

Local Food Systems

The Role of Cooperative Extension

What is driving the current local food movement in the U.S.?

Health/obesity concerns

Distrust of corporate food systems

Desire to simplify lifestyles

Desire to reduce carbon footprint of traditional food transportation systems

What will it take to make local food systems really work?

Strong and consistent consumer demand

Producer adaptation to capitalize on new markets

Investment in local food transportation and storage facilities (public and/or private)

Trained workers within the system infrastructure (production, marketing, transportation, logistics, storage, pricing, food safety, govt. regulation, management, etc.)

Questions Extension needs to ask before committing to the effort

Is this a fad, or is there going to be a continuing demand for educational programs to support local food systems?

Is it up to us to initiate discussions on the development of local food systems, or do we simply respond to demand for our services? If we are in an advocacy and promotion role, should our efforts be statewide or

targeted to local communities where local food systems are most likely to succeed? If targeted, how do we decide where?

A successful local food system is likely to have several critical entities involved, not just Extension. Who is in control? Are there MOUs in place that define everyone's role? If the project moves in a direction of being an advocate against traditional food systems, will it hurt our credibility with other agricultural organizations that are critical funding partners and advocates?

With current budget realities, can we afford to commit to programming excellence in local food systems when other proven programs are hurting?

With several internal academic units involved, what are the internal barriers to pulling together a cohesive local foods educational program? Can we sell it to our own university administration?

What are liabilities in the event of an outbreak of food-borne illness or individual cases of food allergies?

How do we document success? Healthier lifestyles, reduced obesity, economic viability of small farms, and economic development can all be indicators, but how do we gather that data and demonstrate overall value to more traditional funding partners?

From an educational standpoint, what are the differences in supporting a true, large scale local food systems vs. community gardens which provide a source of fresh fruits and vegetables and physical activities for a small number of families?

What is our role in local Farm to School programs? Who is in charge?
What are our liabilities?

Examples of successes, failures and learning experiences: