

6-2012

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

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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 activities of the Local Food and Farm Program during its first year of operation. The program seeks to promote local foods and increase farmer profitability in Iowa. The report outlines areas of emphasis planned for year two of the program.

Disciplines

Agriculture

Local Food and Farm Program Final Report to the Iowa Legislature June 2012



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June 2012

About this report

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

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

The program brings together the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Iowa State University Extension, ISU's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

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Executive Summary

The Iowa Legislature passed legislation in 2011 to promote further development of Iowa's local food system. As approved, the Local Food and Farm Initiative (SF-509) outlines broad goals of increasing the production, processing, distribution, marketing, and consumption of local food. In the 2012 legislative session, a second year of support and funding was approved.

Additionally, the Initiative outlines the need to increase the profitability and the number of jobs all along the local food chain. Specifically, the Initiative purpose and goals are as follows:

1. The purpose of this chapter 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.
2. The goals of this chapter are to accomplish all of the following:
 - a. Promote the expansion of the production of local foods, including all of the following:
 - (1) The production of Iowa-grown food, including but not limited to livestock, eggs, milk, fruit, vegetables, grains, herbs, honey, and nuts.
 - (2) The processing of Iowa-grown agricultural products into food products, including canning, freezing, dehydrating, bottling, or otherwise packaging and preserving such products.
 - (3) The distribution and marketing of fresh and processed Iowa-grown agricultural food products to markets in this state and neighboring states.
 - b. Increase consumer and institutional spending on Iowa-produced and marketed foods.
 - c. Increase the profitability of farmers and businesses engaged in enterprises related to producing, processing, distributing, and marketing local food.
 - d. Increase the number of jobs in this state's farm and business economies associated with producing, processing, distributing, and marketing local food.

The Initiative does not include a direct reference to the Iowa Local Food and Farm Plan, which was previously mandated by the Iowa Legislature and presented to it in January 2011. However, it is believed the intent of this legislation was to work toward a number of the recommendations as presented in the Plan.

The Iowa Local Food and Farm Plan outlined 29 operational recommendations divided into 6 different types of assistance. The six sections are:

- Develop business development models to serve as profitable community-based local food business models for bankers, economic development officials, and entrepreneurial local food businesses and financial assistance programs to increase availability and access to loans to build local food businesses.
- Enhance processing capacity through providing education, training, and incentives to increase the productivity and efficiency of local food processors particularly Iowa's small meat processors.
- Provide education and training on food safety for farmers to enable them to access new markets while ensuring a safe food product.
- Provide education and training for beginning, minority, and transitioning farmers to

- increase their profitability while protecting Iowa's natural resources.
- Develop benchmarks and collect appropriate data to assess progress and determine whether Iowa's local food economy is growing and benefitting local food businesses and communities.
 - Pilot local food incentive programs to open up unique local food markets and include local food as an Iowa Great Place designation.

The Local Food and Farm Program State Coordinator, along with a Local Food and Farm Program Team of six food system section leaders, began to assess the current state of each recommendation, to identify any barriers to the recommendations, and to craft a set of recommendations with a proposed budget for next steps toward completion.

In addition to the Program Team, the legislation created a Local Food and Farm Program Council within the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) that will advise the state coordinator. The council includes representatives from IDALS, Iowa Farmers Union, Iowa Farmers Market Association and three people appointed by the Governor to represent Iowa resource conservation and development; a food processor, wholesaler or retailer; and a regional food system working group participant or expert in local food. In 2012, the Local Food and Farm Program Team will provide oversight to the Council.

The assessment, barrier identification, and next step recommendations for each of the 29 operational recommendations from the Iowa Local Food and Farm Plan are included in this final report.

Overview

There is a significant and increasing demand for fresh, local food produced throughout the upper Midwest and the nation. This demand comes not only from farmers market customers but also schools, hospitals and other large institutional buyers, food distribution companies, food retailers and restaurants that are striving to make local items a larger part of their product offerings but cannot find enough products to meet their needs. The rising demand for local produce, meat and dairy is evident in Iowa and throughout the upper Midwest.

As a key agricultural state, Iowa possesses unique advantages and incentives to build the state's local food economy. Almost three-quarters of our state's land already is vested in agriculture and the commercial farming infrastructure is in place. With the support of federal programs, complementary initiatives in neighboring states, and the clout and capability of a strong network of committed farmers and community leaders, Iowa is well positioned to expand its leadership in agriculture by more intentional investments that grow the local food economy.

Iowans spend more than \$8 billion on food each year; but it is estimated that only 14 percent is grown within the state. Local food commerce has increased in many areas across Iowa, but further growth will require more direct-to-consumer sales as well as sales in the retail and institutional sector. Infrastructure, research and development and incentives are needed to support increased local food production and marketing activity.

Conventional farmers who raise corn, soybean, 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. Additionally, 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 means more jobs. A 2010 six-state study examining the potential value of an increased fruit and vegetable industry in six states (Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin) focused on increased production of 28 fruit and vegetable crops and a projected increased consumption of in-state produce. The analysis indicated this scenario would mean farm-level sales of 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.

As of May 2011, there were more than 85 organizations and programs including state, federal, university and private groups engaged in helping build Iowa's local food economy.

Enthusiasm for local and sustainably produced foods in Iowa is growing. Evidence can be found in the increasing number of community supported agriculture farms, farmers markets and restaurants that serve and supermarkets that sell locally grown foods. In addition, interest in the Farm to School movement is increasing, and there is significant and exponential growth of school gardens.

Iowa Local Food and Farm Plan and the Local Food and Farm Initiative

Given the interest in local food and the 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 outlined 29 operational recommendations and was developed in 2010 by accumulating and assessing input from more than 1,000 individuals.

Recommendations were 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. 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.” 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 are integrally related. For that reason, it was deemed appropriate to continue to move the Iowa Local Food and Farm Plan forward as the response to the Initiative. As stated earlier, with renewed support and funding from the 2012 legislative session, this work can continue.

The methodology for development of this report and the first step toward moving the Plan forward was simple. Six Iowa local food system leaders were identified throughout the state.

Each leader would head up a section of the Plan and complete three tasks:

- Conduct a current assessment for each recommendation within their respective section.
- Identify current gaps or barriers.
- Recommend strategies to further the completion of each recommendation.

Each set of recommended strategies had a proposed budget that included the level of funding from any source needed to complete specific recommendations. Funding could come from grant awards from foundations or federal sources, Iowa food industries, or existing budgets of agencies and nonprofit partners.

Iowa Local Food Summit

A local food summit was held in Ames, Iowa in April 2012 as a follow-up to the Iowa Local Food and Farm Plan. Over 130 attendees representing a diverse group of government agencies, NGOs, individual consultants, farmers, and others participated in a one-day strategic planning process. Two planning sessions were carried out focusing on opportunities for each section

(Business, Food Safety, Processing, Beginning/Minority Farmers, Assessment, and Food Incentives), challenges, next steps, participant's role in the process, who's part of the ongoing discussion, and who's missing from the discussion. The top three challenges and the top three next steps were determined.

The assessment and recommended strategies for completion for each operational recommendation follow.

Section 1: Business Development Models and Financial Assistance

This section of the Iowa Local Food and Farm Plan had 4 recommendations.

3.1 Plan and implement a set of four to six innovative and comprehensive local food business projects across the state starting in 2012.

Assessment of current state: There are numerous Iowa local food business projects in various states of completion. The Community Vitality Center and the Wallace Center have lists of local food projects looking to scale up, including food hubs in northeast and central Iowa, and three shared-use processing kitchens in central Iowa.

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.1: After compiling a database of potential projects, four to six need to be chosen for intensive monitoring and review, and personnel and methodology for comprehensive business case studies or templates need to be determined and assigned. In addition, there is potential for a management team and leaders across public-private sector to develop selection criterion for distribution model.

