

Micro-Farming: Reducing rural and urban food deserts through job training

Abstract: A community college sustainability coordinator formulated a continuing education course to educate aspiring farmers about all aspects of producing and marketing local foods in southwest Iowa. The course curriculum was shared with other Iowa community colleges.

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The Dream to Farm: Micro-Farming program was created and extensive follow-up took place for a year afterwards. Participants were placed in three different categories: contributing, developing and not contributing to the local food system.



MARKETING

What was done and why?

The Micro-Farming: Reducing Rural and Urban Food Deserts through Job Training project led to an innovative 42-hour continuing education course at Iowa Western Community College (IWCC) in Council Bluffs. The course, named, Dream to Farm: Micro-Farming, will continue to train a new generation of farmers to increase production of fresh, healthy and affordable food to alleviate identified regional food deserts in southwest Iowa. Urban and rural food deserts in Cass, Fremont, Harrison, Mills, Page, Pottawattamie, and Shelby counties in predominantly rural southwest Iowa were served by this project.

IWCC and its partners engaged in a collaborative effort to meet the goals of the grant. The objectives were:

- Develop a Micro-Farming training course specifically for southwest Iowa
- Recruit and train 30 students within the first year
- Graduates of the Dream to Farm: Micro-Farming program will increase the number of local food producers in southwest Iowa with continued support for Iowa Western and its partners
- IWCC will make this curriculum available to any of Iowa's 11 community colleges
- The Micro-Farming project will be sustained through tuition of future participants, as well as ongoing grant development by IWCC and Golden Hills RC&D

What did we learn?

The Dream to Farm: Micro-Farming program has helped encourage new local producers in southwest Iowa. Seven of the 30 students currently are producing and selling their produce and before this class they were not. This program gave them the education and resources they needed for their farms to succeed. The curriculum that was developed by the educators and farmers is a resource that Iowa Western will share with any interested parties. One unexpected result was that almost 30 percent of the students did not complete the program. This was partly due to the students not having a full understanding of what the program (and local food production) entailed. Better explanations on the marketing material might have helped.