The Healthy Farms Healthy People Symposium is a registered “Food Day” event. Food Day is a nationwide celebration and a movement toward more healthy, affordable, and sustainable food. Food Day was created by the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI). Throughout the month of October, communities all across the country participate in a variety of Food Day events. These events are powered by a diverse coalition of food movement leaders, organizations, and people from all walks of life to address issues as varied as health and nutrition, hunger, agricultural policy, animal welfare, and farm worker justice. The ultimate goal of Food Day is to strengthen and unify the food movement in order to improve our nation’s food policies.
Table of Contents

Introduction ..................................................................................................................1

Particiants, Goals & Agenda .....................................................................................2

Common Themes ........................................................................................................3
  Continued relationship-building
  Collaboration with new partners
  Ongoing efforts to educate and inform others
  Technical assistance regarding policy initiatives/systems level approaches

Policy Change Opportunities with Multisectoral Support .........................5
  Production/Supply
  Access
  Safety

Recommendations for Future Research .................................................................8
  Supply and Distribution
  Access
  Risk Management and Food Safety

Appendix A: “No Farmers, No Food”
A speech by David Cleverdon, Kinnikinnick Farm ..............................................11

Appendix B: Symposium Evaluation .....................................................................17

Supporting Partners/Planning Team .................................................................23
Introduction

As one of the largest agricultural states in the nation, Illinois has a burgeoning local food movement. Among many advocates, the Illinois Stewardship Alliance promotes environmentally sustainable, economically viable, socially just local food systems through policy development, advocacy and education. In addition, in 2009, the legislature launched the Local Food, Farms and Jobs Council housed in Illinois’ Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, whose purpose is to facilitate the growth of an Illinois-based local food and farm economy that revitalizes rural and urban communities, promotes healthy eating with access to fresh foods, creates jobs and supports economic growth through making local farm or food products available to all Illinois citizens. Fair access to healthy food is supported by the concept of food justice in the production, transport, distribution, access and consumption of culturally appropriate foods sold in markets void of disparities and inequalities.

Public health has a strong interest in local food development work in its traditional role of assuring the safety of the food supply. Public health regulates an array of areas relevant to the local food agriculture sector, including farmers’ markets, cottage food businesses and restaurants preparing and serving locally produced food. More recently, public health advocates working on nutrition and obesity prevention have been engaging with these agriculture interests in a number of ways, partnering on food systems and food hub development work, farm to school and farm to institution promotion, and development of farmers’ markets and efforts to make them more accessible to low income people.

In 2010, Illinois Public Health Institute (IPHI) launched the Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity (IAPO), a state-wide coalition comprised of a broad range of stakeholders working toward a state-level response to the obesity epidemic, focused on developing policy, systems, and environmental changes with an investment on par with the scale of the problem. Among a number of areas of concern, IAPO’s Obesity Action Roadmap includes a focus on increasing access to retailers who serve and/or sell healthy and affordable foods, increasing consumption to healthy foods and beverages in relation to consumption of unhealthy foods and beverages, and promoting healthy and affordable food consumption in senior centers, schools, parks, child care settings, and after school programs.

As a strategy to achieve these goals, IAPO developed a Local Food Systems/Local Food Access Workgroup focused on developing local food systems and policies to support them, developing incentives to support local food production, and promoting expanded farm-to-institution programs.

In order to further deepen and strengthen relationships between the public health and local food communities to further these initiatives, IPHI sought and received a grant from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), through the National Network of Public Health Institutes to explore the intersection of agriculture and health. In collaboration with the IAPO, Illinois Stewardship Alliance, the Illinois Local Food, Farms, and Jobs Council (ILFFJJC), and several other key stakeholders, IPHI held a state-wide “Healthy Farms, Healthy People” symposium to address food access, regulations, food safety, and production/supply issues in Springfield, Illinois on Tuesday, October 23, 2012 – the day before national “Food Day.”
The Participants

One hundred sixty-one people registered for the event. Roughly 140 people attended, which ensured a diversity of perspectives from a variety of health and agricultural stakeholders including farmers, public health and food safety practitioners, food processors, food, nutrition and health entrepreneurs; and advocates for local food systems, farmers’ markets, urban farming, healthy food access, and farm to school/institution programs.

Goals of the Meeting

The goals of the meeting were to:

• Increase inter-sectoral understanding of diverse perspectives pertaining to food access, food production/supply, ensuring food safety, and their impact on expanding local food systems.

• Provide a meaningful opportunity for networking, building relationships, and improving understanding among sectors that typically do not interact with one another.

• Produce a catalytic policy and research agenda that: (1) advances the creation of a local food system and improves public health, (2) lends itself to participatory and transdisciplinary methods and approaches, and (3) is better addressed jointly by health and agricultural stakeholders working together - not by either sector acting alone.

The Agenda

The morning plenary speeches and panel presentations explored some of the contemporary issues related to: (1) Food Access and Food Justice; (2) Food Safety on Farms and in Processing; (3) Food Production and Supply; and (4) Legal and Regulatory Barriers to Food Procurement. The morning sessions were designed to provide attendees who might have been unfamiliar with some of these topics with a brief introduction, as well as inspire creative thinking. Attendees were instructed to write down opportunities for action throughout the morning sessions – recording even their most extravagant wishes with the hope of identifying opportunities for action in the afternoon breakout sessions. Using an interactive process based on the “World Café” model, working roundtables were held in the afternoon to discuss and generate collaborative, multi-sectoral solutions to the challenges facing the Illinois food system.