3.2 Extend the Iowa Small Business Loan Program Fund, managed by Iowa Department of Economic Development, beyond its current sunset of March 31, 2011. Request that Iowa Department of Economic Development work with the state local Food Coordinator and other agencies, institutions, and organizations to increase the access of any remaining loan funds to local food farmers and businesses.

Assessment of current state: Recently, the Iowa Small Business (ISB) Loan Program contract between Iowa MicroLoan and the Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) has been signed by Iowa MicroLoan. There will be some modifications to the program parameters due in part to the limitations of the funding source being used. So there will need to be some changes to the ISB Loan Program website descriptions before it is available to the public again. The new program will run for three years and make available \$3,168,350 in U.S. Treasury Funds to Iowa Microloan for loan loss reserves and loan capital to support the ISB Loan Support Program. IEDA officials wish to have the marketing of the program rolled out in January 2012.

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.2: No further activities are required for completion over the next three years.

3.3 Increase outreach to recruit women and minorities interested in developing local food and farm businesses to apply to the Department of Economic Development's Targeted Small Business program by partnering with the Leopold Center and other agencies, institutions and

nonprofit organizations that have working relationships and ways to contact these audiences.

Assessment of current state: Of the NGO representatives contacted, all indicated awareness of this program is not yet widespread.

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.3: We are trying to find farm women or minorities who have successfully accessed capital through this program so that we can document lessons learned and relevant audiences and avenues for outreach. Practical Farmers of Iowa currently is promoting this program on their Resource List for Farm Financing. Another potential partner could be the Women, Food and Agriculture Network. Publicity materials should be available in the appropriate languages.

3.4 Develop and deliver a curriculum and training program on local food business development for Iowa bankers. This training will include model businesses that bankers can refer to when making loans.

Assessment of current state: A meeting on December 19, 2011 included representatives from FSA, NCAT and Extension who discussed delivery methods, program agendas, and dates for professional development opportunities for FSA officers and commercial agricultural lenders about financing non-conventional agriculture businesses. Possible delivery methods could include workshops, a series of webinars/video-conferences or conference calls. The team has begun compiling a list of nonconventional farm operations that could be used to develop archetypical business plan templates.

Five half-day workshops were offered to commercial agriculture bankers and FSA loan officers through a SARE Professional Development Program grant by Andy Larson (ISU Extension) and Hannah Lewis (National Center for Appropriate Technology) in May 2012. As part of the workshops, participants received a packet of written materials including a new publication from the NCAT Sustainable Agriculture Project (ATTRA) called "Financing Your Farm: Guidance for Beginning Farmers," a packet of selected alternative agriculture financial benchmarks for use in reviewing loan applications, and two texts for use in coaching clients including Building a Sustainable Business from SARE/MISA and Fearless Farm Finances from MOSES. New loan officers will receive additional training from Larson and Craig Chase (ISU Extension/Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture) at the ISU Agricultural Credit School on alternative agricultural options (organic and food-related businesses) to be held in June 2012.

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.4: Current activities are underway as described. Further recommended strategies may come out of those activities as they are evaluated and further discussions take place with a wide variety of partners. During those conversations, we hope to collect data from Iowa farms (verified through a third party) for lenders and insurers. In addition, we believe it would be beneficial to create curriculum models or materials with the characteristics of each particular target group.

Next Steps for the Business Development Models and Financial Assistance Section:

Financing:

- A website as a central point of contact would provide the opportunity for potential farmers, current farmers, lenders and additional resource people and agencies to have one location to find and dispense information as it relates to financing and financial matters. Some of the topics could be:
 - Savings.
 - Self-financing.
 - Credit and credit scores and their impact.
 - Existing programs available and their requirements/criteria for participation.
 - Public-private partnership opportunities.
 - A list of lenders willing to work with beginning farmers.
 - Micro-financing options.
 - Challenges and ways to overcome them; for example, lack of experience, corn base subsidy, price of land, cost of equipment, minority issues.

Business development/marketing:

- Use of the central information website to share information of models on how to make a living on 20 acres, including varied and diverse farms.
- Branding system for the best of Iowa food.
- More new farmer incubator programs.
- Connect farmers with value-added process farmers.

Education/resources:

- Business planning information and workshops readily available.
- Enterprise budgets for new crops – scalable and verifiable.
- Technical support for new crops or enterprises.
- Community colleges and Iowa State University Extension and Outreach to provide farm business education.
- Training “Five Steps to Boosting your Local Food System”:
 - Mentors.
 - Access to land.
 - Small stipend.
 - Capital.
 - Plan to make it all happen.
- Central point of access for all resources.

Risk management:

- Crop insurance for fruits and vegetables.
- Marketing assistance.

Section 2: Processing

This section of the Iowa Local Food and Farm Plan had 5 recommendations.

3.5 Establish a local food processing educational program for local food farmers and entrepreneurs.

Assessment of current state: Initial discussions with Cathy Strohbehn, Angela Laury and others from the Food Science Department at Iowa State University have taken place. A regulatory guide publication is under development, working with the Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals and the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship. The guide, developed by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, will outline existing food processing regulations and should be completed by July 2012. A study funded by the Leopold Center focuses on shared-use kitchen facilities and licenses, regulations and standard operating procedures, and will be completed by September 2012.

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.5: Further discussions are needed before specific recommendations can be developed. Included in the discussion could be: More training and implementation assistance/work for available strategies to be profitable; and, tacit mentoring program for local/small food processing.

3.6 Develop a pilot meat processing facility investment credit program for state-inspected meat processing facilities with fewer than 20 full and/or part-time employees.

Assessment of current state: This recommendation requires legislative action and state agency participation before it can be completed. No further recommendations can be made at this time.

3.7 Repeal section of the Iowa Code: 428.22 Locker Plants to allow locker plants to be declassified as commercial property and re-classified as industrial property; this action may provide tax breaks that could benefit these businesses. In addition, 428.20 definition of a manufacturer, a classification applied to larger packing plants, to exempt them from the sales tax on plant equipment purchases for upgrades, etc. (as outlined in 423.3, subsection 47.a, of the Iowa Code).

Assessment of current state: This recommendation requires legislative action before it can be completed. No further recommendations can be made at this time.

3.8 Pilot a meat-cutting education and mentoring program geared to supply the highly skilled labor needed for Iowa meat processing businesses with 20 or fewer full-time equivalent employees.

Assessment of current state: Vocational meat-cutter programs are not new to the Midwest; however, they have disappeared over the last 50 years in conjunction with a decline in the number of small and very small meat plants. A survey by ISU graduate student Arion Thiboumery in 2008 showed interest and need for a meat-cutter vocational program. In 2009, ISU graduate student Phil Damery worked with a group of stakeholders to ascertain the

potential structure of a small meat processor training program. This project, funded by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, detailed the expected skills for a vocational student entering the small meat plant industry and offered a training program outline. Damery worked with community college representatives to determine how the program could fit their structure and he surveyed 23 Iowa meat processors to determine the technical and financial feasibility of the program, and ascribed costs of a finalized curriculum.

The resulting vocational meat cutter curriculum guidelines would utilize existing Iowa State University Meat Science Extension, Small Business Administration (SBA), community college and Center for Industrial Research and Service (CIRAS) resources while also allowing for students to also engage in practical training in meat plants. Highlights of the program include:

- Practical skills training in the tactile meat processing arts.
- Business classes that include accounting, human resources, operations management, customer management, and food safety.

Overall conclusions show that creating a meat-cutting vocational program is desired by the Iowa meat plant industry, would have sufficient support from various Iowa and federal institutions, and is financially feasible. Additionally, there is a current framework for actually achieving an effective meat processing program presented in the study.

