Planning grant for the establishment of a food enterprise center

Abstract: An assessment of community resources to support the development of a food enterprise center (FEC) or food hub was completed through planning meetings with community stakeholders. Local farmers and food businesses were surveyed and interviewed to determine their interest in the services of a food hub and FEC.

What was done and why?

The project sought to determine the level of community interest in creating a food enterprise center (FEC) and/or food hub to serve Johnson and Linn County food entrepreneurs and local farmers. The project investigators studied selected FECs and food hubs around the country shown to have had a demonstrated impact on the expansion of local food use in their communities. Project investigators used these organizations as models in networking and education sessions with area farmers, food entrepreneurs and businesses, and government and economic development leaders.

The project leaders wanted to examine the partnership potential and specific roles that local organizations and institutions might take in the development of a full feasibility study for a FEC or food hub in the area.

What did we learn?

Recommendations

Further needs assessment and customer discovery should be undertaken by increasing and diversifying the survey contact list to include additional area food processors, food entrepreneurs, caterers, mobile food vendors and farmers selling into secondary markets. Large local buyers and community resource groups that did not attend the stakeholder meeting (Hy-Vee, Kirkwood Community College, Public Health Services, for example) need to be brought into the process.

Three possible models should be further researched and developed.

1. Create a food enterprise tool kit to make use of existing resources.
2. Develop a food hub business model and feasibility analysis.
3. Develop a FEC community kitchen model and feasibility study.