Sample Questions for Working Breakout Sessions

• With respect to the small groups’ subjects (production/supply, access, food safety): What is it time for in Illinois?

• What needs to be done, that we must come together to accomplish, in the next 2-3, years to ensure safe and healthy food systems in Illinois?

• What specific policy agenda items are needed? What policy items don’t exist that need to? What policy items need to be changed?

• What specific research items are needed? Where do we need to know more? Where do we need to build the evidence-base?

• For the policy and research items listed, what are the most important next steps to advance this work? What must be done first?
In addition to the development of specific policy and research recommendations, the symposium identified two overarching capacity development issues that are needed to enhance the ability of stakeholders to implement the recommendations and build sustainability for long-term efforts to build a strong and safe local food system in Illinois.

**Capacity Development**

Continued relationship-building and new partner engagement

New collaborations across the health and agriculture sectors are critical to safely expanding local food systems. This was evidenced throughout the day, as stakeholders had an opportunity to share a variety of perspectives, make connections, and build new or expanded networks. Attendees shared their appreciation for this opportunity and commended its value in learning from one another and generating collaborative solutions on shared causes.

Recommendations in this realm included:

- Holding an annual Healthy Farms, Healthy People event to continue the dialogue and the work of building bridges and establishing new partnerships. One option was the idea of holding a similar but shorter meeting as a pre-meeting to the annual Illinois Environmental Health Association conference.

- Encouraging the Illinois Department of Public Health’s Division on Food, Drugs and Dairies to seek out a new, collaborative partnership with the University of Illinois College of Law and the Illinois Department of Agriculture to help small farmers navigate the legal and regulatory landscape associated with environmental health and food safety.

- Develop communications mechanisms for ongoing dialogue about the complex intersection of agriculture and health, for instance through an Illinois-specific Healthy Farms, Healthy People listserv or through the Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity Local Food Systems/Local Food Access Workgroup.

- Supporting and encouraging policymakers to engage stakeholders through meetings, sharing information, and other outreach.
**Capacity Development**

Technical assistance regarding policy initiatives and systems level approaches to support local food systems is needed

As with many sectors, local food producers and food safety practitioners are concrete and practical, and participants offered many excellent ideas for programs that would help achieve Healthy Farms, Healthy People goals, like new farmer education initiatives and connecting visits to farms with nutrition education programs. In addition, participants promoted many ideas for the development of collaborations that would advance local food systems. However, their practical sensibilities made policy, especially policy that is not funding-related, seem somewhat abstract. Thus, one key area for strengthening systems would be provisions of supports – for both participants and organizers – on how to focus on and articulate policy solutions to identified problems and how to develop policy ideas that advance programmatic ends.

For instance, incorporating training or education on the relationship between policy and programs in ongoing local food system improvement efforts, and maintaining ongoing engagement of practitioners in policy initiatives will be helpful in strengthening policy skills and capacity. Provision of technical assistance to the meeting planners and small group facilitators on strategies to structure discussions that leverage practitioners’ practical and holistic understanding of the context in which policy is implemented would also be helpful to improve future efforts.
Policy Change Opportunities with Multisectoral Support

Below are key areas for policy change identified and synthesized from the breakout sessions at the symposium. Deep concern was expressed throughout the event about an array of barriers to producing safe and affordable local foods for Illinoisans. The policy change discussions focused on reducing these barriers as well as developing proactive approaches to effectively expanding production, improving access, and ensuring effective and efficient approaches to assuring food safety. Importantly, though the policy recommendations are categorized in the three areas of interest at the symposium (production/supply, access and food safety), the policy recommendations can have multiple effects and some are interdependent across categories.

**Production/Supply**

- Create more opportunities for, and remove barriers to, financing for small farmers, which is one of the largest hurdles faced by farmers/producers, especially for those who attempt to grow healthy foods, which are typically unsubsidized, higher-risk crops.

- Provide state-level tax financial tools, such as targeted tax credits and matching grants for small farms and for the development of local food infrastructure like constructing hoop-houses, food hubs and similar projects.

- Support federal farm bill efforts to reform commodity subsidies and provide increased support for specialty crops and local and regional food system development.

- Establish a policy to expedite the payment process for small Illinois farmers selling their locally grown foods to state institutions and create user-friendly systems for small producers to market their products to the institutions.

- Expand access to shared-use kitchens – ideally located in proximity of a food hub – to provide access to commercial equipment required for scaling food processing and promoting value-added foods developed by farmers and entrepreneurs, e.g. expanding USDA Rural Development Programs like the Value-Added Producer Program to include specific funding for shared-use kitchens.

- Reestablish and expand the agriculture and family/consumer science programs in the Illinois school system to promote agriculture as a vocation and teach life skills such as cookery, consumer economics and nutrition for all students.

- Establish a zero food waste policy for restaurants and institutions in Illinois and create a process for the collection of food waste to be composted and sold to the community at a cost-recovery margin that takes into account the reduced landfill costs. Recover edible food/ensure edible food is not going into the waste stream, but is distributed to those that need it.

- Remove statutory barriers to make it easier for urban and school gardens to accept/use off-site materials to compost on-site.
Policy Change Opportunities with Multisectoral Support

Access

- Ask the Illinois General Assembly to “Double Down” on the $10 million investment it made for the Illinois Fresh Food Fund – specifically, provide additional funding that is earmarked for corner stores, co-ops, and other non-traditional markets that carry a minimal stock of locally-grown fruits and vegetables.

