Local Food Systems as Community and Economic Development in Rural Illinois

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Research Questions

- What is the current state of the food system in rural IL?
- How do you build a locally based food system? Are there key characteristics within a community that support local food system activities?
- What are the economic impacts of a local food system?
- Do community residents' attitudes about their community influence the success of a local food system?
- What impact do relationships between producers and food buyers have on a community?
- What information is necessary for local leaders to influence the development of a local food system?
Research Methods

• Case Studies
  – Fairbury, IL
  – Central Illinois Farmers’ Markets

• Surveys
  – Intercept surveys at farmers’ markets and Dave’s Supermarket (late summer 2005; select markets in July 2006)
  – Mail surveys to:
    • Direct market farmers in 13 county region (Fall 2004)
    • Institutional food buyers in 13 county region (Fall 2004)
    • Random sample of residents in 22 county region, oversampled in case study communities (February 2006)

• Focus groups/Interviews
  – Focus group with farmers’ market vendors and managers to define a successful farmers’ market (February 2006)
  – Interviews with key stakeholders in the Fairbury project, including business owners and producers (ongoing)
Region of Study
Findings: Direct Market Producers in Central IL

- 68% have an on-farm stand, 41% sell at farmers’ markets, and 48% have other direct sales to customers. Only 14% sell to restaurants, 22% to grocery stores, and none to institutions.

- 36% of direct market producers surveyed raised products for conventional commodity markets in addition to direct market products. Two-thirds of those farmers used less than half their acreage for direct-market products, yet made more than 50% of their total gross farm sales from those products.
Findings: Institutional Food Buyers

- Only 39% of buyers surveyed had purchased locally grown food products in between 2003-2004, with most purchasing fresh vegetables in season.
- Concerns about USDA certification and insurance were the most commonly mentioned barriers to buying local. Convenience and consistent quality and quantity were also important issues for food buyers concerned about buying locally grown food.
Findings: Consumers

- 36% of consumers are unaware that there are opportunities to purchase locally grown food in their communities.

- Households that purchase locally grown foods were more likely to have a vegetable garden (43% of local food purchases, versus 32% of non-buyers, significant at .05 level).

- 43% of consumers said food produced “within 50-80 miles from home” was the best description of local food. 25% said “within 5 miles from home,” and 24% said “grown in Illinois.”

- For consumers who purchase local food, “quality of product” and “flavor and taste” were the most influential reasons, followed by “to support local farmers.” Price, weekend hours, and variety of products were among top three factors that influence shopping at local food venues.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am unaware that there were opportunities to purchase locally grown</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>products here.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer to shop at a grocery store.</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The hours of the venues are inconvenient.</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The locations of the venues selling locally grown products are</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inconvenient.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have my own garden.</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prices are too high.</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The products are not high quality.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fairbury Local Food Project

- Two farmers began relationship with Dave’s Supermarket—local independent supermarket in 2004
- Created farmers’ market within the supermarket
- Farmers take 80% of sales; Dave’s takes 20%
- In 2004, total local food store sales of $850 (2 farms); by 2005, total sales increased 136% to $2,009 (5 farms). In 2006, sales exceeded $4200 (11 farms). Over 16 farms participated in 2007.
- Additional sales to several restaurants in Fairbury, plus requests from other grocery stores in region.
Next Steps: Resource Guide

“Beyond the Farmers’ Market: Planning for Local Food Systems in Illinois”

- Takes key findings from our research to provide action steps and strategies to help community leaders develop successful local food system projects that benefit farmers, consumers and their communities.
- Target audience is community leaders and Extension educators
Part I: First Steps
A. Why Local, Why Now?
   Worksheet I-1: First Steps
B. Know Your Community
   Worksheet I-2: A First-Glance Agricultural Inventory

Part II: Expanding Local Food Production
A. Why Local Food Production?
   Worksheet II-1: Market Research for Production
   Worksheet II-2: Marketing Local Food
   Worksheet II-3: Identify and Address Challenges to Local Food Production

