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Food and Farming: The Cornerstone of Community

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“You have your doctor, your lawyer, your hair dresser or barber,” notes Kamyar Enshayan, long time local food champion. “Why not also make sure you have your own farmer?”

For more than 15 years questions about our food, like Kamyar’s, have challenged Iowa to take a hard look at how this state can rebuild our local and regional food production. The conversation that has unfolded is setting deep roots for a new component of Iowa agriculture. In fact the response has been so great, that a statewide approach, captured in the Iowa Food and Farm Plan, was adopted during the 2011 Iowa Legislative session.

My husband, Tim Landgraf, and I, along with our two children Andrew and Jessica, started our family farm venture in 1994. One Step at a Time Gardens is among many Iowa farms that have grown to meet this new opportunity. Today Tim and I farm full-time together, marketing products six months of the year off of eight acres. Our farm provides for 130 farm members, farmers market customers and several wholesale accounts. Our products include vegetables and herbs, pastured poultry and raspberries. Over the past 16 years, we’ve been fortunate to host 16 interns, sharing our insights and benefiting from their contributions.

The experience of the flavors and the connection to the land through food and the story of food and farming, provide our members and customers as fresh a relationship as the food itself. This direct connection begins, ever so gradually, to create a powerful shift in our food culture. A new economic relationship emerges, integrating more than just an exchange of product and finances through the commitments shared among farmers, eaters and other community partners.

Community-based agriculture recognizes food as a cornerstone of complex community assets—nutritional, economic, social and environmental.

A simple question about where we get our food has opened exciting opportunities for farmers and eaters all across this state. With engaged farmers, diverse partners and Iowa’s new Food and Farm Plan in place, Iowa is well positioned to leverage the complex role food production plays in our communities.

Jan Libbey (‘84 fisheries and wildlife biology), right, is a farmer and co-owner with her husband, Tim Landgraf, of One Step at a Time Gardens Hancock County. Jan is actively involved in local food development work at state and local levels and is currently coordinating Healthy Harvest of North Iowa, a regional food system working group.