- Fund expansion/availability of EBT machines to farmers and farmers’ markets to increase access to healthy, local foods; provide incentives for those markets to locate in areas accessible by affordable public transportation and develop a campaign to create statewide awareness and outreach regarding the farmers market EBT availability.

- Support federal farm bill efforts to allow Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)\(^1\) benefits to be more easily used for CSA\(^2\) shares.

- Invest state and federal funds to expand SNAP incentive programs (e.g. double value coupon programs for farmers’ markets) to help SNAP recipients purchase healthy, local foods.

- Create a farmers market food demonstration policy that exempts the cost of a food vendor permit when the demonstration is organized by the market, features foods donated by the farmers and identifies the specific seasonal foods available at the market.

- Fund the Illinois Farm Fresh Schools competitive grant program to support Farm-to-School projects like school learning gardens that provide students with holistic, hands-on education that is integrated throughout the curriculum in health and nutrition, reading, math, science, geography, etc.

- Work with the Illinois State Board of Education to ensure holistic farm-to-school curriculum and education projects are aligned with the Illinois Learning Standards.

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1 The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a federal farm bill program, formerly known as food stamps, that provides nutrition and food purchasing support for low or no-income individuals and families.

2 CSA stands for Community Supported Agriculture. CSA’s are innovative arrangements between farmers and consumers where the consumer or CSA member pays a flat fee or for a share of the farm’s production at the beginning of the growing season. Then the member receives a weekly box or basket of seasonal vegetables, fruits, herbs, and flowers from the farm throughout the growing season.
Policy Change Opportunities with Multisectoral Support

Safety

- Establish uniform, state-wide food safety standards for farmers’ markets in Illinois.

- Engage the existing Farmers Market Task Force in creating a traceability procedure/form for sellers who are selling products that they did not grow themselves. Require that sellers disclose to consumers and market organizers when they are not the producer of a particular item.

- Engage the Farmers Market Task Force in creating and implementing a mock food contamination recall exercise to test and improve processes and procedures.

- Establish policy that ensures traceability procedures go to the farm level. For instance, currently, egg aggregators have no tracing that goes to the producer – traceability starts at the aggregator level, not the farm level.

- Work with the insurance industry to create insurance/liability products that are applicable and tailored to the needs of cottage food operations. In addition to providing compensation if customers become sick, private sector insurance companies would provide strong financial incentives, in the form of policy discounts, to producers with a solid safety record with premiums reflecting a host of risk factors. Subsequently explore establishing mandatory liability insurance for cottage food industries.

- Involve small farmers and producers in initiatives and efforts to create, reform and revise existing and future food safety-related rules and regulations.

- Share information about the recent release of proposed rules for the federal Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), and encourage stakeholders to submit comments.
Recommendations for Future Research

Below are key areas for research identified at the symposium. Similar to other aspects of the meeting, an overarching theme of this discussion was the observation that currently, research on the supply and distribution of local foods, improving access to local foods, and increasing food safety occurs in “silos”, and that future research needs to be grounded in inter-sectoral and multi-sectoral approaches; the group emphasized the importance of community-engaged research, in particular, the engagement of farmers.

Supply and Distribution

• There is multi-sector interest in measuring the effectiveness of food hubs. For example, both the public health and agriculture communities want to know if food hubs will actually make it easier to stock healthy, local food in small groceries and corner stores that serve disinvested communities.

• Farmers also want to know how they can use food hubs to aggregate more, but maintain farm brands. Are there qualitative case studies of other food hubs or examples of best practices they can use?

• Explore opportunities to improve efficiency by enabling farmers to work together. Is it possible to use food hubs to help streamline regulatory/inspection process?

• Research connections between the waste of one farm product process serving as a potential input in the development of a new farm product similar to the manner in which the industrial food industry extracts all potential products from their inputs to reduce waste and increase profit as described in Ken Meter’s story about the Ohio creamery business.

• Conduct research to identify the cultural foods desired throughout the state by region and distribute to farmers along with methods of presentation at farmers’ markets, grocers or roadside stands for culturally appropriate marketing.

• Evaluate the effectiveness of farmers’ market food/cooking demonstrations in promoting acceptance and sales of foods.
Recommendations for Future Research

Access

• Explore whether there are policy opportunities that could authorize the use of federal reimbursement for the free-and-reduced price lunch program for development of community and school gardens.

• It is assumed that expanding production of local food is good for health. Is this assumption true? What are the mechanisms and features that make local food access a health improvement strategy?

• Investigate the impact on health and on the purchase/consumption of locally grown foods of integrating health and food literacy competencies into school curricula that meet the Illinois Learning Standards.

• Utilize asset-based assessment and community participatory research methods to improve access to healthy, affordable food for communities.

• Evaluate the effectiveness of mobile markets as a manner to improve food security and access to healthy, affordable foods in low-income and high risk populations, commonly termed as food deserts.
**Recommendations for Future Research**

**Risk Management and Food Safety**

- Research opportunities to pool risk. Is there accessible literature available regarding risk management, indemnification, liability insurance, and alternative risk management strategies that can be used here in Illinois to help local farmers better manage their risk?

- Is “risk level” for food safety a construct that can be measured reliably? Is this a one-dimensional, or multidimensional, construct?

- What are different methods of scaling risk? E.g., income-based scale, size of operation, geographic distribution, type of food risk and crop (for example, salmonella in eggs and E. coli in beef)?

- Investigate methods to scale food safety regulations to the level of risk posed by various foods.

- In order to promote consistent application of food safety regulations, conduct research on a set of food safety “best practices” at the state level that could be implemented locally with uniformity.