Part III: Adding Value: Processing and Distribution Networks
A. Small-Scale Processing
   Worksheet III-1: Processing Inventory
B. Distribution issues

Part IV: Food for Your Community: Buying and Selling Locally Grown Food
A. Institutional and Commercial Food Buyers
   Worksheet IV-1: Are Your Community’s Businesses Buying Locally?
   Worksheet IV-2: Why Aren’t Business Buying Locally and What Can You Do?
   Worksheet IV-3: Brainstorming for Business
B. Household Consumers
   Worksheet IV-4: Encouraging Household Purchases of Local Food
C. Farmers’ Markets
   Worksheet IV-5: Tips for Creating a Successful Farmers’ Market
D. Beyond Farmers’ Markets: Alternative Venues for Local Food

Part V: Building Your Community’s Food System: Where to Start?
A. Nine Key Elements that Facilitate Successful Local Food Projects
   Worksheet V-1: Matrix of Key Assets
B. Conclusion

Steps for getting started
Specific actions community can take
Additional tools to develop local food systems
Worksheet 1: First Steps

**Step 1. Defining Local**
How will you define your local food system? Your community, county or within a certain driving distance? Mark the general boundaries of your local food system on a regional map of your area, and attach to the description below.

**Our Local Food System**

**Step 2. Why Local?**
Describe the motivations that encouraged your community to engage in building your local food system.

**Step 3. Why Now?**
What are key priorities that you hope to address with your local food system?

**Step 4. Outlining Goals/Criteria for Success**
Provide at least 3 key goals that your community would like to achieve with its local food system projects, and suggest several criteria that will help you to evaluate your local food projects based on these goals.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asset</th>
<th>Existing Resources</th>
<th>Potential Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catalyst Farmers</td>
<td>Who are farmers in the community? What are their business goals and what are opportunities for business development?</td>
<td>Are there opportunities for encouraging market gardeners, building community gardens, etc?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Retail Outlet</td>
<td>What locally owned businesses would be interested in collaborating on local food projects? What resources could they contribute?</td>
<td>What other local businesses might be resources for collaborations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>What are current communication methods in the community? How can they be utilized to develop and promote local food projects?</td>
<td>What additional advertising or communication channels would connect stakeholders and draw in new participants?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Time Horizon to Achieve Success</td>
<td>How can local food projects serve the long-term vision of the community? What would be short-term goals that would demonstrate success of new local food projects?</td>
<td>What are future projects for the community? What are community visions for the future?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Who are stakeholders who could provide leadership in developing local food projects?</td>
<td>Does your community have leadership training workshops? Who are potential leaders not yet identified?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Cohesiveness and Pride</td>
<td>What are unique aspects of your community that residents are most proud of? How can local food projects support or build on these unique community attributes?</td>
<td>Are there other unique resources in your community that are underappreciated or underutilized, such as residents’ talents, history, etc?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Local Officials</td>
<td>Are local officials supportive of agriculture or local food systems? What programs exist to support agricultural businesses?</td>
<td>What other local programs promote small business development?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invested Consumers</td>
<td>What local businesses are most popular with consumers? What are needs of residents that are unmet within the community?</td>
<td>Are there challenges for groups of residents in acquiring food that could be met by building local food projects? (senior citizens without transportation, WIC or food stamp holders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>What are active community spaces? Are there locations with adequate parking, restrooms, space for entertainment?</td>
<td>Are there underutilized spaces that would be attractive locations for local food projects?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Next Steps: Extension PDO

PDO on “Strategies for building locally based food systems in Illinois communities” Jan-Feb 2008, 2 locations: Participants will learn to:

- Assess the state of the food system in their region
- Access existing knowledge about local food systems in IL
- Identify activities and projects that can help communities get started in building a locally based food system
- Determine appropriate roles for Extension to play in working with key players in the food system

This PDO will build on introductory material presented at Tri-State Conference on Local Food Systems in November 2007—IL, IA, MO