Update of the Iowa Produce Market Potential Calculator website

Capacity should be determined by market demand, but driven by location-specific goals and leadership. However, due to the many evolving transportation-related costs, minimizing distance to market is likely to become a central priority of marketing strategy for all farming platforms. The tool developed by this project is intended to focus all participants on minimizing transportation dependency.

What was done and why?

The purpose of the project was to update the Iowa Produce Market Potential Calculator, an online tool developed as a part of previous work sponsored by the Leopold Center.

Project objectives were to:
• Update technical content to reflect more recent data,
• Redesign the visual format,
• Add geographic selection and other analytical functions,
• Introduce the finished tool to practitioners,
• Develop a “how to” guide to help others develop similar tools for other states, and
• Summarize activities and responses in a final report.

What did we learn?

• Farmers can use it to target a specific market to develop. For example, it could be used to determine how many pounds of a product are needed during a three-month growing season to supply all of the high schools located within a 30-mile region. By targeting a particular market share from the total, and adjusting a few variables, the tool can quickly identify how many acres are needed, how much storage space, and how many truckloads per day should be expected. Cost and revenue assumptions can be applied quickly to each type of measure.
• Food policy councils, nonprofit organizations, researchers and economic development groups can use it to examine the effects of policy decisions on a specific region. Information can be used to target or acquire resources for research and education, or to assess impacts on changes in food availability, diet or marketing.
• Third-party service businesses, such as suppliers and marketing firms, can use the tool to identify support systems that might be needed, such as warehouses, processing plants, local trucking fleets and other shared infrastructure.
• Transportation officials, municipal and regional planners, and other public works agencies can use the market planner to estimate the impact of local food systems on roads and other infrastructure, or on future mandates to reduce fuel dependency and global or local emissions.