- Both the health and agriculture sectors are interested in an accessible comparison of federal, Illinois, and local laws and regulations – and their interpretation – related to food safety, with a county-to-county comparison of ordinances and food safety regulations. Explore opportunities to reconcile inconsistencies between federal, state, and local policies.

- Review good models of traceability procedures so that the recall of one lot in a larger batch of product does not completely wipe out a small farmer. Determine best practices and applicability to different products. Conduct rigorous cost-benefit analysis of various traceability methods and their efficacy. The dairy industry has been suggested as a good model for traceability. Research how identified models and best practices align with FSMA rules.

- Review and research proposed FSMA rules to provide guidance on its possible impacts to small farms, access to fresh healthy foods and local food system development. Conduct a cost/benefit analysis of traceability methods tied to scale of operation and risk of food.

- For most local entrepreneurial farmers, the perceived risk associated with production of local food is substantially less than the risk posed by much larger-scale agribusinesses. Is there any truth to this assumption? What are the relative risks of small scale vs. large scale farming?

- Research the food safety efficacy of mechanical refrigeration for eggs, different cheeses, and meats versus ice or ice packs in coolers and other low tech preservation methods. Research whether it is possible to have and effectively enforce variable temperature requirements for different foods (e.g. different types of cheeses require different temperatures for optimal taste and preservation).

- Review the research around hand washing equipment and procedure requirements and best practices for the purpose of informing and promoting more uniformity in health department policy regarding farmers’ markets and sampling.
Next steps

These recommendations represent the collaborative work and input of many stakeholders from both the agriculture and public health sectors. They are designed to help guide the thinking and action agendas of advocacy and research groups and provide a mechanism to bring stakeholders together for action as opportunities present themselves. In particular, the Workgroup on Local Food Systems/Local Food Access of the Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity will review the recommendations, identify key issues that align with IAPO’s long-term agenda, and develop short-term goals as suggested by these recommendations. In addition, the Workgroup will disseminate this report and work across sectors to promote ongoing collaboration and implementation activities.

The report will be useful to the Illinois Local Food Farms and Jobs Council, the Illinois Farmers Market Task Force and Illinois Beginning Farmers Training Programs to review as they work to build capacity for local food systems. Illinois universities and community colleges that provide education and training in the areas of agriculture, nutrition, community development and public health can benefit from reviewing this call for action for developing a safe and accessible food system for the citizens of Illinois. Finally, the report should be useful to the Departments of Agriculture, Public Health and Commerce and Economic Opportunity in identifying areas that can be acted upon through legislative and administrative policy action.
APPENDIX A

NO FARMERS, NO FOOD
PLENARY SPEECH

by

DAVID CLEVERDON
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Let me just say at the outset that I’m probably not the best person to give this talk. I don’t use Power Point. And I don’t come from a world of “stakeholders,” and “facilitators,” and “partnering.” I’m a farmer. Not a public speaker. I spend most of my time on a tractor, coordinating our farm crew, taking care of livestock at Kinnikinnick Farm, or complaining about the weather . . . or my neighbors. I don’t spend too much time worrying about “food policy” or “food security” issues. The most I do is read the IllinoisLocal-foods listserv from time to time to see what some of you are up too.

But as a Board member of the Frontera Farmer Foundation and the Green City Market and as a member of our local Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training, and as a farmer who spends 24/7 immersed in the details of running a farm, I have thought a great deal about farming, particularly about the kind of market oriented farming that I fell into years ago as a third career. I think about its relative economic importance and its future. So . . .when Wes King asked me to give this talk to food, public health, and farm people and told me to focus on local food production and supply I agreed, because . . .well. . . I’ve got a dog in this hunt . . . and a few things I’d like to get off my chest. I’m going to talk to you as someone who has “crossed over.” Gone from the city to a farm. I want to share with you a few things that I have learned about “food farming”—growing food—in Illinois.

So, let’s cut right to the chase. And face an uncomfortable reality: what we all would like—an Illinois food system based on Illinois produced food—is a long way off. We are not going to see “20 by 20.” And the reason for that has only a little to do with anything that can be solved by better marketing or distribution or partnering or cooperating or connecting Illinois food producers with food consumers. Goodness knows that you all have been very effective in these areas. It has a lot to do with my end of things, with the absence of local food itself. Except for a few specialty crops like sweet corn and pumpkins or fruit from Pike County, it just is not there. Sure, some of us who are members of a CSA or shop at a local farmers market, or eat at a high-end Chicago restaurant eat more local food. At least for part of the year. And sure, we can, and should, improve the system that delivers that food. But for the other people of Illinois—the other 98%—local food does not exist. And the reason it does not exist? The farmers do not exist. In Illinois there are damn few of us who produce food for local consumption. That’s the “bad news.” The “good news,” which I will touch on in a few minutes, is that our numbers are growing.
No Farmers, No Food

Growing the number of local Illinois farmers is the single, most important need that has to be met if Illinois is going to have anything that resembles a local or regional food system.

