Putting it all together: Planning for local food
June 10, 2009
University of Northern Iowa Center for Energy & Environmental Education

The Beginning of a County’s Story

**Story County, Iowa**

Leanne Harter – Story County Planning and Zoning Department
“Grow Story County” Initiative

- History
- Research
- Action – Approvals
- Committee Work
- Next Steps

Local Foods Lunch – Nevada Multiage
History

• From Zoning Ordinance No. 1 (adopted September 2, 1958) to the first Land Use Plan adopted in 1977 to the Story County Development Plan (adopted in 2003 to present), Story County has long established policies and regulations addressing ongoing preservation of agricultural resources.
  – Goal statement from the 2003 Story County Development Plan…
    • Protect and preserve Story County’s agricultural resources.
      – Identify and preserve productive agricultural land for continued agricultural use.
      – Implement planning policies to protect farms and farmers from urban influences that inhibit agricultural practices.
      – Encourage value-added agricultural practices that support sustainable economies.
Resources

- Dedicated staff members with knowledge base, interest and passion for stepping “out of the box”.
- “Grow Story County” initiative staff driven
- Growing movement
- Potential funding sources

TJ Family Farms – Mc Callsburg, Iowa
The Story County Local Food System – Issues and Opportunities

Purpose of report - review of over nine months of ongoing research by County Planning and Zoning staff to answer the following questions:

Why is “eating local” important?

What, if anything, can Story County do to facilitate our own food system?
Story County Local Food Systems Initiative

• What “eating local” means and the definition of food systems planning.
• The importance of local food systems planning, the benefits it can bring our community, and a snapshot of Story County’s local food system.
• What other communities are doing to facilitate the local food system.
• Recommended Board of Supervisors consider forming a local food systems steering committee comprised of local stakeholders, food systems experts and citizens to discuss issues and opportunities in the Story Country Region.
Includes counties of

- Story
- Polk
- Hardin
- Boone
- Dallas
- Jasper
- Marshall
- Hardin
- Hamilton
Why “Eat Local”? 

• The reasons people eat local are many: 
  – Public health 
  – Environmental protection 
  – Agricultural preservation 
  – Homeland security 
  – Economic sustainability 
  – Social health
Local Guinea Pigs!

- Started in May 2008 substituting a majority of groceries with locally-grown food.
- Comparing receipts in 2008 with receipts from 2007
  - Expenditures are comparable even as the percentage of local groceries versus non-local is switched.
  - Provides optimism, specific to the Story County foodshed, regarding the affordability of locally-grown food for an average household.
- Issues/Concerns/Old Habits Die Hard (especially with three children)
  - Extra time involved to prepare the foods.
  - YES, we still eat Kraft Macaroni and Cheese. YES, we eat bananas, and YES, we still do fast food…
    - but NO, we (at least I) have not worked through guilt for such choices!
  - Social benefits – relationships with neighbors, local farmers, time outdoors, teaching “heritage” recipes and cooking techniques to next generation.
Outreach Activities

Fall Festival – McFarland Park

Story County Planning and Zoning Department
Survey of Local Producers

- Story County staff administered a qualitative survey to over 15 local food producers to determine the size and issues of the food system.
  - What they are growing;
  - How much they are growing;
  - Their employment numbers;
  - How they market their products;
  - What organizations to which they belong;
  - Challenges they face; and
  - How Story County may be able to help their operation.
Survey Findings

- Most respondents in the survey belong to or are involved in at least one organization or programs devoted to helping local growers or local food systems.
  - Includes Practical Farmers of Iowa, Iowa State Extension, Iowa Fruits and Vegetables Grower’s Association, the USDA, Iowa Farm Bureau, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, and many others.

- Many were aware of grants and loans available to local food growers
  - Most, if not all, agreed they had little time for the application process.

*All respondents thought Story County (government) should be trying to help them in any way.*
Actions - Approvals

• Review by the Story County Planning and Zoning Commission in September 2008 and recommendation to the Story County Board of Supervisors

• Adoption of Resolution #09-16, establishing the “Grow Story County Committee” on October 7, 2008, by the Story County Board of Supervisors
Grow Story County Committee
Resolution #09-16

• “Grow Story County” committee appointments began January 2009, lasting 18 months, with final presentation to the Board within one year of the initial appointment outlining recommendations for specific action, with an additional six-month appointment period built in to allow committee members’ involvement in implementation strategies as needed.

• Initiative added to the 2008 calendar year and the 2009 calendar year work programs of the Planning and Zoning Department.

• Planning and Zoning Department directed to develop outreach steps to solicit volunteers for Grow Story County Committee and bring list forward to Story County Board of Supervisors by November 25, 2008.

• Story County Board of Supervisors formally appoint such individuals to the Grow Story County Committee by December 23, 2008, with appointments effective January 1, 2009, through June 30, 2010.

