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# Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit

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## **Abstract**

Community agriculture and food systems offers many inviting opportunities for communities of varying sizes. This project engaged in efforts to increase and enhance local food options in three Iowa communities.

## **Keywords**

community-based food systems, food pathways, food systems

## **Disciplines**

Agribusiness | Agricultural and Resource Economics | Entrepreneurial and Small Business Operations |  
Urban Studies and Planning



# Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit, Year 1

## Abstract:

Community agriculture and food systems offers many inviting opportunities for communities of varying sizes. This project engaged in efforts to increase and enhance local food options in three Iowa communities.

## Principal Investigator:

**Nadia Anderson**

## Co-investigators:

**Carl Rogers**

**Courtney Long**

Community Design Lab  
and ISUE  
Iowa State University

## Budget:

\$24,950 for year one

**Q** What process can communities use to develop holistic food systems?

**A** The Iowa State University Community Design Lab worked with three Iowa communities to help them devise their own blueprints for creating healthy, sustainable local food systems.

## Background

Using funds for this project, the ISU Community Design Lab (CDL) sought to create an Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit that would help communities establish their own local food systems. The Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit is a phased approach to building local food systems with community partners. The project focused on building coalitions within communities and developing trust and inclusive partnerships to encourage and create momentum around food systems efforts. In the first year (2014), CDL partnered with Cedar Rapids, Cresco and Des Moines to develop a transferable process for local food system design. During this pilot year, each community went through the same process, and determined different place-based priority projects that related to their community.

This project's primary objective is to create a transferable process for communities of all sizes (rural, suburban, metro, urban) to create sustainable, place-based food systems. Originally, the project was conceived as a one- to two-year process with the first year focusing on assessment and conceptual design and the second year moving into implementation of priority project designs.

The first year (as outlined in this project) focused on coalition development and assessment of existing conditions within the food system, culminating in the selection of priority projects (tactics). The second and third years will focus on the development and design of these projects and further coalition development. This process is flexible, and is intended to meet communities where they are in terms of readiness for food system development, allowing for more or less time as needed. This maintains and enhances the overall objective of the Toolkit, to increase the number of communities that can simultaneously participate in the Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit process and help their food systems evolve.

## Approach and methods

Original plans for the first year of the project were to:

1. Identify partner communities to participate in research and design development of the toolkit process
2. Conduct literature and case study reviews of best practices and tactics in agricultural urbanism



**MARKETING**



Annual meeting. (Photo courtesy ISU College of Design Communications)

- Showcase key strategies and differences within existing systems
  - Publish best practices booklet (ISU Extension, spring 2015, <https://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/Agricultural-Urbanism-Toolkit>) and create posters for community input session in communities
3. Map and document existing food system opportunities and gaps (including programs and built infrastructure)
    - Document topics determined through public meetings
    - Document locally verified information through steering committee meetings
  4. Host public input sessions in communities and determine appropriate best practices for implementation
    - Evaluate best practices based on community needs/desires, access, feasibility, impact, cost, and time
  5. Identify priority tactics for design and eventual implementation\*
    - Use tactic ideas to identify priority project types and locations
    - Identify projects associated short-, medium-, and long-term goals and low, medium, and high impacts
  6. Annual event for community participants and general outreach about program.

\* Please note that in the original grant proposal item 5 was folded into conceptual design to be completed in the first year. Based on the team's experiences, the first year now culminates with the identification of priority projects for design and implementation to occur during the second and third year of the process.

## Results and discussion

While all project objectives were achieved, the Community Design Lab found that additional time was needed to build trust in communities before beginning the conceptual design of food systems projects. During the first portion of community capacity building and literature review, CDL and the lead contact in the community interviewed key stakeholders that represented best management practices in each community. This process brought new partners to the table, generated discussion around the existing best practices within the community, and bridged gaps between sectors of the food system.

Due to this finding and change in the initial process, the CDL proposed a continuation of the Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit grant for 2015-2016. This allows the original one- to two-year process to become a three-year process with more focus on coalition development during the first year.

*Coalition findings:* Cedar Rapids and Cresco both continued with their original coalition and moved directly into prioritized tactics by the end of Year One (see Recommendations section). Des Moines discussed adding additional steering committee members and CDL assisted by assembling additional stakeholders and continuing meetings in the spring of 2015.



Public input session. (Photo courtesy Courtney Long)

In addition, the more diverse the coalition, the more creative solutions and projects became. For example, by having public health officials, farmers, schools, planners, and nonprofit organizations jointly discuss reoccurring food access issues, the entire coalition can appreciate each organization's constraints and brainstorm on creative and unique solutions. By having an open door to diverse partners, many options presented themselves, both for the vision of the food system and for the types of projects that were determined as priorities.

*Prioritized tactics:* By January 2015, each community had determined four to five priority tactics for implementation (see Recommendations section). In the spring of 2015, each community confirmed the identified priorities and determined "lead partners" to carry out each tactic.