Potential barriers: Meat plant owners commonly complain of problems maintaining both skilled and unskilled labor. A large part of the problem is the conflict that meat plant owners experience between keeping costs low and maintaining a skilled labor force. In a small or very small meat plant environment, labor is generally the highest expense that owners incur. Because of this, they are extremely focused on the cost of their labor and commonly see it as a major reason why they are unable to improve the profitability of their plant. As such, meat plant owners often are reluctant to offer higher and more competitive wages to employees.

This is compounded by the fact that many meat plant owners incur high overtime costs during busy seasons. To cope with this, they often offer lower wages with the expectation that employees will have significant overtime pay during part of the year. This situation often contributes to employee turnover and time-consuming retraining for managers. However, the alternative, which is to pay higher wages to attract and retain skilled employees, is not attractive from the meat plant owner perspective because costs are higher, resulting in lower profitability.

For any meat-cutter vocational program to be successful, the implicit assumption that higher wages will result in lower profitability must be successfully challenged. It is necessary to show that increases in wages, when implemented properly, can make a business more profitable and valuable to the business owner. In essence, an effective vocational meat-cutter program can help plant owners achieve better profits, lower turnover, and fewer workforce-related headaches, while prospective vocational program participants receive long-term career prospects, good wages, or the potential to buy into an operation when current owners retire.

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.8: A meat-cutter educational and mentoring program has been examined by service providers in Iowa. However, the major constraint for implementing such a program is that wages may not be sufficiently competitive to attract and retain participants. The framework outlined by Damery effectively uses existing educational infrastructure to keep the cost of developing this program low. However, any

program will require some funding and large amounts of time for service providers in Iowa.

Until meat plant owners are able to recognize production systems that can successfully translate skilled labor into higher profits; it is not reasonable to expect sufficiently high wages for trained meat-cutters. Because of this, a meat-cutter vocational program is not recommended at this time.

3.9 Expand educational and training opportunities for Iowa's small meat processors.

Assessment of current state: In 2009, Center for Industrial Research and Service (CIRAS) professionals working in conjunction with the Small Meat Processors Working Group (SMPWG) conducted pilot projects to introduce modern manufacturing methods to small and very small meat plants. The project discovered four actionable items that significantly improve small and very small meat plant operations. One pilot plant, which implemented methods outlined by CIRAS and SMPWG, found significant results, which included a 93 percent increase in operating profits, nearly a 100 percent decrease in overtime, 23 percent decrease in expenses, and higher hourly wages for employees. Non-measurable benefits included less stress, better quality of life, and happier customers. This work was funded through the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

Based on the work of CIRAS and SMPWG, the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture is providing funds for Winneshiek County Extension to offer a series of classes for the meat plant industry. The class will cover the following topics:

- Class One: Scheduling/Product Mix Decisions (Solutions to Operational Problems)
- Class Two: Strategies to Increase Sales, Changing the Way We Measure Ourselves
- Class Three: Using Financial Numbers to Make Shop Floor Decisions

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendations 3.8 and 3.9: Based on comments from industry stakeholders and researchers who have done work with meat plants, the major constraint for a vocational meat-cutter program is the ability to pay competitive wages for these skills. Until it is realistic to expect increased wages, spending resources to develop this program is not advisable. However, there is reason to believe from the work of SMPWG and CIRAS that more opportunities for managerial training to successfully show current owners how to increase the profitability of their operations, could result in higher wages. With this key prerequisite satisfied, a meat-cutter education and training program would be much more feasible.

Next Steps for the Food Processing Section:

Education/resources:

- Tools for communication among producers, buyer and processor.
- Translate inspection licensing to layperson (checklists).
- Develop a database for food processing and cold storage.
- Educating buyers on carcass utilization.

Regulatory:

- Fix labeling processes within the state.
- More funding for inspectors; existing inspectors go to bigger operations.

Infrastructure:

- Storage for processed products.
- Coordination of processing capacity.
- More chicken processing.

Section 3: Food Safety

This section of the Iowa Local Food and Farm Plan had 6 recommendations.

Food safety is everyone's responsibility. Being a small farm operator or local food producer does not exempt anyone from this responsibility. However, the regulations can be tricky to navigate and difficult to apply to smaller food operations. The following recommendations from the Iowa Local Food and Farm Plan outline the most significant barriers voiced by stakeholders in the local food system. Most of the points in the food safety section of the plan have shown progress.

3.10 Convene a task force of state agencies that regulate Iowa agriculture and food processing and local food producers and entrepreneurs to review laws and regulations and recommend scale-appropriate changes that reduce financial compliance costs to local food producers and entrepreneurs while maintaining a high level of food safety and environmental protection for Iowa citizens.

Assessment of current state: This recommendation requires legislative action. A task force should be appointed that would include representation from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals, Iowa State University and local food farmers and entrepreneurs.

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.10: Small local food farmers and food entrepreneurs participating in listening sessions and/or surveys commissioned for the Iowa Food and Farm Plan have identified compliance with food safety and environmental regulations designed for much larger businesses to be prohibitive – due to required purchase of additional equipment, keeping of detailed records, certification and licensing costs, and other transaction costs.

After establishing the task force, a series of listening sessions should be planned across the state to allow farmers and food producers the opportunity to share barriers and feedback on laws and regulations that inhibit local food production and marketing.

3.11 Develop a comprehensive and recurring Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) educational training program to ensure that farmers and food entrepreneurs participating in local food commerce are providing safe food to their buyers.

Assessment of current state: Iowa fruit and vegetable farmers and entrepreneurs need continuing education and training to assure their customers that they are providing safe food products. Many food retailers, wholesalers, restaurant chains, food service distribution and management companies and universities want to purchase more local fruits and vegetables, but

they also want reassurance sellers of local food have followed practices that guarantee food safety.

Upon review of GAP trainings over the past two years, the primary source of GAP education in the state has been Iowa State University Extension and Outreach staff. They work with local groups and partners to deliver the education to Iowa fruit and vegetable farmers including grower associations and regional food system working groups.

Regional Efforts: The Northeast Iowa Story

The Northeast Iowa Food & Farm Coalition (NIFF) was named a Regional Food System Working Group by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture in 2006. Today, the coalition has more than 150 producer members and is part of the Northeast Iowa Food & Fitness Initiative. The NIFF Coalition completed a strategic planning process where local food production was identified as a strength in the region.

As the coalition worked to scale up specialty crop production in the region, food safety quickly emerged as a barrier to some markets. The most notable example occurred in 2009 when Sodexo was named as the food service contractor at Luther College. This change in management yielded a new requirement that farmers selling to them needed to be audited by a third party.

To meet these requirements, ISU Extension county staff worked with area growers to secure funding to research food safety certification programs, develop training and educational opportunities with experts in food safety, provide workbooks and manuals to growers, and develop marketing materials to recognize farms using good agricultural practices.

The committee created an intense and comprehensive training schedule to educate fruit and vegetable producers in GAPs. Members also learned of a Whole Farm GAP pilot program offered by the USDA. The pilot program was designed to help the USDA establish baseline costs for training and certifying farmers according to the “one field - one farm - one audit” approach. Northeastern and southeastern Iowa were training locations for this pilot program, which resulted in 13 farms becoming USDA GAP-certified.

Statewide Efforts

After observing the training program developed in northeast Iowa, ISU Extension staff in Ames secured a two-year competitive grant from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture to develop and implement a day-long GAP training program to launch across the state. Seven events were scheduled across Iowa between January 27 and February 10, 2011. The project included faculty and staff members from these ISU departments: Value Added Agriculture; Hotel, Restaurant, Institution Management; Food Science and Human Nutrition, and Horticulture. The course agenda and materials can be found here: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/HRIM/LocalFoods/From%20Farm%20to%20Foodservice.htm>

GAP workshops were held throughout Iowa during the 2012 winter season. Presenters included ISU Extension as well as experienced farmers.