• Grow Story County Committee provide quarterly reports to the Story County Board of Supervisors throughout 2009 outlining specific policy changes and implementation measures.
Grow Story County Committee

- Small Acreage Farming
- Regional Collaboration
- Food Access
- Public Education and Outreach
- Recruit and Retain More Local Farmers
- Natural and/or Organic
- Regional Food Processing Facility

TJ Family Farms – Mc Callsburg, Iowa
Statement to Consider

County governments have a role to play in helping the local food system as well, and addressing the issues of the food system at a local level in Story County provides us the opportunity to be leaders in a growing movement towards a more sustainable future.
County governments have a role to play in helping the local food systems as well as addressing the issues of the food systems at a local level in Story County provides us the opportunity to be leaders in a growing movement towards a more sustainable future.
Question: What are the primary impediments to the continual growth of Story County’s local food system?

The objective of the analysis was to identify possible steps and actions that can be taken by Story County government to facilitate the local food system. Such a discussion will help to establish existing and perceived causes for the problem and assist as we define strategies and future steps for facilitating local food systems planning at the Story County government level.
Force Field Analysis – Committee Responses

- Lack of education
- Higher cost of food
- Accessibility
- Production volume
  - Until production volume is in place, the increase in the amount of Coordination, Infrastructure, and Access to local food will not necessarily be needed.
  - More local food production
- A central organization to help match buyers with sellers and/or possibly be involved in distribution of product.
- Some sort of standards as to case/product sizes—to fit in with what restaurants/schools/medical facilities need.
- In Ames, we have two completely different farmers markets that pull in separate directions—together they could be so much stronger of an organization.
- Currently it seems there are plenty of organizations out there involved in trying to help the buy local mantra, but it seems that collectively their resources could all benefit the whole.
- Public awareness and understanding of a local food system.
- Overlap with the Des Moines market area.
- Lack of regional consideration (extending a local food system beyond Story County boundaries).
Potential Strategies

• Committee members were asked to respond to the following questions.

1. Individually list potential activities/strategies/projects that Story County government should/must/can do to facilitate the local food system.

2. List all strategies on board and share with group – place similar ideas together.
Identified Strategies

- Promote web based system of local food
- Local food systems assets mapping
- Market Maker
- Local harvest
- Local Food- Farm Conversion Policy
- Story County government buying policy
- Identify existing farmsteads
- Vegetable farming at 5-10 acres
- Promote the locations
- Support a Central Iowa Regional Food Systems Working Group
- Connect with surrounding counties

- Marshalltown Farm Incubator
- Patterned after Marshalltown Community College
- Partnership with Iowa State, PFI…
- Review Story County regulations as to the inhibitors of local food systems
- Historic Building Tax Incentives
- Preserving rural building, while providing incentives to growers
- Build on existing relationship between County and county extension
Activities Already Underway

Our Green Tomorrow Strategic Action Plan

Promote purchasing policies and budgeting that will enhance the use of products that lessen the negative impact on human health and environment in a cost effective manner.

Goals and Strategic Action Steps

TIME FRAME: Short-term (FY 2010 and 2011)

Develop policy to buy local.
Next Steps - Grow Story County Committee Timeline

**June**
- Present and review action plan to committee members
- Add any additional action strategies
- Present preliminary findings to the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Board of Supervisors

**July**
- Present feedback from the Board of Supervisors and the Planning and Zoning Commission
- Review action plan
- Add or change any additional action strategies

**August**
- Review action plan
Next Steps - Grow Story County Committee Timeline

**September**
- Finalize the local food systems action plan

**October**
- Public review
- Work session with the Board of Supervisors
- Budget recommendations

**November**
- Review feedback from public review and Board of Supervisors
- Revise the action plan

**December**
- Implementation by the Board of Supervisors
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<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Targets</th>
<th>Key Players</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase Local Food Production Volume</td>
<td>Provide incentives for producers</td>
<td>Local food farm- tax conversion policy</td>
<td>Fruit and Vegetable Producers Pork/Beef/Poultry Producers</td>
<td>Story County Government</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facilitate support for beginning farmers</td>
<td>Facilitate support for beginning farmers</td>
<td>Beginning Farmer Incubator A) acquisition of land and partnership with key players</td>
<td>Beginning farmers</td>
<td>RC&amp;D Iowa State Extension NRCS Community Volunteers Leopold Center Story County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decrease regulations for local producers</td>
<td>Decrease regulations for local producers</td>
<td>Review Story County’s regulations as to the inhibitors to local food production</td>
<td>Land Development Regulations</td>
<td>Story County P&amp;Z</td>
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<td>Story County local land link</td>
<td>Story County local land link</td>
<td>Partner with existing land link organizations Identify larger tracts of land for local production Identify existing farmsteads A)Vegetable/ Fruit farming at 5-10 acres Promote the locations</td>
<td>Beginning Farmers</td>
<td>Beginning farmers program Iowa State PFI Leopold Center</td>
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<td>Increase awareness of local food</td>
<td><em>Promote web based system of local food</em></td>
<td>Identify existing local food system data</td>
<td>Consumers</td>
<td>Market Maker</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Local harvest</td>
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<td>Story County P&amp;Z</td>
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<td><em>Develop markets for locally grown food</em></td>
<td>Formulate a procurement policy for Story County governmental institutions</td>
<td>Story County Government</td>
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<td>Iowa State Dining Services</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Promote web based system of local food</em></td>
<td>Identify existing online information of local producers</td>
<td>Consumers</td>
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Story County Planning and Zoning Department
Thank you for your time!

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