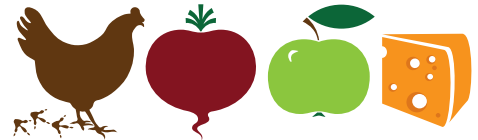




Supporting Local Food System Development in Your Community



IOWA FOOD SYSTEM
working group

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
Extension and Outreach



LEOPOLD CENTER

As agriculture evolves to meet the desire for more local food products, community leaders are playing key roles in facilitating the development of local food systems. These leaders come from diverse backgrounds such as teachers, local government officials, extension educators, community activists, gardeners, or staff from faith-based groups. Regardless of background, affiliation, or community leadership role, here are some tips to help you get involved with promoting local food system development in your community:

Step 1 Get to Know Your Community's Local Food System. Collect information about the scope of your community's current local food system to help paint a picture of what has already been accomplished and what efforts are underway. To start, you may want to know:

- ▶ Are there other people or organizations already working on the development of your community's local food system?
 - Contact your local Chamber of Commerce, Resource Conservation and Development council (<http://iowaleaguercd.org/>), or your Extension and Outreach Office (www.extension.iastate.edu/content/county-offices).
- ▶ Are there producers in your community who sell directly to consumers, market community supported agriculture (CSA) shares, or operate you-pick enterprises?
 - Find a list of CSA producers and organizers here: <https://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/iowaCSA-Farms-2014-Statewide-List-of-iowa-CSA-Farms-and-Organizers>.



- ▶ Does your community host farmers markets?
 - For a current directory, go to: www.idalsdata.org/fmnp/index.cfm?fuseaction=main.formFarmerMarketDirectory.
 - To locate producers, agro-tourism businesses, and wholesalers, local to your area, go here: <http://ia.foodmarketmaker.com/>.

- You can find your region's Buy Fresh Buy Local food guide here: <https://sites.google.com/site/bfbliowa/home/local-chapters>.
- ▶ Do grocery stores in your community sell locally-grown produce?
- ▶ Do schools, hospitals, or nursing homes source any cafeteria or dining service items locally?

Learn if there is a current demand for local foods, and how the demand is being met.

- ▶ Administer a simple survey to community stakeholders or host a focus group with the sole purpose of gathering this information.
 - Surveys to assess demand for local foods can be done with basic, free online survey tool such as www.surveymonkey.com.
 - Brief personal phone calls are effective when gauging institutional (including school) or retail support for local foods. For examples, you can check out the Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative's local foods survey: www.iowafoodandfitness.org/uploads/PDF_File_29113448.pdf.

Step 2 Map the benefits to your community.

Brainstorm ways local food system development may improve local economy, environment, social relationships, human health, education, culture, politics, or infrastructure. This information can help communicate the importance of your efforts to potential funders, policy-makers, and other stakeholders. Consider the following question:

- ▶ *Who* in your community could benefit from growth in local food systems? For example, if the school district sources 10 percent of its vegetables locally, producers have increased their market size, and children in school lunch programs would have access to fresh, locally grown produce. Use census data for your community to understand the makeup of your community by age, socioeconomic status, race, or gender at www.census.gov/topics.html.

Step 3 Identify Assets.

Identify community assets you could call on to promote local food system development. Potential assets include fertile soil, varied agricultural methods and practices, community pride, shared agricultural heritage or identity, a community loan program or foundation, inclusive leadership, an engaged local government, diverse populations, entrepreneurial business owners, active non-profits, a cooperative spirit, or creative youth. Connect these assets to develop potential benefits identified for your community. The Census of Agriculture contains data regarding farms in your community: www.agcensus.usda.gov/. U.S. census results are helpful for finding business, economic, or population data: www.census.gov/topics.html.

Step 4 Schedule Public Dialogue.

Plan an informal meeting to gauge public interest in developing a local food system.



This could be a potluck, a gathering at a community center, a get-together at a local coffee shop, or another welcoming and neutral meeting space.

- ▶ Schedule the meeting at a time and date that is likely to work for producers, consumers, and community stakeholders.
- ▶ Advertise in non-food related venues to reach all corners of your community. These might include newsletters from your community's chamber of commerce and local school district or your community center's calendar.
- ▶ Invite anyone who may have an interest in supporting a vibrant local food system—such as producers and aspiring producers, elected officials, school administrators, community and economic development professionals, local food system advocates, restaurant cooks, institutional food buyers, health professionals, environmental advocates, entrepreneurial youth, new immigrants, women, and community members with an interest in eating local foods.