*Agricultural Urbanism Event and Booklet:* In January 2015, the first Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit event was held at Design on Main in Ames, Iowa. There were more than 90 attendees and most survey responses were positive, suggesting that this should be an annual event. Although the Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit booklet was not yet available, many were anticipating the release. Members of the Cedar Rapids, Des Moines, and Cresco teams shared their experiences, and participants were able to engage around food system tactic break-out topics. Topics included faith gardens, edible landscapes, food hubs, awareness campaigns, shared-use kitchens, school gardens, educational programs, urban farms, and food box programs. Organizers shared information about the application process for Year Two of the Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit project.

## Recommendations

During the first year of the project, each community received facilitation for building a local food systems coalition, assessment and analysis of existing conditions, and public forums with the best practices that were researched for each tactic of Agricultural Urbanism. These best practices were transformed into posters for public input sessions and an Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit Tactic booklet, published in spring 2015.

In spring 2015, each community continued their quarterly coalition meetings and tactic project teams will have monthly meetings to ensure accountability and forward momentum. The communities each determined four or five projects to implement in the next two years. Projects include:

### *Cedar Rapids:*

1. Faith garden, coalition-programming
2. Public edible landscape, Coe College
3. Public edible landscape, urban orchard at Noelridge Park
4. Public/urban farm, BIG at Beaver Park
5. Shared-use kitchen

### *Cresco:*

1. Values survey: What do people want to see/participate in?
2. Public edible landscape, community orchards
3. Food box/food hub programming and awareness campaign
4. Norman Borlaug Farm design, expansion project
5. Shared kitchen/public market/urban farm business model

*Des Moines:*

1. Awareness campaign
2. Community garden manual
3. Public edible landscape: Viva East Bank neighborhood
4. Food box/food hub: Aggregation distribution analysis
5. Green house/urban farm: Viva East Bank neighborhood

Incorporating a process to design local food systems requires a foundation of trust and collective goals in order to build momentum and move projects forward. The seamless, linear process originally anticipated was not compatible with the food system development process, due to the necessary flexibility for relationship building, project management and process that ebbs and flows with new community partner participation. The research team now understands that it is necessary to be flexible and develop the coalition at the speed of the group rather than pushing forward under a particular framework. As the next two years of the grant unfold, this research will help to develop a transferable model and process with coalition development and collective impact in the first phase, and strategic planning, design and implementation in the second phase.

The Toolkit will assist communities in developing community local food systems by offering a process for participation to generate collective goals with multiple community partners around food system development. Once the collective vision of the food system is created within the first year of the process and a coalition is developed, the projects that evolve out of the process will be tied to a larger system and goal for the community. This creates a unified plan for numerous organizations, individuals and businesses to gather around, and generates greater impact when multiple projects and programs are being developed for a particular goal. As the projects are implemented, and community members continually have feedback, accountability, momentum, as well as food system design and expertise from Iowa State, there is a high potential for success in implementation of the tactic projects that have been sought by the coalition.

## **Impact of results**

There are many different pieces of the puzzle to consider when developing food systems. Participants bring multiple perspectives to the table and there are countless ways of implementing projects within communities. This process has shown the importance of collective and value-based decision making to identify the people at the table and readiness for project implementation. Implementing the Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit process in communities offers an opportunity to build coalitions based on food system development around the state. Creating this coalition with diverse partners is critical for a diverse and holistic outcome.

The communities also participated in surveys to show their interest and anticipated impacts of the toolkit in the future. Two of the three communities felt strongly that this process will assist other communities in developing local foods systems and providing research/ best practice examples. One community is still interested in participating, but is currently unsure of the process; this community also determined they needed new stakeholders involved in the process.

## Education and outreach

### *Conference presentations:*

“Catalyzing Community through Food Citizenship.” Growing Power, Milwaukee, WI, November 2014

“Public Interest Design: Connecting Teaching, Research, and Scholarship through Engagement.” Engagement Scholarship Consortium Conference, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, October 2014

“Urban Agriculture Initiatives.” Co-presentation with Andrea Vague and Marissa Moore, Mason City, IA, October 2014

“Community Food System Implications.” Iowa Regional Councils. Co-presentation with Josh Clements: Ames, IA, October 2014.

“Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit.” Iowa Hunger Summit: Des Moines, IA October 2014

“Improving Urban Aesthetics to Reach Functional Goals in Acquiring Food Security.” Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA), New Orleans, LA, ISU CDL, May 2014

### *Publications:*

*Community Matters* Publication - Volume 7, Issue 4, 2014

*Community Matters* Publication - Volume 7, Issue 3, 2014

*Public Health Matters* - Fall 2014

“Improving Urban Aesthetics to Reach Functional Goals in Acquiring Food Security,” Abstract, in Proceedings of the 45th Annual Conference of the Environmental Design Research Association, (EDRA: McLean, VA, 2014) p. 382.

The CDL will continue presenting at conferences nationwide on the impacts within communities. Also, there is now a process for communities to apply to become “Agricultural Urbanism” communities. The goal is to work with at least three new communities each year. The application process is announced at the annual event, which is open to the public, in order to create a platform for knowledge-sharing between communities across the state of Iowa and to communicate the availability of this as an ongoing program.

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## Leveraged funds

The project received a \$5,000 SARE Education Grant for annual event and travel scholarships.