On December 15, 2011, FamilyFarmed.org announced the development of an online On-Farm Food Safety Project at www.onfarmfoodsafety.org. This easy-to-use tool is available at no charge to users and has been developed to help small and mid-scale farmers create an on-farm

food safety plan. The tool is voluntary and enables produce growers to adopt and document best practices in food safety. In addition, the website includes educational information and resources on food safety.

Potential barriers:

- Offering training on a regular basis for producers because demand for this program is growing.
- Providing farmers regular updates on food safety issues.

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.11:

- Continue to offer annual GAP training for farmers across the state.
- Develop an interactive, online video for farmers to use in training their employees. Instruct county ISU Extension office staff on how to offer completion certificates for people who view the video.
- Develop a training program for youth as they produce food in school gardens and greenhouses for school lunch programs. Train ISU Extension staff on how to deliver the program.
- Develop an On-Farm Food Safety blog as a tool for farmers as they develop and implement their farm safety plans. The advantage of using the blog format over a conventional website is that farmers can subscribe to updates delivered by email. The blog also allows comments and feedback on the issues as they are posted. Update: In April, ISU Extension launched the Iowa GAP Center blog at <http://blogs.extension.iastate.edu/iowagap>.

3.12 Implement a pilot food safety audit cost-share program targeted at farms selling local and regional food to wholesale market venues that require audits.

Assessment of current state: More mid- and large-scale buyers of local fruits and vegetables require food safety audits of farms. The cost of these audits for small-scale farmers can be prohibitive and discourage farmers from expanding production to serve larger markets.

Currently, there are no USDA GAP auditors in the state. The additional travel time to bring auditors from outside Iowa adds to the cost of the audit. It is estimated that the cost of GAP audits of Iowa farms can range from \$600 to \$1,200.

A cost-share program would assist with the expense of food safety certification. Other states such as Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and New York have similar programs and will serve as models. A business/individual is eligible to apply for reimbursement as soon as their GAP/GHP audit has been approved. Applicants must fully complete the necessary application and be able to show verification of audit approval. Qualified applicants may receive funding for only one successful audit per calendar year. Applications will be accepted and approved on a first-come, first-serve basis.

The Northeast Iowa Food & Farm Coalition currently has a USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant (SCBG) to offer a GAP cost-share program to Iowa fruit and vegetable growers in the 2012 growing season. Growers may receive up to a maximum of \$300 per year to apply to the costs of one successful GAP or GHP audit. The program will help farmers maintain their certification, and

it will provide an incentive for new farmers considering certification.

The demand for local food continues to grow. Sysco of Iowa, a major food distributor, has indicated a willingness to purchase local food products if they can be GAP-certified. To demonstrate their commitment, Sysco partnered with the NIFF Coalition to host a meeting in August 2011 to discuss products they would like to purchase. More than 60 farmers attended the meeting.

Resources:

- Wisconsin GAP Cost-Share Program:
<http://datcp.wi.gov/OnFarmFoodSafety/GAPGHP/index.aspx>
- Pennsylvania GAP Cost-Share Program:
http://www.agriculture.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_2_24476_102_97_0_43/http%3B/10.41.0.77/AgWebsite/ProgramDetail.aspx?name=GAPGHPProgram-&navid=12&parentnavid=0&palid=89&
- New York GAP Cost-Share Program:
<http://www.agriculture.ny.gov/rfps/GAP/2012/2012-GAP-application.pdf>

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.12:

The GAP cost-share program will need to be supported by state or grant funds and a reliable funding stream for the future needs to be secured. Other states use their Specialty Crop Block grant funds to support their programs.

3.13 Increase outreach and availability of information regarding Iowa food regulations that involve selling food to hospitals, nursing homes, and educational institutions, and provide additional information on local retail, wholesale, and food service markets.

Assessment of current state: Both sellers and buyers of local food indicated in the Iowa Local Food and Farm Plan survey that they would like better access to information about Iowa food regulations when selling to an array of market venues.

A publication on state regulations related to different local foods is currently under final review by the Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals (DIA) and Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship. The publication was compiled by an intern at the Leopold Center and is based on similar publications from Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Angela Shaw is ISU Extension's new food safety specialist who hosted a series of webinars on the Food Safety Modernization Act in December 2011. Topics included general background on the act, implementation dates of specific rulings, description of fees assessment for failure to comply, and guidance on preparation of a food safety plan. She continues to lead workshops on GAP and developing on-farm food safety plans across the state.

The Iowa Food Safety Taskforce hosted a webinar on starting a fresh-cut light produce processing business on April 7, 2011. The archived webinar is available at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/HRIM/LocalFoods/From%20Farm%20to%20Foodservice.htm>

A series of publications on sourcing local food is available from ISU Extension. The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship issued a memo to clarify the use of local food

in hospitals and nursing homes. (April 2008)

http://www.iowafoodandfitness.org/uploads/PDF_File_1747062.pdf

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.13: It can be difficult to find resources related to local food regulations because they are located on several different websites. The consolidation and review of these resources would be an appropriate job for the task force identified in section 3.10. We also would suggest meetings for statewide collaboration to increase the diversity of voices and venues for stakeholder input.

3.14 Add local food producer to the State of Iowa Food Safety Task Force to ensure that local food producers have a voice in food safety issues.

Assessment of current state: This recommendation has been completed. At the Oct. 21, 2011 meeting, the Iowa Food Safety Task Force identified Jeanne Hansen from Hansen’s Dairy, Hudson, as a local food producer to serve on the committee.

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.14: Determine a service period (i.e. one year, two years) and identify a replacement if needed.

3.15 Provide a “train the trainers” course to educators within ISU Extension, Iowa community colleges, and other organizations working with local food producers, so these educators can increase their understanding of Iowa food safety regulations.

Assessment of current state: Local food producers and entrepreneurs often turn to their local ISU Extension educators and local food practitioners working with local nonprofit organizations, community colleges and private colleges for information about food safety. Ongoing training is needed to support these resource people.

There have been several training opportunities for resource people in Iowa.

- August 17, 2010. Six people attended a GAPs training by the USDA and Cornell University GAPS program in Fayette, Iowa.
- September 15-15, 2010. Seven people attended the Mid-Western Produce Safety Train-the-Trainer Workshop at the University of Nebraska Lincoln campus. The attendees represented ISU Extension, Iowa Crop Improvement Association, IDALS, Iowa Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association and National Center for Appropriate Technology.
- August 31, 2011: Fourteen people from across the state received training from a Food Safety Consultant to serve as food safety coaches for local producers. Nine of the attendees are serving as “food safety coaches” and will be visiting farms this winter to assist with self-audits and farm safety plans. The attendees represented local growers, a food distributor, ISU Extension, RC&D and a certified kitchen.
- At the state level, some of the horticulture specialists offering GAP training have received training in ServSafe or a similar curriculum.

Several new resources have been developed to assist agency staff with information related to food safety:

- The School Nutrition Foundation (SNF) in partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service’s Office of Food Safety offered a webinar on October 12, 2011 entitled “Applying Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) to

Farm-to-School and School Gardens.”

<http://www.schoolnutrition.org/Content.aspx?id=16087>

- Mock Third-Party Audit for GAPs Certification, video from North Carolina at: <http://ncsu.edu/enterprises/ncfreshproducesafety/2010/05/11/mock-third-party-audit-for-gaps-certification/>
- FamilyFarmed.org announced the development of an online On-Farm Food Safety Project at www.onfarmfoodsafety.org. This tool will be useful to educators as they assist farmers with food safety plans.
- The USDA has created a webpage with food safety resources for Farm to School. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/F2S/implementing/safety.htm>

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.15:

Develop ongoing training opportunities for food safety resource contacts. Training may include speaker fees from national food safety experts. Develop infrastructure to provide access to aggregation centers and encourage farmer clusters to decrease audit costs.