At first glance, Illinois would seem to be a natural place for a local food system to take root. Nearly 80% of Illinois’ total land area—around 28 million acres—is farmed. And it is not just any land. It is some of the richest farmland in the country. But it is a mistake to assume that just because Illinois has farms it can produce food. It is not possible to just tweak things a bit—show Illinois farmers, for example, that there is a demand for locally produced veggies, fruit, meat, and dairy—and expect them to respond. Illinois only produces 6% of the produce consumed in state. $26 billion in food revenue leaves the state every year. And there are some of rock hard reasons for that. First, food produced out of state, in California’s Central Valley, for example, can be produced more cheaply and over a longer season than it can be produced here. Second, at its core, Illinois is a Corn and Bean state. And that is not going to change anytime soon. If you have any doubt about that, check out the Home page for the Illinois Dept of Ag. The national and international economic and political interests that have a stake in Illinois’ corn and bean commodity agriculture are about as permanent as any human thing can be. We can criticize it all we want, but it isn’t going to change anytime soon—it is too efficient a mechanism for extracting wealth. Third, Illinois farmers aren’t really farmers anymore. In fact, they don’t even call themselves farmers. They call themselves “Producers.” It’s true. That is what they are: producers. Awesome producers. Several generations of US food policy has created in Illinois a type of commodity farming that requires a massive amount of capital, huge tracts of land, and large and expensive machinery designed to do one job and one job only: produce huge amounts of soybeans and #2 field corn which is indigestible to humans but used in animal feed, food additives and supplements, and ethanol. The result: Illinois producers have lost the ability to respond to market forces (the only real marketing decision they need to make is whether to plant corn or beans) because the federal government’s commodity programs insulated them a long time ago from having to deal with market risk. Worse, even if they wanted to respond to the growing demand for locally produced food, they can’t. They don’t have the machinery, on-farm infrastructure, or knowledge to plant, grow, husband, and sell it.

When it comes to Illinois, here’s a bottom line: In Illinois’ rural farming community, the knowledge, intelligence, information, relationships—in other words, the very social capital—needed to create farms which can respond to the demand for locally grown food has been leached out over the years. It barely exists. Government farm programs are only partially to blame. A lot that we think of as basically good has also contributed: industrialization, urbanization, suburbanization, the service economy, social mobility, higher education, international trade.

This means that if we are going to build a local food system or a new agriculture we must first regain the social capital required to farm and that means starting at the bottom and building, farm by new farm, a foundation of knowledge, experience, wisdom, talent, and relationships. And for that we need people (farmers), time (lots of time), financial capital, land, appropriate markets that match the scale of the farms, and a regulatory environment that can foster the growth of farmers and farms. A lot of what I see, hear, and read about that is going on in the “food world” seems to be putting the cart in front of the horse. The way I see it, given the circumstance we are in, the few Illinois farms that actually produce food do not exist to meet the demands for local food. The demand for local food exists to foster the development of these farms and more like them. And, believe me, the development of these farms won’t happen overnight. Fortunately, the whole process of creating new farms and the social capital to farm has already begun at the far edges of agriculture in Illinois and in some of the surrounding states. It is a new frontier. It is, intellectually and vocationally, right now one of the most exciting places to be. There are already embryonic farming oases and food system oases dotting Illinois. I know they are there because, as a Board member of the Frontera Farmer Foundation, I see every year their applications for capital grants. In fact, all across the U.S. there is the start of an alternative farming subculture with its own training programs, and journals, and practices, and heroes, and standards.
No Farmers, No Food

Well. . .

Where will these new farmers come from?

The farm population in Illinois is not regenerating itself. The average age of Illinois farmers has been rising steadily. In 2007, the average age of Illinois farmers, according to the Illinois Agricultural Census was over 56. My bet is that it could be pushing 60 when we see the results of the 2012 Ag census. Not many farm children are following in their parents’ footsteps. They see better prospects elsewhere, or don’t have the balance sheet—the capital—to do commodity farming, or they see that their family farms need to change but don’t know how or what to do. So the truth is: new farmers are going to need to come from people like you in this room. We need to develop a new or different agriculture in Illinois, so we have need to think and work outside the box. A lot of new farmers, with non-farming backgrounds, are already outside the box. And that’s a good thing. There’s a good chance that when you go to a farmers market, the farmer selling to you has a degree more advanced than your own. I know farmers who were once mining engineers, astrophysicists, publishers, musicians, artists, business consultants, lawyers, nurses, doctors, professors.

How do these new farmers learn to farm? Where do they get their information, their knowledge about farming? When it comes to techniques and methods there are formal training programs, some old some new, like the program in organic agriculture at Michigan State or the Sustainable Ag program at Warren Wilson College or farmer to farmer training programs like The Farm Beginnings Programs in Illinois that some of you are familiar with or the annual Organic Farming Conference in La Crosse (what I call the meeting of the clan) or acquiring the Core Competencies outlined by the Stateline CRAFT by working on one or more CRAFT farms. But nothing can take the place of experience. And that’s why the farm incubator program that George and Vickie Ranney started at Prairie Crossing in Grays Lake is so important. We need more incubators in Illinois like theirs. Ultimately, however, when it comes to creating a farm that makes money, that is profitable, the best teacher is the farm itself.

When you start to farm for real, when your intention is to make a business of it, your farm will present you with its own particular set of risks that you must deal with. It is when you actually begin to deal with those particular risks for your particular farm that you actually learn to farm. These risks are real and they are the primary barriers farmers need to deal with in order to grow the food that is the foundation of the local food system we all want. There is the production risk—a lot of this has to do with the weather but it also includes the question: can I put together the right blend of soils, fertility, climate, on farm infra-structure, and my own knowledge, that will enable me to produce what I want to produce; the capital risk or the money management risk—do I have the capital base to produce what I need to produce in the quantity I want or will I over-reach my capital base and risk total ruin because I have had a bad year. There is the market risk—how and where do I sell what I grow and what price do I get. And there is the risk of not being diversified enough, of not having enough different on-farm income streams or crops or ventures all responding to different variables in different ways so that when you get blindsided by a failure in your operation it is not fatal to your whole enterprise.

