

# Southwest Iowa institutional foods survey and producer training program

**Abstract:** The project determined the demand and value of locally grown foods for use in the institutional market, and attempted to quantify the supply available in southwest Iowa.

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*Local growers/producers could potentially have access to new markets and increased value per acre of their product. There will be more opportunities to add additional value by further branding, processing and distributing their products on a year-round basis rather than seasonally.*



## What was done and why?

Agriculture's future in southwest Iowa is at a crossroads between commodity and small niche agriculture operations. In order to add value for existing or mid-size producers, bring new people into niche agricultural production, and brand southwest Iowa as a food corridor, producers need to know what can be grown successfully and how it can be marketed to larger, institutional customers.

Objectives for the project investigators were to:

- Determine level of interest by local institutional food preparers,
- Create a database for a mailing aimed at a 6 to 10 percent response rate,
- Identify local producers to meet institutional demand, and
- Match existing producers to the institutional demand (i.e., have 50 producers providing food to 100 institutions by the end of the first year and 100 producers supplying to 170 institutions by the end of year three).

## What did we learn?

- Institutional food preparers in the survey area have enough interest in local food products to have a major impact in target market (Omaha/Council Bluffs) as well as some overflow into surrounding county institutions.
- Databases for institutions and producers have been coded, categorized and cleaned.
- Seventy-five producers have been identified in the eight-county area in southwest Iowa, but additional producers must be recruited and trained to have sufficient numbers to meet market needs.
- The produce/products needed to meet the demands of institutions in some areas are available, but additional growers and produce resources are needed to meet the initial goals.
- Further work must be done on gathering, branding, processing (if applicable), packaging, pricing and distribution of the products.