Next Steps for the Food Safety Section:

Regulatory:

- Scaled options of GAP-QA based on farm, i.e. food product, community gardens, farmers markets.
- Create lobbying presence for local food.
- One-crop audit vs. whole farm identify risky-ready to eat; establish levels of certification.

Information/resources:

- Establish statewide clearinghouse for information (website, blog, etc.) for producers, consumers, regulators/policymakers, and others.
- Retailer agreements.
- Don't pit conventional vs. local as "safer".
- Provide information regarding state border issues.
- Consumer safe practices.
- Steps of food safety scale.
- Food transparency – disclosure – social media – consumer tools to assist with choices.
- Making food safety information accepted and non-threatening—government regulatory agencies all have their own agenda and it may or may not address the whole process.

Section 4: Beginning, Minority and Transitioning Farmers

This section of the Iowa Local Food and Farm Plan had 4 recommendations.

3.16 Develop an educational program or cooperative agreement to train and provide additional services to beginning farmers and food entrepreneurs interested in local food production, processing, and/or marketing, ensuring that training and education for minority populations is culturally appropriate and easily accessible.

Assessment of current state: As the average age of Iowa's farmers rises, educational programming and resources are more important for beginning, minority and transitioning farmers. Although there are a number of programs and projects designed to assist beginning and minority farmers, in Iowa there is inadequate coordination and information sharing among these efforts. The lack of coordination creates a delay in accessing information for beginning and minority farmers.

Surveys completed by statewide partners such as ISU Extension, Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI), Iowa Bureau of Refugee Services, Iowa Valley Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) and the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) show there are many different programs that train or provide additional services to beginning farmers and food entrepreneurs about production and marketing but few about processing. Programs and training are being provided to women, Latino, Hmong, Southeast Asian, veterans, Amish and Mennonite groups, and many minority and transitioning populations are using the services. Many programs are offered in their native language, and publications in Spanish and some Hmong are available from the National Center for Appropriate Technology. Some workshops are available in person and online.

The ISU Beginning Farmer Center (BFC) coordinates and facilitates Ag Link each year. Ag Link is a four-day retreat for multi-generation farms focused on estate planning for family farms. The Beginning Farmer Center also coordinates the FarmOn Program, which works to match beginning and experienced farmers who are not part of a family farm or do not have a younger generation to take over the farm. The BFC reports success in working with Latino, Hmong, and Southeast Asian populations and veterans.

Practical Farmers of Iowa has developed a Next Generation program. The program consists of a savings incentive program, online seminars, a retreat and a Find a Farmer program. Find a Farmer is an online graphical interface for beginners to post their land needs, and landowners to post land opportunities. As a partner of Practical Farmers of Iowa, the Iowa Valley Resource Conservation & Development created a Local Food Producer Education and Training Program. This program consists of a series of classroom workshops for beginning farmers in eastern Iowa. As part of the partnership, PFI and the Iowa Valley RC&D developed a database of beginning farmers.

Grow Your Small Market Farm™ has expanded its business training programs to southwest and central Iowa with an annual class of graduates. Grow Your Small Market Farm™ is designed to help agricultural entrepreneurs with business tasks, including writing a business plan, developing financial planning skills and learning about specialty food marketing.

New programs also were developed in the past year. Iowa Lutheran Services and the Healthy Urban Food & Farming Working Group developed training programs for immigrant populations in Des Moines. Golden Hills RC&D is working with a community college in southwest Iowa to develop a 12-week, for-credit course for beginning farmers.

Iowa's programs for beginning and minority farmers have many strengths: programs are accessible in central, southwest and east central Iowa and available to many populations based on age, race, gender and experience.

Statewide partners have determined the following weaknesses: beginning farmers must travel long distances to attend classroom workshops and a majority of the programs are available in narrow geographic regions.

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.16: In order to complete recommendation 3.16, partners believe the following working groups and programs should be established:

- Develop an Iowa Beginning Farmer and Food Entrepreneur Working Group so that programs and services would be coordinated statewide. The working group should have representatives from Practical Farmers of Iowa, Iowa State University's Beginning Farmer Center, the Iowa League of Resource Conservation & Development groups, National Center for Appropriate Technology and the New Iowans Center, and meet regularly throughout the year to share information and challenges.
- Establish a low interest revolving loan program for Beginning, Transitioning and Minority Farmers and Food Entrepreneurs in Iowa.
- Make programs more visible.
- Coaches to provide information and encouragement and a clearinghouse of individual consultants to serve beginning farmers information needs
- Survey available resources (land, small and large landowners) and programs to determine what works and to determine minority individuals' needs
- Statewide program to provide range of services for beginners.
- Educator training – cultural awareness
- Networking older and beginning farmers – there needs to be more programs and possible starting points would be the Iowa Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association conference and Women Food and Agriculture Network "Harvesting Our Potential" – two programs that are already in place.
- Help women landowners meet their goals and connect with beginners (Women Food and Agriculture Network/Practical Farmers of Iowa program – Women Transitioning the Land).

3.17 Develop a local/regional food training course for growers and entrepreneurs who wish to work with other Iowa local food farmers and/or brokers to aggregate supply for sale to larger volume buyers.

Assessment of current state: As local food demand continues to grow exponentially, supply must follow. Iowa farmers and local food professionals have realized that supply is not keeping pace with demand. The distribution and aggregation networks are reasonable solutions to increase access to local food supply. In order to scale up the food system, it is important that farm enterprises produce the volume required by institutions, schools and distributors or contribute their supply through aggregation.

Surveys and listening sessions revealed that Iowa local food producers and local food practitioners perceived that many of the existing farmer-led aggregation and distribution models were not robust enough to readily expand to provide larger volumes of products.

Training for growers and entrepreneurs was identified as important to be able to create new and expand existing Iowa local food distribution and aggregation businesses.

There are currently no training courses for growers and entrepreneurs in Iowa based on aggregation business models.

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.17: Establish the following trainings and resources:

- Develop a resource manual for growers and entrepreneurs with case studies of the successes and challenges of aggregation and distribution businesses.
- Organize and conduct five informational sessions for Iowa growers about aggregation and distribution.
- Develop a curriculum for an Aggregation Business School Workshop to be conducted in each quadrant of the state. A business workshop for growers and entrepreneurs would cover business/legal basics, vendor compliance, standard operating procedures, record keeping, book keeping, certifications, and lending options; not just loans, but also other capital/growth options, better production baseline data for business planning, marketing information.
- Incubator and/or pilot incubator program for farmers.
- Need local food brokers sited regionally within Iowa.

3.18 Develop a workshop to train local food producers and food entrepreneurs to recruit, manage, and optimize labor within their operations to the mutual benefit of laborers and farmers.

Assessment of current state: Scaling up our food system to meet larger volume needs will require farm enterprises to hire and manage new employees to meet labor needs. Access to and management of labor were identified as serious challenges for local food producers who want to diversify or scale up their farming operations. Farmers need to better understand how to recruit and manage labor for the mutual benefit of the farmer and farm worker.

Many available resources are directed toward farm workers rather than the local farmer. The National Center for Appropriate Technology has a guide about Iowa farm labor laws. Iowa Workforce Development has a migrant and seasonal farm worker program, and Proteus provides farm worker health and job training in the state. Partners have concluded that many of the migrant and seasonal farm workers are not accessing these local food employment opportunities.

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.18:

- Develop a curriculum for a Farm Labor Management Training workshop to be conducted with Iowa Workforce Development in each quadrant of the state. The workshop would cover taxes and payroll, planning on-farm duties, personnel financial management and opportunities and resources for farm workers in sustainable agriculture.
- Conduct information sessions for Iowa labor force agencies and organizations on employment opportunities in Iowa's local food system. Stakeholders would include Iowa Workforce Development, the New Iowans Center and Small Business Centers.