I could talk for an hour about each one of these risks facing farmers. I’ll just touch on a few of them to give you an idea about why it will take a long time to develop the farms in Illinois we need to produce food for a local food system.

We are all familiar with production risk presented by weather. I know of one farmer who lost his entire squash crop this year. A combination of drought, insects, and disease did it in. A few years ago, we had a very cool summer which created the perfect condition for the spread of the Late Blight. I watched an acre of tomato plants die on our farm in three days.
No Farmers, No Food

Each of these crop failures hits our bottom line immediately. We are out the cost of the seeds, labor, profit, etc. It can take years to recover. And we are forced to begin looking for more drought resistant and disease resistant varieties to plant. Or change our crop mix altogether . . . which may mean changing equipment and our marketing. And all this will be done, for the most part, by trial and error over a period of years until we find the right combination of crop variety, equipment, and markets that work for our farm.

Having the right infra-structure in place is also fundamental to making a farm productive and profitable. But as the needs of the farm change, so do the needs for new infrastructure. It can take years and years to get everything in place. When you look at the Amish farms around Arthur, II—at the angularity, the compact fields, the rectilinear layout of the farmyard, the fencing, the placement of the barn to the house and the house to the road—you are looking at farms with infra-structures that are the product of a farming tradition that goes back for generations. But when you start farming with a non-farming background you have no tradition. You need to discover and make it up as you go along. And that is going to take you years, probably decades.

From the outside, farms look like simple places. But they are not. They are the result of a slow organic process of laying on layer after layer of details and trade-offs and practices and habits. They become so embedded that when you are on the farm you don’t even give them a second thought. Let me give you a small example. Multiply this example a thousand fold you will begin to get an idea of what goes into creating a productive farm. And why it takes so much time. Our farm is powered by an old International 806 tractor. We bought it soon after we bought our farm. After we used it for a month, the front tire went flat. The lug nuts were rusted on. A tire iron wouldn’t work. But we needed the tire because we needed the tractor because we needed to power the farm. So we got a pneumatic impact wrench. But in order to make the impact wrench work we needed an air compressor. So we got an air compressor. And then we quickly learned that you can’t power an air compressor with an extension cord. The electric power needed is so great that it will melt the prongs on an extension cord. So we had to run electric power out to our garage and wire the garage in a strange and wonderful way—lots and lots of outlets—so we could plug in the air compressor to power the wrench to change the tire so we can use the tractor to power the farm. Basically, the equation on our farm is that we needed to wire the garage so we could use our tractor. Another way of looking it all this is that a farm is a chaos theory laboratory . . . operating in real time.

Another risk that a farmer has to deal with is market risk. Most conventional commodity farmers are price takers. If they deal at all with the risk of market price movements it’s through hedging up their production using contracts for future delivery. Market farmers, on the other hand and particularly early in their farming careers, look for opportunities to be price makers. And this means they must do three things: first, be willing to break the “farmer mold” by doing some very unconventional farmer things by, two, disintermediating the marketing process to sell direct and, three, going where the money is. A look at the American food dollar will tell you why. According to the USDA’s Economic Research Service report last year, food marketing, what happens to food between harvest and consumption, gets 84.2 cents of every food dollar spent. Farmers get 15.8 cents. And that is down from 19 cents in 2006. If a farmer is going to survive, he or she needs to capture some of the marketing share through direct sales. This may explain to you why you see some farmers grab their wallets when you all begin to talk to them about food hubs and the like. What part or parts of the marketing share are farmers going to go after? The Research Service’s next breakdown of the food dollar into which industry groups in the food supply chain get what percentage gives some pretty strong clues: 13.6 cents goes to retail trade, 18.6 cents goes to food processing, and a big 33.7 cents goes to food service. That translates into exactly what we see farmers doing to build a positive cash flow on their farms in order to build their farming businesses: more retail trade through more farmers’ markets or CSA’s, more farm based value added products, and more farm dinners where the farmer is getting a good percentage of the gross.
No Farmers, No Food

And in all three of these areas, farmers run smack dab into a thicket of public health regulations where they could use a lot of help. Help in everything from the need for uniform statewide regulations of farmers’ markets to allow the broadest array of farm products, raw milk sales, interstate meat shipments, the production of farm based value added products (I still don’t know why pickles weren’t included in the recent cottage industry law), and some slack, like in the B-and-B rules, for on farm production of meals.

