

# Evaluating the impact of a decade of regional food system work on growers in northeast Iowa

**Abstract:** This report describes findings of a survey completed by farmer/growers involved with the Northern Iowa Food and Farm Partnership (NIFFP). It describes their opinions and interests as formed by their past involvement in the regional food system, and identifies their areas of need as owners of farm businesses.

## Investigator:

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*Among the 14 farmers responding to the email question “Is Northern Iowa Food and Farm Partnership (NIFFP) helping create a vibrant local food system in their area?” 66.7 percent responded that it was somewhat valuable, with another 25 percent saying it is very valuable.*



**MARKETING**

## What was done and why?

The purpose of this project was to evaluate the impact of regional food systems work on growers in Iowa’s Cedar River Valley region. The study was to examine the extent to which growers have experienced positive impacts such as greater profitability or increased market access that can be attributed to organized regional food systems work. Staff at the Northern Iowa Food and Farm Partnership and the Center for Energy and Environmental Education (CEEE) at the University of Northern Iowa led the project, and chose to hire an outside analyst to do the assessment of their work. UNI-CEEE contracted with Penny Brown (now at Prairie Rivers RC&D) to carry out the evaluation.

## What did we learn?

According to growers involved with NIFFP, its most valuable functions for them were networking, information sharing, providing a support group, promoting local foods, and helping with training. Growers with past involvement with NIFFP cited these items as areas where the group proved least valuable: getting new customers who call growers, bringing in information and knowledge from other states, working more collaboratively with existing grower groups, and gaining more public exposure.

On the topic of possible future services that could be provided by NIFFP, the highest-rated potential services for farmers were help with promotional material development, food safety training, aggregation and distribution of products, and marketing assistance. The lowest-rated possible services were farm succession and estate planning, crop planning and management, negotiating lease agreements, and livestock planning and management.

Enshayan is working with the Black Hawk County Health Department to do a community food assessment for the county. The results will reveal gaps and opportunities, which would lead to an action plan on food prepared by the county and all who are interested.