3.19 Develop sample contracts/production agreements relevant to local food sales to wholesale and institutional markets.

Assessment of current state: Local food producers, particularly fruit and vegetable growers, want assurances from buyers that if they produce a high-quality product in the quantity desired, they will be able to sell that product. Contracts can provide those assurances. Many local farmers have not participated in formal contracts and need more information about how these contracts typically are structured. Along with farmers, institutions and businesses that are just beginning to purchase local food need sample contracts to include in their procurement procedures.

Sample contracts and production agreements were collected from a variety of food buyers that currently purchase local foods. Sample documents were collected from New Pioneer Food Coop, Hy-Vee, Luther College, Iowa State University, and Local Harvest Supply. Permission has been granted to use and modify these documents and organize by category (institutions vary in procurement procedures). In addition to production agreements, many institutions require growers to complete some form of a food safety checklist. Many Iowa school districts that have Farm to School chapters use the ISU Food Safety Checklist. School food directors also pointed out that the state required bidding procedures are not conducive to supporting local food from Iowa growers.

To develop sustainable procurement procedures for Iowa Farm to School programs, the Iowa Valley RC&D in conjunction with regional farm to school chapters in eastern Iowa will develop an online toolkit for Iowa farm to school programs in 2012-2013. This replicable toolkit will feature sample school food procurement resources and an online portal for schools and growers to submit and reply to bids.

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.19: Develop a series of sample production agreements/contracts using the samples that were collected as part of this assessment. The Drake Ag Law Center is a logical leader for the task.

Next Steps for the Beginning, Minority and Transitioning Farmers Section:

Information/resources:

- Clearinghouse of information – legal, financial, land (i.e. purchase agreements/contracts).
- Social learning networks (potlucks).
- Community involvement.
- Access to all information in one place.
- More coordination/communication.

Regulatory:

- Legislation to provide funds for programs (check-off).

Finance:

- Seek out philanthropists and investors to help beginning farmers access land.

Infrastructure/risk management:

- Need crop insurance/food system infrastructure.

Education:

- Need to find best ways to reach out to minorities, including women.

Section 5: Assessing Progress

This section of the Iowa Local Food and Farm Plan had 7 recommendations.

3.20 Create a subcommittee of the Local Food and Farm Advisory Board, chaired by the local food state coordinator, to oversee the collection of local food data critical to tracking growth of the local food business sector in Iowa.*

Assessment of current state: Currently no subcommittee has been established to oversee data collection and track growth of local food businesses. Several institutions and groups are collecting data but not in a uniform manner. Coordination and collaboration with these institutions and groups will be critical to assessing progress. Research conducted by leaders in this field such as Dave Swenson (ISU Economics), Ken Meter (Crossroads Center, private consultant) and numerous national studies shows that local food enterprises can contribute significantly to local and regional economies with meaningful impact in Iowa's state economy – producing jobs, increasing profits, and reinvesting state dollars in our communities. Assessing progress and providing benchmark data on local food commerce is an essential evaluation tool in illustrating such impacts.

Important members to serve as collaborators would include 1) economists, 2) economic development professionals, 3) evaluation specialists, and 4) local food professionals already experienced in collecting such data.

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.20:

- Legislative support and action to form a subcommittee and fund recommendation.
- Appoint subcommittee comprised of specialists indicated above.
- Subcommittee development of a uniform measurement tool to track local food data and business growth.
- Subcontract data collection and tracking to Regional Food Systems Working Groups, 16 of which are strategically dispersed around the state.
- Work with State Data Center to ensure data collection is consistent with existing state data collection methods.

3.21 The state local food coordinator shall, starting in fiscal year 2012, conduct a recurring survey of state agencies and state-funded educational institutions to track the purchases of Iowa grown foods.*

Assessment of current state: Despite many state agencies having the ability to codify expenses and purchases according to dedicated object codes specific to the type of procurement, only a small number of state agencies currently are tracking local food purchases. Of those tracking

local food purchases, most are using informal methods such as an internally-created spreadsheets with totals entered manually. There is no evidence that a uniform method is employed across the state.

As such, it would seem tracking state agency purchases of Iowa-grown foods would involve the following: 1) a state-mandated addition of object codes dedicated to local food purchases by all state agencies, 2) development of a reporting system to aggregate totals annually, and 3) funding for staff to oversee program.

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.21:

- Legislative action and support to implement and fund recommendation.
- State-mandated addition of an object code to agencies' existing system that is dedicated to local food purchases.
- Development of a reporting system to aggregate totals annually.
- Funding of staff to oversee implementation and reporting responsibilities (this could likely be rolled into an existing part-time position).
- Partner with schools to provide data.
- Encouraging use of more local food indicators in public health tools.
- Better use of partners – development of good working relationships in order to build trust when sharing information and dealing with issues like proprietary data and agency specific/territorial mindsets.

3.22 Conduct a comprehensive survey of Iowa producers of edible horticultural food crops, including production and marketing activities.

Assessment of current state: Several organizations now survey producers of edible horticultural food crops, though not in any consistent or collaborative manner. The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) conducts various surveys of producers related to specific IDALS programming. Many of the surveys are voluntary and self-reported by the producers as part of marketing via directories or registry services offered by the department. These niche directories (e.g., Farm Stand Directory, Sensitive Crops Directory, Farm to School Directory, Fruit and Vegetable Growers Directory, Organic Producers Directory, et. al.) collect considerable, relevant data on Iowa producers, but are not uniform or synthesized.

Realizing the need for a uniform survey of Iowa's edible horticultural food crop producers, the Iowa League of Resource, Conservation and Development (RC&D) recently received USDA-RCDI funding for a program titled "Building Local Food Capacity in Iowa." One outcome attached to this funding stream is a statewide survey of Iowa food producers via 10 regional efforts in the state. Coordinators of these groups have worked together to develop a uniform survey of food producers in Iowa. It has been widely distributed and results are being collected in a consistent and meaningful way. Future plans include collating each group's survey results to produce a statewide clearinghouse of this information. Recent efforts also have included working collaboratively with IDALS to synthesize survey results.

Potential barriers: The only barrier to implementing this recommendation is funding related to the continuation and maintenance of current survey efforts. The RCDI funding stream likely will not be renewed, which would result in the termination of the survey project.

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.22:

- Encourage collaboration and partnership among Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship and Rural Community Development Initiative project participants, facilitated by the Iowa League of Resource Conservation & Development.
- Fund continuation of survey project via subcontracts with Resource Conservation & Development participant groups.

3.23 Research data collected in other states, and, in collaboration with appropriate Iowa organizations and agencies, survey Iowa producers to determine the labor skills needs of fruit and vegetable producers and processors at various stages of the production and processing cycles.

Assessment of current state: Despite several surveys and information-gathering sessions that indicate the lack of data about labor skills needed for fruit/vegetable production and processing, no such comprehensive survey has been done. Food production, processing, and marketing can be successful business ventures when accurately capitalized on slim profit margins, but every opportunity for efficiency must be seized. According to published work by agricultural researchers, food producers are busy implementing the latest technologies and processes and labor skills must keep pace with emerging production practices.

In addition, the average age of Iowa's farmer is increasing steadily while new populations of Iowans (some of whom come from countries with strong agricultural values and relevant labor skills) are calling our state home. Both circumstances will significantly change the landscape of farming and labor.

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.23:

- Contract work to a project team, likely including Iowa State University Extension, Iowa Workforce Development, New Iowans Center and Practical Farmers of Iowa.
- Project team creates and implements a work plan that includes survey development, distribution and analysis.
- Use survey results as a catalyst for the creation of jobs and certificate training programs at community colleges and other workforce development entities.

3.24 Survey capacity of existing food production and aggregation centers, distribution, storage and processing facilities in the state.

