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.

What was done and why?
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 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 year will now 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.

What did we learn?
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.