Abstract: Efforts by a group of southeast Iowa producers to create an aggregated marketing organization yielded mixed results.

What would it take to form a group of producers who might act as one? It would take a legal structure that every member bought into, an efficient mode of marketing and selling that covered transportation costs in the food mark-up, a group of like-minded individuals who really wanted (or needed) to make the project work and an administrator who was a creative problem-solver and sufficiently dedicated to the project.

What was done and why?

In Good Company began through the networking and cooperation of several southeast Iowa farms in order to create more market opportunities for their farm enterprises. The project started with a group query into the different structures and forms that a business entity may use to incorporate, explored how to choose and form a legal structure that will best suit the group, considered the formation of bylaws and Articles of Incorporation, and was intended to culminate with the submission of papers and Articles to the State of Iowa for legal incorporation of the group.

What did we learn?

There were many challenges for the Pathfinders RC&D in 2011. In April, there was a significant change in funding of the office as a whole. Many conversations occurred with the local alliance members about the structure of the group. Business leadership ideas were brought to the group, and there seemed to be disagreement about financial buy-ins and partnerships. Trust never was established among the group’s members.

The 2011 summer/fall negotiations about the structure and leadership of the group ended with the loss of the local food coordinator. The group took a break from meeting until the new coordinator was in place in October. Within the scope of this grant there was a group trip in January 2012 to visit another growing group and learn from the structures that they have in place. The group learned a great deal about the SWOTs process from Johnice Cross of Decorah’s GROWN Locally. The Luther College food service providers—who purchase 20 percent of their food locally—inspired the group. They also visited a CSA grower in Calmar who gave them a tour of her four hoop houses for producing crops.

There are currently no farms interested in continuing the alliance. Other ways of increasing the availability of local food in southeast Iowa are being explored. Each of the producers learned about their options and some will continue to work together on an informal basis.