

**Illinois Local and Organic Farm and Food Task Force**  
Listening Session March 22, 2008  
Dunn-Richmond Economic Development Center  
Carbondale, Illinois

**Breakout Group Outcomes**

Consumer Group

- 1) Farmers Markets Locations
  - a. Need help getting reliable locations.
  - b. Encourage state/city incentives for working with Farmers' Markets
  - c. State Institutions: parking lots for locations
  - d. Tax Increment Financing TIF Districts
- 2) Good Process to Promote:
  - a. Gardener- to Farmers Market sales – to institutions (as gain one gains confidence and increase production).
- 3) Link Local Food to Emergency Preparedness
  - a. Focus on Decentralized systems
  - b. Public safety
  - c. Food Security
- 4) Institutional Procurement
  - a. Major constraints: SIU: state regulations (i.e., to buy from farmer, he must have \$1 million liability insurance).
  - b. Paperwork
  - c. If over \$30,000, must put out to bid
- 5) Local Schools:
  - a. Not state regulations (see above). But Labor and cost barriers
- 6) Institutions need to know local food sources.
- 7) Mandatory Composting for food waste at Illinois Institutions
  - a. Vermiculture
- 8) Green Solutions
  - a. Lt. Governor Pat Quinn- program
  - b. Universities portion [www.standingupforillinois.org](http://www.standingupforillinois.org)
  - c. 12 environmental goals. Must follow through! Accountability?
- 9) Retailers
  - a. Need reliable local system
  - b. Need stable supply (suppliers)—consistent access
  - c. Need local producer coop distributor

Infrastructure Group

- 1) Producers – “What would make it easier for you to sell more food locally?”
  - a. Provide help to farmers wanting to transition from “traditional commodity crops”

- b. Provide crop insurance to producers. Currently there is no crop insurance available as there is to commodity crop farmers.
- c. Land costs are rising making it difficult to “start – up”
- d. Organic soil amendments are not readily available to the region
- e. Local “value added” products should receive tax breaks
- f. More cooperative efforts needed to bolster producers
- g. Seed money to those wishing to start-up, transition or expand
- h. Share knowledge of soil improvement techniques
- i. Labor is non-existent or too expensive. A suggestion was made that perhaps a prisoner work release/rehabilitation program could be utilized to benefit all.
- j. Currently there are no local processors, local growers are forced by necessity to obtain a FDA brokers license to bring back to Illinois what is locally grown but is taken across state lines for processing.

2) Distributors – “what would make it easier for you to sell more locally grown and processed food?”

There were no distribution representatives present. The group did discuss the idea of a regional central warehouse and distribution center that would make it easier for the farmer to harvest their crop at the “peak readiness” stage, for future distribution. This would increase markets by serving local, regional and larger metropolitan areas throughout the state and beyond.

3) Retailers – “What would make it easier for you to sell more locally grown and processed foods?”

The group consensus was that consumers need to be educated overall. Most people who shop are used to seeing “picture perfect” produce when in reality local and organic foods are more likely to have blemishes on them.

4) Consumers - “What would make it easier for you to buy more locally grown and processed foods?”

a. Increase availability by increasing farmers markets and locations with the help of State, County and City incentives. Perhaps creating “agricultural TIF districts” was one suggestion.

b. Increase local processing to create a readily available market for the farmers

c. link local foods to “emergency preparedness” to create new funding assistance programs

d. State and Federal regulations prohibit local purchasing by institutions eliminating a readily available market. Revisit these regulations to make them more locally grown friendly.

e. Provide a “mandatory composting” incentive to local communities to create an available soils amendment resource for local producers.

f. relax rules on vermi-composting sites to make this composting option more available

### Producer Group

- 1) Don't have any farmers—how to create farmers; few educational programs to help transitioning and “staying alive” during transition.
- 2) No affordable crop insurance: cost of farms high.
- 3) Getting inputs for organic farms (minerals, etc.)
- 4) Tax incentives for food growers and processing
- 5) Transparency in the market: what foods are needed? Prices? Taking some of the risk out.
- 6) Way for farmers to work together, not every farmer for himself. Producers cooperative?
- 7) Seeds and \$ for farmers to get started.
- 8) Probably no more important strategy against terrorism than local food production.
- 9) Labor problems—legislation making it harder for migrant workers; migrant workers a “revolving” pool, not permanent
- 10) Value of models, i.e., Ag classes in high schools. Teaching good ways to do things.
- 11) Improving soil—training and help to get food crops into the existing commodities system.
- 12) Preserve farm land in a state that is 5<sup>th</sup> in losing land; how do we assess our farm land and keep it in the Ag sector?

### Education Group

Consumers:

- 1) Processed foods are popular, due in part to a lack of consumer familiarity with preparing locally grown produce. Baby-boomers won't eat healthy; prefer fast food.
- 2) Total ignorance and programming.
- 3) Education must occur on a regular basis through newsletters, television, Internet.
- 4) Public education about food and farms! Potential opportunities with Ag in the Classroom.
- 5) Think and act like corporations: use a “corporate mentality” to leverage education.
- 6) Establish a consumer education goal for maximum impact.
- 7) Connect with personal memories for marketing.
- 8) Farms tours for young people to help create the connection between children and food production.

Producers:

- 1) Components: market, producers, potential market, grocers.
- 2) A primary agricultural education group exists:
  - a. Teacher's Agricultural Institute
  - b. University of Illinois Agricultural Extension
  - c. “Farm Beginnings” program in northern Illinois.
  - d. USDA rural development programs for value-added products.

- 3) New Farm Credit process?
- 4) Opportunities do exist:
  - a. Education about how to get started: access for young people wanting to farm; older farmers (55+) challenged to transition.
  - b. Look to government programs, especially for small farmers
- 5) SIU and other universities are not active
- 6) Address the grant system:
  - a. Strategize
  - b. Specific theses
- 7) Local production for national security: the vulnerability of import/export dependence.
- 8) John Doerr (“Going Green”) and Paul Newman.

Education “Business Plan” strategy:

- 1) Explore the potential market through surveying and analysis (community food assessment?).
- 2) Determine production and technology needs
- 3) Tap into existing energy/resources/issues
- 4) Education: primary and continuing