

South Central Iowa Area Partnership, Local Foods Network

Abstract: The project explored various ways to expand and promote local food enterprises and consumption in south central Iowa.

Many local producers are using direct marketing (as well as local markets) and this project tried to help them aggregate and coordinate these efforts with a collection point for the Iowa food cooperative and other DM outlets, ultimately assisting both consumers and producers to connect with these market outlets.



MARKETING

What was done and why?

The project was a joint venture started by the South Central Iowa Area Partnership (SCIAP) agriculture development committee, an organization including economic development, farm, and community leaders from six counties – Decatur, Clarke, Lucas, Madison, Union and Wayne. This project also reached participants in Marion, Monroe, Ringgold and Warren counties.

Primary objectives of the project were to:

1. Implement an educational effort on the importance of local foods, the opportunities for producers and the benefits to local consumers in the six counties.
2. Study the feasibility of a South Central Iowa Local Foods Network, to link the efforts of 20 area food producers.

What did we learn?

The project addressed the objectives as identified by the stakeholders. There was good response to the educational programming and networking efforts, particularly for the business skills building exercises for producers, and awareness building and networking demonstrated by the “Taste of Southern Iowa.”

More than 40 producers were involved in ongoing project efforts. Overlap with other projects initiated in Creston and Albia changed the focus of this project. There is great interest in coordinated efforts by local growers and consumers, particularly partnering with central Iowa local foods projects. At this time there is no consensus to build a local foods organization including dedicated staff and facilities. Instead, the emphasis is to stimulate growth of existing efforts and reach out to create new partnerships.

Continued development of aggregation/distribution and shared use kitchen projects, as well as promotional efforts such as “Taste of Southern Iowa,” will be continued by the local leadership team. A study (funded by the Leopold Center) on shared-use kitchens is being done in partnership with Valley Junction, Sherman Hill, and Chariton ventures. Results and the amount of commitment will determine future efforts by the investigator.

Investigators:

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