Assessment of current state: Several organizations or food systems work groups have conducted regional assessments of infrastructure necessary for aggregation centers, such as distribution, storage and processing, or they have amassed this information through food systems mapping exercises. Despite these isolated instances, there has been no statewide assessment of capacity for food production to be aggregated in centers for distribution, storage and processing. Additionally, these efforts have not included mapping professionals with GIS expertise or organizations with experience in transportation and distribution systems.

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.24:

- Contract work to a project team, including those with experience in food storage, transportation, local food asset mapping and GIS technology.
- Initiate a project team to create and implement a work plan including survey development, distribution and analysis, resulting in site locations that would benefit from and support an aggregation center.
- Use survey results as a catalyst for working with entrepreneurs, economic development professionals, bankers, and funders to appropriately fund and support aggregation centers.
- Determine existing resources for data collection – identify consistent parameters.
- Better coordination and communication among collaborating organizations and efforts.
- Determine capacity in Iowa.
- Identify a point group to aggregate information.
- Community of practice training for data collection.

3.25 Provide an updated list of consultants who offer technical assistance to local food businesses.

Assessment of current state: The Leopold Center published an update of its guide, *Learning about Local: A Resource Guide to Iowa Organizations and Programs Supporting Local and Regional Food Systems*, in 2011, which sets the stage for an updated and expanded resource featuring technical assistance providers for local food businesses. The publication lists 85 resource or technical assistance providers, along with each provider’s information under the following categories:

- Mission or goal
- Type of work
- Topical category
- Geographic location
- Program examples
- Contact information
- Keywords
- Audience

Learning about Local was designed and published for use as a printed-copy manual; it is somewhat limited in user accessibility, efficient maintenance, reproduction, and self-registration by providers. However, the data set used in the resource provides a good foundation for a recommendation to develop an interactive, online database for resources and technical assistance in local food systems.

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.25:

- Contract work to a project coordinator to implement work plan.
- Work plan should include consulting with information systems professional to design an interactive and accessible database for online use, according to foundation provided by *Learning about Local*.
- Update existing resource listings, and solicit new providers through outreach via existing local food networks.
- Launch interactive resource website, accompanied by the availability of information

downloadable in a printable (PDF) format, for those who prefer it.

3.26 Request the Iowa Insurance Division convene an ad hoc committee of appropriate Iowa state agencies, local food producers, and insurance providers to provide more information regarding options of liability policy coverage for local food producers selling to buyers that require liability insurance.

Assessment of current state: National food safety concerns have been heightened due to food-borne illness related to recalls associated with large commercial farm operations.

As a result, more retailers and institutions are beginning to require proof of liability coverage from producers. Many buyers request a minimum of \$1 to \$5 million of liability coverage from local producers, which can greatly limit market access because such policies are difficult and expensive to obtain.

This issue is highlighted in a recent report by Kristen Markley and the Community Food Security Coalition, *Food Safety and Liability Insurance – Emerging Issues for Farmers and Institutions*. In it, Markley recommends: “Given the success of state or regionally based non-profit growers’ organizations in working with this population of farmers, partner with these organizations in developing resources, programs and solutions (to increase outreach for local producer liability options)”, (find this publication on the Community Food Security Coalition website at: http://www.foodsecurity.org/pub/Food_Safety_and_Liability_Ins-EmergingIssues.pdf).

Fortunately, Iowa has numerous well-established networks of growers’ organizations that provide a sound infrastructure for developing relevant solutions and outreach. They include the Iowa Fruit and Vegetable Growers’ Association, Iowa State University Extension, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Practical Farmers of Iowa and the Regional Food Systems Working Group.

Potential barriers: The major barrier to implementing this recommendation is funding for staff time to amass existing resources and provide outreach. There are obvious opportunities for improved efficiencies and cost-share opportunities if this recommendation is funded and supported in conjunction with recommendations 3.10-15 in the Food Safety section.

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.26:

- Develop resource manual of existing liability options and policies for Iowa producers.
- Distribute manual widely via existing infrastructure channels referenced above to reach producers.
- Distribute manual widely to other professional organizations providing technical assistance to food producers, such as Small Business Development Centers or Beginning Farmer Incubator programs.

Next Steps for the Assessing Progress Section:

Methodology: Working groups/information hub/regulatory policy

- Integrating ecological perspective (behavior changes measured) – hunger, kids behavior in schools, rain barrels.
- Qualitative measurements.

- State data library.
- Federal Nutrition Program dollars – data already there.
- CHNA-HIP (Community Health Needs Assessment and Health Improvement Plan) – Iowa Department of Public Health – Community Transformation Grants.
- Consistent methodology and language.
- Cultivating Resilience – making connections with other sectors.
- Iowa Food System Council – Specialty Crop Block Grant – kitchen survey.
- Localized data/visualizing data.
- Coordinate lobbying/advocacy capacity among groups.
- Funding, especially for local food coordinator positions.
- Defining a dollar amount for FTE of local food coordinators.
- Mobilize advocacy campaign – legislative action.
- Vision/outcomes for Iowa local food and farm plan – better articulated.
- Determine capacity in Iowa.
- Identify a point group to aggregate information.
- Community of practice for data collection.
- Encouraging more local food indicators in public health tools.

Section 6: Local Foods Incentive

This section of the Iowa Local Food and Farm Plan had 3 recommendations.

3.27 Implement a one-year pilot reimbursement program in 2012 or 2013 for five K-12 schools to provide an additional 10 cents for each school lunch that offers Iowa-grown fruits and vegetables.

Assessment of current state: Over the past three months, information has been collected from Tammy Stotts at IDALS and several of the RFSWG local food coordinators. A survey was sent through several Department of Education newsletters, by Ann Feilmann. Hopefully, after sorting the data, there will be a more accurate and complete picture of the statewide use of local food in Farm to School programs or events. According to the Northeast Iowa Food & Fitness Initiative report, there are currently 16 schools using local food. The total dollar amount for the 2010-11 school year, by the public schools, was \$14,030. The amounts purchased by schools are still small in comparison to the money they spend on food. However, more schools have school gardens and are report that they are using more produce from the gardens.

Statewide, there are 15 Farm to School Chapters, administrated through the IDALS program. The other Farm to School initiatives through IDALS include: A is for Apple and Wrap Your Own Iowa Grown. Since 2008, 5,832 students have participated in the A is for Apple program and 10,663 students have participated in Wrap Your Own Iowa Grown.

There appears to be widespread use of local food in schools throughout Iowa, although it is often on an occasional rather than a regular basis. And, there is still an absence of a formal database that stores this statewide information.

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.27:

- Provide data to Grinnell student group for a comprehensive mapping project to show the location of schools using local food.
- Offer incentives or grants for kitchen renovation and staff training.
- Partner with Iowa School Nutrition Association on the benefits of Farm to School.
- Work with Iowa Department of Education on data collection on food procurement.
- Central point of contact for resources to promote advocacy and support local food, to provide a list of experts, and menus.
- Help farmers know true cost of production so they can price accordingly.
- Centralized data collection.
- Getting info to schools, e.g. FoodCorps model.
- Recognition for schools/institutions that use local, e.g. World Food Prize.
- Show the program can be profitable. Quantify dollars from local producers that stay within the community. Measure job creation.
- Develop a template that can consider variables regarding local food sales and purchases. Identify products that can be profitable and a process that would be efficient to make information available quickly, i.e., database. The actual template should be integrated into the process.
- Local Food Summits – producers meet with buyers (speed dating).
- Intergenerational learning (school garden day).
- Set up partnerships among growers to sell to larger institutions, and to get training.
- Improve connection from garden to kitchen to table to compost.
- Build on Best Practices.
- Community pressure for Farm to School.
- Communication – success stories, lessons learned, promising practices.
- Find best Farm to School practices and pass along info that's creating success. One mid-range goal could be: in 3 years half the Iowa school districts would spend 5-10 percent of food budget on local and across the board use 3 percent local produce. In 3 years, half the Iowa school districts will be processing local food. In 3 years, half will have a garden. This will create healthier kids and communities. Have benchmarks and indicators.
- Parent education curriculum.