Dealing with the capital risk is the biggest problem of all and the one that needs the most attention. This is the risk of over-reaching the farm’s capital base to the point that the farm faces the risk of total ruin. This is particularly true for young farms who hear the siren song of “scaling up.” It is a risk that too many of us new farmers have flirted with. I speak from my own experience. Too much success for any small business can be very dangerous. This is doubly true for farmers. And the reason is this: building a successful business can drive you into insolvency. Why? Sales generally grow arithmetically while Capital requirements grow exponentially. At some point in most businesses, like manufacturing, economies of scale kick in. In vegetable farming, diseconomies of scale kick in very quickly, particularly for farms that try to push their size much beyond the 6 to 8 acre “sweet spot.” Vegetable farms in the 7 to 20 acre size struggle. It is easier to make money if your vegetable farm is below 7 acres or above 20 acres. Back in the mid 90’s some farmers in the Twin Cities area, in both Wisconsin and Minnesota shared their numbers and put together a sheet describing different sizes of farms and what was needed in terms of land, equipment, capital costs, for each and what could be expected for income. As a new farmer, I grabbed that sheet and never let go. I was interested in how to grow from a small scale to a larger one. And this is what it showed. Remember this is in 1995 dollars . . . but it tracks quite closely our own experience and that of other farmers. A farmer with $14,000 in capital could farm 1 to 3 acres and expect an income of about $20,000 on $40,000 in gross sales—earning $6,000 more that his capital base. Put it another way. A young farmer could pocket 50% of his gross sales, pay for his investment in farming in one year, and have money left over. This is contrary to popular wisdom. It points to just how efficient very small farms are. BUT . . . if that same farmer wanted to kick his income up 2 ½ times to $50,000, he would need to farm over 20 acres and have to gross over $200,000 to get that $50,000. That is only a 25% return . . . and he would need to expand his capital base 18 fold to over a quarter of a million dollars. Where does that money for expansion come from? It has to be either earned over years and years from the farms cash flow, or come from some kind of grant . . . or from a rich uncle . . . or borrowed. Debt is a double edged sword. It can be very destructive or very creative. Most of us stay as far away from debt as we can for that reason. But, having said that, I should also say that, right now, there is a crying need for bankers . . . loan officers in small community banks near farms . . . willing to learn about how small farm businesses work and become, literally, the economic advisors to small farmers, guiding them to faster growth and more profitability through the judicious use of debt. What we have right now is a whole superstructure of people and institutions arrayed around various aspects of the food issue and underneath it, at the foundation level, we have a non financed or under financed or poorly financed substructure of farms that we expect to produce food to meet local demand. On its face, that is an unreasonable expectation.

At Kinnikinnick Farm our strategy is to not scale up but scale out. We are not alone. I know of a number of other farmers who are doing the same. We have dropped the number of acres we have in produce and begun to diversify the farm into livestock and other on farm ventures. Our goal is to make the farm more internally resilient both economically and ecologically. We want a farm with staying power. My advice to everyone in this room who wants more locally grown food is to be patient and bend every resource you have available to help new farms and young farms to be as profitable as they can be at whatever stage of growth or change or development they are in. If we do that we can create, as sure as day follows night, a solid local food system based on a statewide network of local farms that are here to stay.
Healthy Farms, Healthy People Symposium Program Evaluation

The Illinois Public Health Institute works through partnerships to promote prevention and improve public health systems that maximize health and quality of life for the people of Illinois. While acknowledging the impact of individual choices on health outcomes, it is the role of policy, systems and environments in both supporting good choices and presenting barriers to health that is the focus of the work.

One hundred sixty one people registered for the event. Roughly 140 people attended. Forty-five evaluations were submitted – a 32% response rate. Fourteen evaluations were incomplete with one or more sections left blank by the respondents.

The evaluation inquired about attendees’ views on the content and logistics of the symposium (Table 1). In addition to gathering feedback on content, a portion of the instrument was designed to gain insight about whether or not the information shared influenced the participants (Table 2) as it relates to the key aspects of building a healthy local food system, including: food access, food production/supply, regulatory barriers, and food safety, as well as opportunities for networking across multiple sectors.

The scale used in the evaluation tool was “strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree”. Statements for which responses left blank or entered “N/A” were noted with a dash (-).

Feedback about the event was positive and enthusiastic.

- The overwhelming majority of respondents thought the event created a productive environment to discuss local food systems and food issues and also helped to identify shared policy priorities and action steps regarding these issues.
- 90% of respondents thought the event was a good use of their time and also believed the content was consistent with the program description and learning objectives
- 96% of respondents indicated that practical information was provided. About 70% also said the materials and handouts provided were useful.
- Only a few concerns were raised about the length of the event, with 11% of respondents sharing that the event was not the right length (Table 1), with a few comments about the event including too many speakers.

1 The symposium learning objectives were to share information with participants that would help lead to the production of a catalytic policy and research agenda that (1) advances the creation of a local food system and improves public health, (2) lends itself to participatory and transdisciplinary methods and approaches, and (3) is better addressed jointly by health and agricultural stakeholders working together -- not by either sector acting alone.
Table 1: Symposium content and logistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Event created a productive environment to talk about and develop common language around food systems and food safety.</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event identified shared priorities for policy and research including action steps to advance local food systems that improve health in Illinois.</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event was a good networking opportunity.</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event was about the right length.</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful handouts and support materials were provided.</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical information was provided.</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content was consistent with the description and learning objectives.</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event was a good use of time.</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Logistics</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyed food and beverages that were served during the meeting.</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important that food served was predominantly locally sourced.</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The “Food Networking” exercise was worthwhile.</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many attendees gained an increased understanding of food access, food production/supply, regulatory barriers, food safety, and networking. The vast number of attendees also expanded their knowledge on the impact of these aspects on building a healthy local food system.

