

BUILDING A LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM: WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU?

ILLINOIS SUSTAINABLE LIVING AND WELLNESS EXPO 2008

APRIL 11, 2008

SMALL GROUP INPUT

Below you will find the input collected during the small group discussion of the benefits, obstacles and actions for the development of a local food system. Analysis of this data revealed several repeating, often overlapping categories into which the data have been organized.

	Benefits	Challenges/Obstacles	Potential Solutions
Individual, Community, and Environmental Health	<p>Locally produced food is fresher, better tasting, higher quality, contains fewer or no chemicals (conventional herbicides, pesticides, fertilizers, shelf-life enhancers such as carbon monoxide, etc.), thus making it healthier for the individuals producing/handling the food, the consumers who eat the food and the environment.</p> <p>There are both potential and proven links between consumption of highly processed foods and health problems such as obesity, heart disease, diabetes, autism, asthma, food allergies, etc.</p> <p>Local foods are most often produced sustainably (low input avoids depletion of resources).</p> <p>Locally produced foods significantly reduce or eliminate need for shipping/transportation, thus reducing carbon footprint.</p> <p>Growing more food locally preserves farmland and surrounds the community with a diverse rural landscape.</p>	<p>Members of the community (consumers, health regulators, healthcare professional, restaurants/retail, institutions, etc.) lack education and awareness regarding the many benefits of local foods</p> <p>Consumers are often confused by terms like "organic," "natural," and "sustainable," which may have an effect on their perception of local food.</p> <p>Over 50% of meals consumed are not prepared at home. Consumers perceive that home cooking is not quick or convenient.</p> <p>Consumers have unreasonable expectations regarding the percent of their income that should be spent on food. In Japan consumers spend 25% of their income on food as compared with 15% in the U.S. Some countries spend as much as 50% of their income on food.</p>	<p>Educate consumers, regulators, healthcare professionals, etc., about the benefits of local food.</p> <p>Make it more convenient for consumers to buy local food. Get local food into grocery stores, restaurants, schools, businesses, and institutions.</p> <p>Show consumers how whole, fresh foods can be just as "quick and convenient" as other foods (e.g. chopping up a variety of vegetables for a quick stir-fry or making a no-cook salad by combining fresh greens with vegetables, cheese, or eggs can be faster than waiting in line for take-out).</p> <p>Help consumers understand the "true cost" of the food they buy; most consumers are unaware of the subsidies, tax exemptions, and regulatory benefits given to large-scale producers; what they pay for food in a store or restaurant is not its true cost.</p> <p>Organize/sponsor local food events such as dinners, festivals, farm tours, etc., to raise awareness among consumers.</p> <p>Develop relationships with members of the media (newspaper, television, radio) to help promote local food.</p>

<p>Food Security/Access to Food</p>	<p>Increased food security – ability to feed the community; reduced risk due to many small vs. few large producers and facilities; more flexible food supply in event of natural disasters; improved food safety due to less aggregation of large quantities of food from diverse sources.</p>	<p>Food (especially fresh, healthy food) is not equally accessible to all. Low-income consumers are often disproportionately affected by poor availability of fresh, healthy foods.</p> <p>There are “food deserts”, both rural and urban, where fresh foods are not available.</p>	<p>Identify ways to provide locally produced foods to food pantries.</p> <p>Improve access of low income consumers through assistance programs (e.g., Farmers Market Senior and WIC Nutrition Programs).</p> <p>Establish community gardens in low-income neighborhoods.</p>
<p>Production</p>	<p>Animals raised for the production of meat and other animal products (eggs, cheese, milk, etc.) on small-scale, sustainable farms are raised in a clean, natural environment and are transported and slaughtered humanely.</p> <p>Increased number of small farms provides meaningful employment or small business opportunities for people who may have the interest or aptitude for farming.</p>	<p>Barriers to the success of small-scale farming include start-up costs, equipment, infrastructure (processing, storage, and distribution), land, labor, potential markets, production scale/volume, pollination, seasonality, government subsidies, tax credits and regulations and the cost of liability insurance.</p> <p>Profit in farming is driven by large-scale, industrial production, government subsidies, chemical use and/or genetic engineering, which makes it difficult for small farmers to compete.</p> <p>Inability to support family on profits from small farms growing food. Pricing of food is dysfunctional – it’s not possible to grow food for what people are able or willing to pay.</p> <p>Landowners looking to lease/sell land often don’t make responsible decisions that benefit the community. How can accountability of absentee landowners be addressed to improve accessibility and affordability of farmland?</p> <p>Although small progress has been made in the Farm Bill, there is still much room for improvement.</p>	<p>Identify resources to help farmers with financing and planning their business. Step up support for organizations that currently provide this type of assistance.</p> <p>Encourage consumers to put pressure on the legislators to eliminate laws that are harmful to building local food systems and promote laws that support development of local food systems.</p>

<p>Marketing/Distribution</p>	<p>Producing, processing, distributing, and consuming foods locally leads to a stronger community by fostering the development of relationships, reinvesting money in the local economy, and creating jobs.</p> <p>Opportunity for economic development of local processing/distribution businesses, redirecting revenue that is currently going to out-of-state businesses.</p>	<p>The local community currently lacks the infrastructure for a self-sustaining local food system.</p> <p>Current food system is geared toward large quantities and thus large-scale producers. Buyers (supermarkets, wholesalers, institutions) demand large quantities and consistent supply of products without regard to seasonality.</p> <p>A lack of understanding exists among health regulators, who are focused on the needs and risks of large-scale, long-distance operations to the detriment of local food production.</p>	<p>Identify local investment resources to finance the processing, distribution, and marketing infrastructure needed to support a local food system.</p> <p>Perform economic impact analysis to improve understanding of potential economic benefit of a local food system.</p> <p>Actively connect producers with possible markets: Direct-to-consumer sales, grocery stores, restaurants, retail, institutions (hospitals, schools, and universities). Options include:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Farmer cooperative to address economies of scale, offer greater variety to buyers, and allow farmers to share distribution expenses. Consider expansion of existing coops (e.g. Midwest Farmers' Coop)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Compile a list of farmers and their products to give to potential buyers (supermarkets, restaurants, institutions, etc.) and a list of interested buyers to give to the farmers. Build on existing resources like www.illinoisfarmdirect.org/.</p> <p>Any time local foods are sold/used, ensure they are effectively promoted and advertised (e.g. pictures and bios of farmers, samples or information provided, billboards/news/radio coverage of farmers' markets, etc.)</p> <p>Create a brand or logo for area farmers that can be displayed any time local food is served or sold.</p>
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