- ▶ Design and facilitate the meeting with plenty of opportunities for dialogue and networking to encourage relationships, sharing of ideas, and conversation among attendees.
- ▶ Present and encourage discussion based on information gathered from steps 1, 2, and 3.
- ▶ Discover what your community wants by asking attendees about their dreams for a local food system and how to achieve them.

Step 5A Continue the Conversation: Write a Group Plan.

Host a series of meetings or workshops to develop the group's plan to grow or strengthen the local food system. At these meetings:

- ▶ Visually map lessons from the previous steps. Include details on your current local food system, community assets, and potential benefits to continuing the local food system development process.
- ▶ Write a vision or mission statement to ensure the core values of the group are shared and articulated. Learn how to write a mission statement here: www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/wholefarmhtml/c5-09.html.
- ▶ Assemble a list of goals and corresponding objectives your group plans to achieve and identify what must be done to achieve these goals. Invite members of your community or neighboring community to share their best practices and lessons learned at your meetings.
- ▶ Network with local food system advocates in your area. Call or meet with these groups about best practices and lessons learned. They may have access to resources that can benefit your effort.
- ▶ Ensure underrepresented groups such as women, immigrants, limited resource families and farmers, or youth feel comfortable and have a voice at these meetings.
- ▶ Invite knowledgeable speakers group members can learn from and relate to. Encourage people to participate wherever they feel comfortable.
- ▶ Create a plan based on group conversations and lessons learned from fellow local food system advocates. Include your mission statement, goals, and the associated objectives leading to each goal.

Step 5B Work Towards Achieving Step One of Your Group's Plan.

After the group has developed a plan, schedule a follow-up meeting to focus on your group's first milestone and list achievable accomplishments.

- ▶ Identify tasks that correspond to one of your group's identified goals. For example, your first goal might be healthier kids. The corresponding objective might be to increase vegetable consumption among children. An achievable accomplishment might be a community potluck with a featured dish from a local farm that includes a short presentation on your newly-formed group and how people can get involved.
- ▶ Celebrate wins publicly. Send out press releases on your group's potluck or write op-eds about how the potluck was important to the community. Do everything you can to raise awareness about your group's mission and successes along the way. Do not underestimate easy wins. Simple, winnable victories during the beginning stages of group efforts lend credibility to your cause and motivate others to get involved. People like to be a part of winning teams.
- ▶ Stay on track by using your steering committee. Organize a steering committee that is tasked with ensuring that the work continues to be aligned with the group's identified mission. Sometimes, groups choose to have multiple steering committees overseeing different objectives or strategies.
 - Steering committee members and their responsibilities should be identified and approved by the group as a whole.
 - Steering committees ensure the work being carried out is relevant to achieving the initiative's mission. Avoid "mission creep" to ensure that your group accomplishes what was laid out by the whole group.
 - Steering committees should be diverse. Having varied perspectives and backgrounds represented is a priority. Leadership within committees should be evolving and expansive.
 - Identify a committee chair who will include others while actively working to achieve the committee's goals.
 - Agree on when and how it is appropriate for individual committee members to act on behalf of the committee.
 - Report progress regularly to the broader group.

Step 6 Continually Evaluate Progress.

Identify ways in which the group will monitor progress. Tracking and evaluating the impact of your effort on the community is critical for keeping your group's momentum going and securing funding to supplement or expand efforts.

- ▶ To evaluate, investigate the worth, significance, and impact of a particular effort, organize your evaluation around the following questions:
 - What difference is our work making and for whom? Why does it matter? Who needs to know this information? What do we expect to happen if awareness increases?
 - What data or information will we gather to determine what difference our work is making?
 - What conclusions about the success of the program can be drawn from the available data, information, and analysis?
- ▶ Develop program evaluation standards for your effort at the onset. This will help your group determine if, and how, the objectives are moving toward achieving the group's established mission and goals.
- ▶ To learn more and develop a framework for program evaluation, go to: <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/evaluate/evaluation/framework-for-evaluation/main>.

Step 7 Ongoing...Stay positive and keep up the energy!

Use your group's positive energy to build on its first successes. Community change takes time to achieve—years in most cases. Keep expectations reasonable, identify day-to-day wins that contribute to your group's objectives and mission, and ensure a shared, diverse commitment to the group's mission for a truly sustainable community effort.

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The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture seeks to identify and reduce adverse socioeconomic and environmental impacts of farming practices, develop profitable farming systems that conserve natural resources, and create educational programs with ISU Extension and Outreach. It was founded by the 1987 Iowa Groundwater Protection Act. The Center is located at 209 Curtiss Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011-1050, (515) 294-3711.