- Over 50% of the respondents received increased understanding on issues of food access and 82% gained knowledge on ways various sectors can expand local food availability. However, some attendees did not feel like they received additional knowledge of food access issues, as it relates to food assistance programs.
- Approximately 85% of respondents developed improved understanding of the state of local food production and supply and how growing the supply can expand access to healthy foods statewide.
- More than 60% of respondents have increased understanding of regulatory and policy barriers to the procurement of locally grown foods and the practices that serve as obstacles to entry by smaller local food producers.
- About 70% of respondents obtained more understanding of “Good Agricultural Practices” (GAP) / Good Handling Practices and their impact on local food producers. Almost 90% agreed that speakers from food safety, public health, and the farm/agriculture community engaged in a productive dialogue about how to ensure food safety while supporting the need for increased production, distribution, and consumption of local fresh foods.
- Close to 90% of respondents believed they developed new relationships with different sectors that are likely to increase collaboration and also enhance initiatives that seek to support local food systems and improve public health.
Table 2: Individual Knowledge, Tools and Institutional Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As a result of attending this symposium…</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Food Access</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have an increased understanding of the role of SNAP/EBT, WIC and other nutrition assistance programs at farmers markets.</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have an increased understanding of the role of public health in addressing food insecurity and ways the agricultural community, the public health community, the retail sector and the education community can expand the availability of fresh, locally produced foods for Illinois’ communities.</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Food Production / Supply</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have an increased understanding of the state of local food production – specifically, the problems and opportunities surrounding the expansion of the supply of locally produced food.</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have an increased understanding of how increasing the supply of locally produced fruit, vegetables, meat, and dairy products can increase the availability of healthy foods for all Illinois communities.</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regulatory Barriers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have an increased understanding of regulatory and policy barriers to the procurement of locally grown, fresh foods for schools, hospitals and other institutions.</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have an increased understanding of common practices used in food procurement specifications that may present significant barriers to entry by smaller local food producers in Illinois.</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Food Safety**

| I have an increased understanding of “Good Agricultural Practices” (GAP) / Good Handling Practices and their impact on local food producers. | 24% | 47% | 27% | - |

Food safety regulators, the public health community, and the farm/agriculture community engaged in a productive dialogue about how to ensure food safety while supporting the need for increased production, distribution, and consumption of fresh food from local farmers and food entrepreneurs in Illinois.

| 27% | 62% | 7% | - |

**Networking**

| I developed new relationships that are likely to increase collaboration with people that work in different sectors than my own. | 42% | 47% | 9% | - |

The new relationships that were built at this meeting are likely to enhance initiatives that seek to support local food systems and improve public health.

| 38% | 51% | 9% | - |

**Additional Comments**

**Materials**

- Don’t know about [handouts being useful]. Are presentations being shared online?
- Got more info from networking [than handouts and support materials].
- No handouts from presenters.
- More handouts from speakers.

**Logistics**

- [Food and beverages] not enough.
- Yes, [enjoyed lunch]. No snack.
- Dessert for the closing session would have been good.
- The food was fine. I’m glad it was vegetarian. Could sauces/dressing be on the side?
- [Food networking exercise] a good idea for conversation and for discovery. Well done!
- [Food Networking activity] such as unique gathering!
- The space worked well.
Speakers / Content

- Did your keynote speaker really just say that corn and soy producers create commodities and are not real farmers? Divisive much?! After that, I doubt I’ll have many positive things to say about this event.
- Not enough on health and nutrition prevention.
- Loved talking to the farmers.
- Already knew a lot [food access, food production/supply, and regulatory barriers].
- The time for the Cafe model did not seem sufficient based on the number and complexity of the issues.
- This was an excellent event. The topics covered will be useful and presenters had current and relevant info. Please encourage presenters to consider slide format (less text/more readable font/watch color choices). Same thing for name tags. We could have used more time to talk at lunch – there were many people to meet. Maybe have “the me” tables for lunch conversations? Great job!
- Ken M, Bruce P, should have been given more time. Too many speakers. Breakout session was worthwhile.
- Would have liked fewer speakers and longer, more meaningful and useful info from speaker #1 and #3.

Overall

- This was a great opportunity to build relationships and focus on a cooperative effort toward a vibrant local food system.
- Please share my thanks for the scholarship to attend. Most especially, extend my appreciation to the coordinating groups, the Springfield hosts, and the excellent speakers. With very tangible “Food for Thought,” the symposium on October 23 brought together experiences, offered knowledge, and provided directions for next steps.
- I was very impressed with the HFHP conference. It was so well organized and had very good speakers. The afternoon Cafe session appeared to go very well in the Food Safety group. I like that format very much. Thanks for all the good work you are doing.
- Thank you for all of your hard work in planning the HFHP Symposium, I know that many people got a lot out of it. I was somewhat surprised that there were so few farmers present and when I asked one of my local contacts about it he mentioned that October is a bad month for farmers to attend conferences and that the winter months (like Feb) might be a better time. I thought that maybe it would be an interesting angle to get a farmer on board to co-chair the symposium? Just an idea. Thanks again for your hard work. I appreciated a lot of things about the conference.
- Nice job on the conference. Thanks for all of your hard work to organize this important event.
- Thanks for all you did to make this event such a success!
- Incredibly well-organized! I’m impressed by the number of highly-qualified people you brought together from so many different parts of the local food system. Everyone [was] committed and enthusiastic. Great speakers from across the country.
- Thanks for bringing together people that never seem to talk to each other. A great first step.
- Excellent forum!
- Great! Kendall is a great organizer and deserves a star!
- Is this a first annual event? It should be.

Follow-up

- Please send me a summary of today’s meetings. Very informative!
- Please send me notes from the key recommendations.
Acknowledgement of Financial Support

This meeting is a part of the Healthy Farms, Healthy People (HFHP) State Meetings Learning Community. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has supported the learning community through its cooperative agreement with the National Network of Public Health Institutes (NNPHI). NNPHI has provided funding to selected state meetings and has contracted with the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) and ChangeLab Solutions to provide technical assistance. The views expressed during this meeting do not necessarily represent the views of NNPHI, IATP, ChangeLab Solutions, CDC, or the Healthy Farms, Healthy People Coalition.

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