

Strengthening the local and regional food system in the Iowa Valley: Iowa Valley Regional Food Initiative

Abstract: Creating a local food system can be by achieved more efficiently by assembling a strategic plan with input from a variety of stakeholders and interested parties.

Facilitated meetings provide a terrific opportunity for local producers to meet with area consumers and public officials to discuss policy and marketing opportunities. An effective local foods organization, such as I-Food, offers producers a forum in which to exchange ideas, learn from experts and other producers, and disseminate information about their production through the associated web site, producer list and related publications.



MARKETING

What was done and why?

The Iowa Valley Resource Conservation and Development office began coordinating efforts among key leaders and food system stakeholders in the Iowa Valley (Benton, Iowa, Linn, Poweshiek, and Tama counties and the Meskwaki Settlement) region in 2002. This effort, begun at the urging of local food producers and consumers, led to the formation of the Iowa Valley Regional Food Initiative in January 2007. This project was an outgrowth of a community-identified need to formulate a regional food system plan.

The objective of this project was to complete the food system strategic plan for the Iowa and Cedar Valley region by August 2008, with at least three objectives identified and strategies in place to be conducted and fulfilled within the next three years.

Project goals were to:

- Coordinate the efforts of the Iowa Valley Regional Food Initiative, utilizing the best available data, an asset-based approach, and key local leaders with a stake in local food production and processing;
- Contract with Penny Brown-Huber to hold facilitated planning forums; and
- Guide the formation of the regional food vision and mission to achieve sustainable support for this regional initiative.

What did we learn?

What began as a planned series of meetings between local food producers, consumers, and government leaders has become a focused effort aimed at providing a lasting resource for the development of a sustainable local food system. Future plans include a feasibility study for a proposed local food park/incubator and pursuing the development and expansion of local food production and consumption in the Iowa Valley region. Project partners also hope to hire an intern to facilitate local food efforts in the Iowa Valley region and in Linn County. Because of the project, important information has been gained about the local food situation in the region and the needs of Iowa Valley producers and consumers.

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