Engaging community planners and local elected officials with local food systems producers to integrate local food systems into community plans and policies

Abstract:
Researchers examined three key obstacles to making progress in local food systems from a planning and land use perspective that could be handled by applying community planning tactics.

What was done and why?
Local food production is an economic, health and cultural asset to communities and increasingly is seen as an indicator of resilience in areas hit by economic decline. The demand for locally grown food is currently greater than local market farmers can supply. From discussions at the Town/Craft Food Systems Roundtable held in Perry, Iowa on August 12 and 13, 2009, it became clear that there is a need to engage city, county and regional planners in discussions with those who are involved with various aspects of local food systems. Currently, relatively few community planners in Iowa are deeply involved in the local foods area, and they could aid in the development of local food systems.

The project objectives were to:

1. Advance the understanding of local foods stakeholders, community planners and elected officials of the barriers, opportunities and strategies for the integration of local food systems into the plans and policies of local governments.
2. Identify and document examples of community comprehensive plans from around the United States that include policies, plans and ordinances that address local food systems and/or local food production, food processing, farmers’ markets, community gardens, urban gardens and farm-to-market issues.
3. Using the information developed in the previous steps, develop and disseminate local policy guidelines and an Extension publication to inform city and county planners, local policy makers and local food producers on resources and strategies to promote the adoption and/or expansion of local food systems in more communities across Iowa.

What did we learn?
This project brought together—some for the first time—community planners, local elected officials, local growers, farmers’ markets leaders, food distribution and aggregation business leaders and food policy council members. As a result of this project, the authors anticipate that more city planners and local elected officials will consider the potential benefits of local food systems.