

Listening Session

April 9, 2008

Adams/Brown Extension Office, Quincy

Production

- Parity prices needed
- Growing vegetables in back yard versus growing by the acre. More efficient to grow by the acre. Need more info for growers re larger scale (equipment, weed control, harvest/packaging, etc.)
- But, we need a good price for a lot of small growers—not the California model
- We need to investigate alternative sources of power to assist with this effort in regards to production and distribution.
- Processing- no operations exist in the area. Fresh product has short shelf life, need processing availability.
- Value-added-Food Preservation—How can a producer extend the growing season?
- Equipment needs to justify acreage that can provide volume to support industry
- Labor is big problem as production increases.
- Need help in identifying products that local consumers want to eat. How to package, what types of products, quantity, etc.
- There is a disconnect between consumer and producer- kind of like the chicken/egg comparison. What comes first, supply or demand? And how do you build one without the other.
- Subscription service guarantees sales.
- The market is already there for CHEAP food, but we aren't about CHEAP food, we are about GOOD FOOD, in all of its forms.
- Transportation issue is concern for procuring vegetables for Chicago area. Is there really enough land and growers to provide for Chicago area?
- Are soils suitable for growing food crops? Whatever we do it has to be sustainable- to the soil, the air, water, etc.

Infrastructure

- Commercial operations need acceptable sanitary conditions- for preparation, cleaning, processing, chilling, etc.
- Market needs to be established before product is grown
- This market is no different than any other business model—a community needs to understand the VALUE of buying local, then the market will be there.
- There is trend for us—the trend is “local” instead of “organic”—this is what is happening in the grocery stores.
- Need more producers to grow products- demand is greater than supply
- Need ways to add “new” producers to the mix.
- Financing to establish and run business can be troublesome, many lenders do not have a good understanding of vegetable operations and processing
- Could a cooperative work? Purchase inputs as well as cooperative sales
- Recognize that the climate in central IL not conducive for year round production
- Need to develop the system to allow marketing opportunities (direct, wholesale, distributor, etc.) for all- back yard to commercial size

- Marketing not a problem for me, I have a market. My biggest problem is labor, both to harvest it and get it to my markets—thus I can't grow enough.
- Meat processing facilities are getting more regulations which could reduce their numbers, which are not very many to begin with. We need to keep those that we have. It is becoming more difficult to find facilities to slaughter smaller numbers of head.
- Needs to be an incentive to begin new slaughterhouses. Paperwork is burdening. Deer processing takes over some processors in the fall, so can't get in. POULTRY=VERY DIFFICULT.
- We need the English model where every small town has their own slaughterhouse—consumers and farmers wouldn't even think of going to the next town.
- Campaign needed to affect more positive attitude towards purchasing locally.
- Schools, nursing homes, etc. should be high priority of marketers. Problem for those institutions may be one of convenience- easier to open can of green beans as opposed to snapping and cooking them, as well as cost.
- Need to develop attitude amongst consumers to demonstrate respect for those serving in the food growing industry. And amongst those growers as well as employees, respect for the person and for the job.
- Need more respect for farmers who grow local food—need to add “value to farming” as much as the value-added product
- Too much profit goes to the middle man.
- The IDEAL Vegetable Infrastructure would include (1) a variety of producers-both large and small, (2) a variety of markets-grocery stores, farmers markets, CSA's, schools, etc., and (3) variety of produce.

Public Education

- How do we educate out neighbors?!
 - school-based education-nutrition, health, farm-to-school, internships for youth on the farm (paid)
 - youth-some see it as hard work but not a wholesome vocation or enterprise-the respect issue again
 - series of cooking classes-focus on local food, health, how to cook, how to extend the season, food preservation, affordable cooking classes
 - web-based education-an actual interactive “show”, highlight seasonal foods, how to cook, affordable
 - farmers themselves highlight their product by making dishes, provide recipes
 - Be real- “I feel different when I eat REAL food”
 - Need more education on how to cook, food preservation and how to do both.
- Education should start with the kids- including programs for youth to employ them on local farm
 - _ “We feed convicts better than our school children”
- How can we get youth (and others) to view Ag work as necessary and enjoyable and a means of employment? Goes back to the respect issue.
- Getting affordable and easy instructions on preparing local foods- internet, face to face, etc.
- Educational efforts to increase awareness on proper cooking instructions for produce that they may not be all that familiar with, and even on those that they do know well
- Educational efforts to increase consumer awareness of benefits of fruits and veges

- Information to consumers on quick and easy preparation- most have limitations of time required to cook and prepare meals
- Get food service (schools, cafeterias, etc) to improve quality of food items served. Perhaps they are instilling a sense of poor quality food taste when they don't prepare foods adequately that could last for a long time period, and could influence purchasing decisions in their adult life
- Farmers markets are very limited in terms of operation (certain day and times)- limiting who can utilize them. How can we provide some kind of mechanism to cooperatively provide a longer market for growers? Increased promotion as well.
- Promote the farmers market more. Why isn't it promoted better? It has the perception of a "boutique" market.
- I live downtown so it is much easier for me to buy at the farmers market than at the local grocery stores.
- Need to educate consumers to the benefits of locally grown- fresh, quality, health, economy and environment--- Work with existing infrastructure (stores, etc) to provide access to locally grown—Both must work together—no reason to buy local if local not available to me.

Consumer/Public Access

- We have to go to consumer, not vice versa, and put a face on what we produce. We need to tell our story, and why consumers should know us and importance of supporting local
- RESPECT again! Farmers also need to respect the consumer—put the food where the consumers are—put a face on our industry—be better storytellers—we all have a story to tell
- No better "feel good" story than selling/delivering by horse and wagon—an answer to the petroleum and alternative fuel issue.
- Identification of IL grown- Il Dept of AG already has an "Illinois Grown" logo program
- Our local producers want even greater identification- grown in Adams County or grown as part of Tri State Food Policy area. We have Tri State Food Policy logo, and are working on efforts to provide educational campaign to promote to growers and consumers
- Coops need to be considered for both input purchases as well as sales—how do we get over the independent farmer issue to develop coops? Grocery stores like this idea---helps them get the quantity they need.
- How do we scale back corporate farms, do we partition it?
- Point of origin labels are here-the consumer wants them-I want people to know that my product was grown/raised within 45 miles.
- We should have a nursing home breakfast program just like the school breakfast program—what about our seniors?
- Give REAL FOOD to children in schools and universities.
- Take the money we spend on building roads to transport food across the country and use it instead to get local food to local people.
- Build those internship programs for youth—get youth from the city who wants to farm, on the farm—models of this work between NY City youth and Vermont farms—just not free "labor" for the farmer but a real learning opportunity for youth-build in the farmer responsibility to "teach".