges that face local food procurement in school, including cost, lack of knowledge or facilities, and availability can be overcome with strong partnerships and training. See

<http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/grants/m2009-04>

Compiled by Melissa Lamberton and Laura Miller, Leopold Center Communications

The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture seeks to identify and reduce adverse socioeconomic and environmental impacts of farming practices, develop profitable farming systems that conserve natural resources, and create educational programs with the ISU Extension Service. It was founded by the 1987 Iowa Groundwater Protection Act and is located at Iowa State University.

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