

New Farmer Jump Start Project

Abstract: Southwest Iowa development groups looked at several ways to entice new farmers to commit to local food production.

New farmers with input funding and community support experience greatly reduced financial risk in the first year and consequently have the capacity to continue in business for a second year. Though the profit margins of farmers selected by the New Farmer Jump Start program were not large, they felt that their future was enhanced by their experiences in the program.



MARKETING

What was done and why?

The New Farmer Jump Start project was a one-year pilot program to recruit and provide financial and technical assistance to a new local food producer. With some funds remaining, and positive results after one year, the organizers received a second year of funding to complete the project. The goal was to increase the number of local food producers to help meet the demands of community retailers and institutions for local food products.

Three main objectives were identified:

- Increase local food production by assisting a resident to become a horticultural crop producer,
- Allow the local Cultivators group to better understand how to encourage increased food production by adding to the number of horticultural crop producers in the region, and
- Heighten current and potential farmers' awareness of the feasibility of horticultural crop production.

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What did we learn?

Those considering programs similar to this one should take note of these lessons:

- Potential producers of local horticultural crops should be strongly encouraged to think of food production as a business endeavor. If a producer does not have other sources of income, it is very important to be able to manage and run a profitable operation. Continued promotion of local food at the community level can enhance its acceptance by consumers and food system.
- Profit margins for new farmers may be small initially, but have the potential to increase over time. Community and financial support at the outset of a local food producer's career is very helpful.