

Final Report

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Title: Building Producer Capacity for Institutional Food Distribution

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### **Scope of Work**

The main objective of this project is to provide a series of comprehensive workshops and experiences that will build the capacity of a core number of producers capable and willing to supply institutions with locally grown foods. Northern Iowa Food & Farm Partnership (NIFFP) has focused on Burmese refugees and networking for local food producers and local food buyers in Region 9. In 2017 a workshop was held for school foodservice staff, producers, and community partners and a workshop was held for restaurant staff. Through surveys and discussions, NIFFP has discovered that bringing local food buyers and local food producers together in one room at one time is a very effective educational tool for both

groups. NIFFP will continue to expand on these areas in the upcoming year increasing our reach to more local food producers and local food buyers. The following results are based on the second year of funding, 2017.

### **Brief Project Summary**

In February a local food buyer and local food producer networking event was held at Hy-Vee per their request. Twelve Hy-Vee staff attended from six area Hy-Vee stores. Five producers had the opportunity to present to the entire group individually. After the presentations they were invited to stay for lunch and talk informally with the group. Another networking event was held that month for all local food buyers and local food producers at the University of Northern Iowa Center for Energy & Environmental Education. Seven local food buyers and seven local food producers attended this event. Each producer had the opportunity to talk to each buyer for eight minutes and then they were required to move to the next buyer. This format created an opportunity for everyone to get the chance to speak briefly in person. Many of the participants reported they liked this format because it did force them to talk to everyone in the room. The negative side was due to time constraints of the buyers to stay for the entire event, eight minutes didn't allow enough time for in-depth conversation. Evaluations also expressed the need for more of these events. Another networking event was held in March with nine producers and seven buyers. Many of the participants had not attended the February event. The same format was followed and the same feedback was received. These events will be held again in 2018 with a change in format based on feedback from participants at these events. There will be one, two day event to allow for individual presentations and one-on-one conversations.

Northern Iowa Food & Farm Partnership partnered with EMBARC (Ethnic Minorities of Burma Advocacy and Resource Center) and AmeriCorps VISTA to create and implement an eight week, Community Producers Workshop (CPW) targeted at new comer Immigrant women in Waterloo. The workshop builds on the production skills of the participants in order to connect them with available markets and institutional buyers in the area. The workshops include classes on cash handling, customer service using limited English, marketing, visits to Farmer's Markets, and many guest speakers covering everything from selling local food to restaurants to owning a beginning farm in Iowa. The participants have experience in weaving, farming, and cooking but struggle to connect these skills to generating income due to the language and cultural barriers they have faced since moving to the area. The goal for these classes is to build confidence in communication and sales in order for the women to begin their own market stand at the Downtown Waterloo Farmer's Market. The CPW expanded into two parts in 2017. CPW 101 was for a new group of participants and CPW 102 was for previous participants to learn more and expand on the basic knowledge received in CPW 101. Thirteen participants attended CPW 101 and four attended 102. After the eight week class five participants continued to plant the garden and sell at four farmers markets in Downtown Waterloo. In addition the producers sold to a local grocery store without assistance of the workshop coordinators. There were challenges with this program including language barriers, schedules, and time elapsing from the class to access to land for the CPW garden. Interpreters were utilized during the class and also helped remind them of the class schedule, however, other concerns in their community sometimes over shadowed the class goals. This program received additional funding through the Iowa Women's Foundation and program changes have been made to the program to help overcome the challenges.

Staff from the UNI Local Food Program and EMBARC (Community Producers Workshop Planning Team) traveled to Lutheran Services of Iowa (LSI) in Des Moines to tour their Global Greens program. The goal of the Community Producers Workshop is to develop goals and outcomes similar to this program. The information was valuable and helped the team develop a more detailed plan and apply for the Iowa Women's Foundation grant.

A workshop, Simple Steps for Including Local Foods in Schools: Success Stories had twelve participants. The speaker was Chef Chad Taylor from Des Moines Public Schools and he provided information on basic concepts for starting Farm to School programs. Participants also had a chance to network and share their farm to school success stories in their schools. Survey results indicated participants enjoyed networking and learned more about Farm to School.

A workshop, Local Food from Farms to Restaurants had six participants including one chef who hadn't purchased any local foods for his restaurant. Chef Chad Taylor provided information to this group about the basics of purchasing local food and participants had the opportunity to network and share their experiences. Survey results indicated participants would like to learn more and have more opportunities to network with producers.

A workshop on Marketing and Scaling Up was taught by Chris Blanchard, Purple Pitchfork. Twenty participants learned about the importance of business planning, marketing, and essential tools needed for growing a vegetable farm. Survey results indicated that each participant learned something new and they were glad they attended the workshop. Hosting this workshop provided the Northern Iowa Food & Farm Partnership the opportunity to have Chris Blanchard be the keynote speaker for their annual local food dinner.

Regional collaboration amongst key stakeholders is very important. Region 9 Iowa State University Extension & Outreach (ISUEO) staff, local food producers, and local food buyers collaborate with NIFFP through quarterly meetings. The Region 9 ISUEO Advisory Board meets quarterly to discuss collaboration of ISUEO staff with the UNI local food coordinator and to focus on regional projects to improve the local food system.

#### **Technical Report:**

**Outcome 1: Increased knowledge, skills and motivation of growers to pursue new or expanded institutional markets.** Twenty one local food producers attended a networking event to meet twenty-six local food institutional buyers in our region. Seventeen immigrant women in Waterloo learned about selling to farmers markets and restaurants through an eight-week workshop. Twelve participants increased their knowledge about Farm to School. Six participants learned the basics of purchasing local foods. Twenty participants learned the value of marketing to increase their building capacity of their businesses.

The overall outcome for the entire grant has been thirty-four local food producers, forty-two local food buyers, and twenty-two immigrant women have been reached through educational networking opportunities. In addition another seventy-one people interested in local foods attended workshops to increase their knowledge and skills to expand markets for local producers.

**Outcome 2: Collaboration among some producers in meeting larger or new institutional demand and more trusting relations and a sense of community among participating producers.** Collaboration

continues to grow through the educational and networking opportunities provided through this grant. These opportunities will continue to be provided through the work of the Northern Iowa Food & Farm Partnership.

**Outcome 3: A number of new enterprises emerging in Region 9, likely some of them might be recent immigrants.** Seventeen newcomer immigrant women, Community Producers, were taught business skills to help them sell to farmers markets and institutional buyers. This program will continue through funding from the Iowa Women's Foundation.

**Outcome 4: Increase in number of institutional buyers in Region 9 trying out local food purchasing and increased sales to institutional markets in Region 9.** Sixteen institutional local food buyers spent a reported \$2,552,646 on local foods in 2015. The amount local food buyers are spending continues to increase and more regional data will be collected for 2017. The University of Northern Iowa purchased \$99,603.14 in 2016 and \$32,385 in 2015. Many new restaurants in the region continue to participate in local food networking sessions.