3.28 Implement a one-year pilot reimbursement program in 2012 or 2013 for five Iowa nursing homes, care centers, or assisted living facilities to receive \$5 for every \$100 of locally-grown fruits and vegetables purchased.

Assessment of current state: Several surveys have been sent, including one to dietitians within the healthcare system and to the Iowa Hospital Association, through their newsletter. Several responses, from the dietitians, have been received. Of the 40 responses, 60 percent of the healthcare institutions use local food. They report using local items mostly for special occasions, but a small number are able to utilize it on a daily or weekly basis.

The Iowa Hospital Association article, with the link to the survey, has not yet been sent. Additional information should be available in future reports.

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.28:

- Promotional material to “sell” health care institutions on the value of local foods.

3.29 Add a local foods component into one of the seven existing dimensions of the Iowa Great Places Program.

Assessment of current state: A meeting request has been submitted to Chris Kramer and Sarah Murphy, who oversees the program.

Recommended strategies to complete Recommendation 3.29: No recommended strategies at this time.

Next Steps for the Local Food Incentives Section:**Infrastructure:**

- Infrastructure – there is a need for policy and funding options to support local food system development.
- Set up partnerships between growers (food hub/aggregation centers) to provide adequate capacity. This also creates a social relationship between growers and institutions and could provide political power for farmers and local food supporters.

Capacity building:

- Find five to six key leaders in each community/school/institution.
- Networking/Coordination.
- Hire staff for each Regional Food System Working Group who can establish relationships between producers and buyers with goals of doubling consumption.
 - a. Roles: education regarding geographic preference; help with bid process; hold stakeholder meetings; communicate what’s happening; coordinate school gardens; identify less expensive products.

Regulatory:

- Mandate organizations to buy a certain percentage of local.
- More district money for school meals.
- Subsidies for local food.
- Make wellness policies and implementation mandatory.

Marketing:

- Drive demand for local branding.

Concluding Remarks

The Iowa Local Food and Farm Plan outlined 29 original recommendations to further development of Iowa’s local food system. Progress has been made on many of these recommendations by a diverse set of government agencies, NGOs, individual consultants, farmers, and others. Further development is likely as a result of these activities by these groups and individuals. It our contention, however, that if work and funding is focused on three primary

objectives over the course of the next year, substantial progress can be made. For this reason, we propose to work on the following three sections of the Iowa Local Food and Farm Plan.

- Business Development/Financial Assistance
- Beginning, Transitioning and Minority Farmers
- Food Incentives, particularly Farm to School

Additionally, as a result of the discussion at the Iowa Local Food Summit, one objective that was mentioned universally was the need for a central hub of information. To that end, we anticipate developing a website, blog, and other tools, in conjunction with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.

No proposed funding amount is needed for this objective. Information hub development is an objective of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and will be accomplished by January 2013.

The frequently identified need for scaling up production, aggregation of production, and meeting demands for non-direct marketing sources leads us to focus on food hub development. Several grant projects have started looking at this work.

Proposed funding of \$60,000 would provide match dollars or partnership incentive dollars to implement programs with NGOs and other organizations involved in this work. Four projects with funding of up to \$15,000 would be started.

Development of beginning farmers was a commonly identified next step. Incubator farms, mentoring programs, and processing kitchens can benefit beginning, minority and transitioning farmers.

Proposed funding of \$40,000 would provide dollars needed to implement partner programs with NGOs and other organizations involved in this work. Four projects with funding of up to \$10,000 would be started.

Farm to school and school garden programs have been cited as providing many benefits by a wide variety of groups and individuals. One of the recently funded projects shows great promise by developing a template that can be utilized statewide. Additional funding would allow more schools to implement their own school farm to school and/or school garden program.

Proposed funding of \$50,000 would provide start-up funding of \$10,000 per school which is approximately one-half of what is needed for these programs. The school would be required to provide a 50 percent match.

Total proposed funding needed through grant funds, existing funds, or legislative sources for the next fiscal year for all three objectives would total \$150,000. This amount would be needed in addition to the Local Food and Farm Initiative administrative cost of \$75,000.

The Program Team

Andy Larson – business development/financial assistance

Andy is a program specialist in Small Farm Sustainability for ISU Extension and Outreach, where he works with small farmers and acreage owners in their pursuit of a sustainable living and a sustainable lifestyle. He also coordinates the SARE Professional Development Program in Iowa, which supports continuing education and advancement opportunities for key sustainable agriculture educators. He earned an MBA with a minor in Sustainable Agriculture from Iowa State, and an MS in Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences from the University of Illinois. Andy grew up on his family's dairy and grain farm in northwestern Illinois.

Nick McCann – food processing

Nick has an MBA in Operations Management and an MS in Sustainable Agriculture from ISU, where he also was a graduate research assistant for the Leopold Center Marketing and Food Systems Initiative. Nick previously has worked in agricultural production, processing and marketing in both domestic and international markets. His research and practical interest is working with small and midsize agricultural businesses to improve profitability, return on investment and cash flow. He currently works as the Region 4 Food Value Chain Coordinator for ISU Extension.

Teresa Wiemerslage – food safety

Teresa is the Program and Communications Coordinator for ISU Extension and Outreach in northeast Iowa. She coordinates the work of the Northeast Iowa Food & Farm Coalition (NIFF), including its Farm to School Chapter. She holds degrees in biology from South Dakota State University and plant pathology from Iowa State University, and lives on a fourth generation cow-calf operation along the Minnesota border where they finish 180 head of natural beef annually.

Jason Grimm – beginning, transitioning and minority farmers

Jason is the Food System Planner for Iowa Valley RC&D. Jason has degrees in landscape architecture and environmental studies from ISU, with an emphasis in regional and urban food system design and planning. Jason and his wife live in Coralville where they practice urban agriculture in their yard and work on their family's small diversified farm south of Williamsburg, raising corn, alfalfa, small grains, black beans, produce, beef and poultry.

Andrea Geary – assessing programs

Andrea is the Local Food Program Manager at the University of Northern Iowa's Center for Energy and Environmental Education. She currently serves as Iowa's state coordinator for Buy Fresh Buy Local, co-leads the Midwest Region of the National Farm to School Network, and coordinates the Northern Iowa Food & Farm Partnership. Andrea completed her undergraduate degree at the University of Iowa in 2001, and owned and operated a scratch bakery using local foods from 2004 to 2007. In her spare time, she enjoys being led on adventures by her two young daughters, outdoor activities, reading, and growing and preserving food.

Lynn Heuss – local food incentives

Lynn 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, and recently was elected to serve on the board of the Tallgrass Cooperative Grocery. In her spare time she enjoys gardening, biking, reading, food preservation, and taking care of her backyard chickens. She has three children, two graduated from Iowa State and one currently at DMACC.

Craig Chase – local food and farm program state coordinator

Craig, in addition to being the state coordinator, is currently the interim program leader for the Marketing and Food Systems Initiative for the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, and a farm management specialist for Iowa State University Extension and Outreach focusing on local food system development and alternative enterprise analysis. Craig has been devoting more time and energy to food systems and fruit and vegetable profitability from a producer viewpoint since 2004.

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**, local food industry (Northeast Iowa Food and Farm Coalition),
- **Andrea Geary**, Regional Food Systems Working Group, and
- **Barb Ristau**, Iowa Farmers Market Association.

The Council will take a more prominent role in advising how to move forward the Program specifically, and the further development of the Iowa local food system in general.