

From: THE NEW YORK STATE WORK TEAM ON LOCAL FOODS AND LOCAL MARKETS

In July of 2008 leaders from across the state gathered for a day long Local Foods- Local Markets Summit to examine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges to establishing and maintaining local food systems in and across New York. From an extensive statewide survey - conducted prior to the gathering- summit individuals working in small groups were able to focus on the most pressing issues to local market success. Strategies for resolving these barriers were identified and prioritized. What follows are the most significant and pressing issues to local foods system success as identified by the stakeholders themselves, and their suggestions for solving. In some cases the solutions identified can be undertaken by individual groups such as educators, researchers, policy makers or those working in community outreach; in other cases a collaborative effort is needed to resolve the challenges faced. We encourage all those with an interest in a local food system to consider these state-wide recommendations so that the most effective efforts are employed to ensure success and that our limited resources are used wisely.

Sincerely,

The New York State Work Team on Local Foods and Local Markets

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PRIORITY ISSUES AND STRATEGIES FOR SOLVING

Balancing Regulations and Food Safety

How do we enhance and ensure safety of local foods?

- Disseminate reasonable universal standards for food safety and explain them to farmers.
- Be cognizant of risks of environmental contaminants when creating new farms and gardens (sewage; heavy metals; waste management).

Encouraging Economic Development and Investment in Infrastructure

How do we ensure the economic development community is informed about agricultural trends and programs and help them think beyond traditional manufacturing (e.g. large scale processing)?

- Encourage the development of an agricultural economic development task force at the county and regional level that include representatives from key economic development organizations to ensure that agriculture and food system projects find their way into the pipeline.

How do we increase investment in marketing and branding programs?

- Develop a statewide task force specifically focused on branding issues.
- Determine the effectiveness of regional brands and the state brands.

How do we develop agricultural-based criteria for state economic development investments?

- Solicit input from county development offices on what they have identified as opportunities.
- Determine where investment of new farms could be most beneficial.

How can we help with infrastructure investment and transitioning?

- Determine what is missing and what is most needed.
- Encourage re-establishment through cooperation among economic development offices and agricultural associations.

How can we increase local processing capacities?

- Educate economic development community, (re: current views of agriculture and the potential value and growth) to see advantages of investment in local farms, agricultural business and markets.
- Help them to understand capital investment and resource needs.

How can we connect with farmers for value-added production?

- Determine what options already exist- and what farmers are keyed into.
- Regularly keep farmers aware of consumer demands.
- Fund value-added programs to initiate farmers into process (ex. Food Venture Center/Nelson Farms).
- Conduct classes on processing and business development for farmers.
- Establish more facilities closer to farmers.
- Recognize and promote shared use kitchens.
- Encourage research opportunities which connect farmers and consumers.
- Encourage marketing opportunities based on collaboration or cooperative promotion.

Expanding Distribution

How can we find cost effective ways to distribute /deliver & obtain products?

- Identify, then compare-contrast models of best practices.
- Use various existing distributors.
- Identify opportunities to tap into profit motives of corporations and cooperatives.
- Provide start-up funds and guidance.
- Build regional distribution centers (ex. Evans creamery) which act as “hubs” across NY.
- Fund groups who developed successful models for outreach/education for expansion.

How do we expand into existing farmers' networks of distribution and support and encourage more collaboration? How do we make connections to NYC markets?

- Identify all farmers and farmer groups, their products, availability, location and put it on a GIS system.
- Roster current activities.
- Create portal for information and make it easy to use.
- Create regional marketing cooperatives to sell and market products.
- Develop regional distribution centers.
- Seek grants for 8-10 processing centers.
- Invest economic development money to build systems not just structures.
- Continue and expand farmer to farmer discussion groups and networks (off season).
- Organize NY wine and food summits (chefs, writers, restaurateurs, producers).

How do we improve and get consistent state wide distribution?

- Utilize existing distribution capacity that might be underutilized (e.g. back-haul of product).
- Build up consistent demand.

Encouraging Collaboration and Cooperation

How do we support and encourage collaboration among farmers?

- Encourage cooperative problem solving.
- Provide assistance and technical guidance on cooperative structure and formation.

Creating Connections and Increasing Access to Food

How can we better educate and connect rural, low-income folks & youth about local foods and markets?

- Integrate existing programs from educators, growers, and farmers' markets.
- Tap knowledge and experience of elders and other good models for inter-generational education.

How can we improve access for rural, low-income folks and seniors?

- Create special bussing or other transportation alternative.
- Improve and expand neighborhood garden programs.
- Expand plant a row for the hungry.

Educating Consumers

How do we improve consumer understanding about the importance of local food in an effective campaign? How do we convince consumers to pay more for local food? How do we integrate sustainability, social movements, values and strategies into local food systems and acknowledge that developing a system is not only economic?

- Generate funds to have Pride of New York hire a public relations firm.
- Evaluate what campaigns have been done in NYS and how effective they have been.
- Develop specific consumer messages. Combine homeland security with better health messages.

- Share studies regarding economic impacts of local food systems.
- Increase funding for Pride of NY efforts.
- Get into schools. Use students to carry the message.

How do we convey “the true cost of cheap food” to consumers in a way that they care?

- Start young, work in elementary schools.
- Consolidate resources, pool media, and coordinate a statewide media blitz.

Assisting Farmers

How can we assist farmers with business growth challenges (division of labor) and improve farm management skills (business skill sets)?

- Offer intensive services to groups on particular subjects.
- Expand farmer to farmer mentoring.
- Assist farmers in ‘transition’ (hand-holding); use a case-worker model
- Encourage farmers to attend community college business classes.
- Train agricultural lenders in enterprise analysis for loans.
- Prioritize agriculture as an economic development component.
- Utilize positive deviant model of education (determine what is working) and promote that.
- Encourage and include farmers in chambers and other business associations.
- Modify PRO-DAIRY and First Pioneer’s model of working with farmers.

Increasing the Number of Farmers and Developing a Workforce

How do we encourage agricultural careers and create local viable career opportunities?

- Establish internships for H.S. students.
- Tap into farmers who are willing to train young farmers.
- Help make farms more profitable.
- Utilize NY FarmLink and Beginner Farmer Program to assist with transfers.

How can you help? Below are the identified strategies, sorted by type, to approaching and resolving the most significant barriers to food system success. Consider incorporating these suggestions in your plans of work.

ALL INCLUSIVE strategies need a team approach to address and solve.

1. Consolidate resources, pool media, and coordinate a media blitz.
2. Invest economic development money to build systems not just structures.
3. Build and develop regional distribution centers, in close proximity to farms, which act as “hubs” across NY.
4. Help make farms more profitable by building up consistent demand for NY products.
5. Encourage agriculture with curriculum and gardens, and in the cafeterias of New York schools.

Policy strategies need to be implemented by government officials or agencies and require public funds.

1. Increase funding for Pride of NY marketing efforts.
2. Fund groups who developed successful distribution models to allow for expansion.
3. Fund value-added activities to link farmers with processors (ex. Food Venture Center/Nelson Farms).
4. Provide start up funding and guidance to start 8-10 processing and distribution centers.

Research strategies need to be studied and analyzed (including market research).

1. Research the opportunities which connect farmers and consumers.
2. Identify all farmers and farm groups, products, availability, location and put in GIS system.
3. Determine current value added options and identify areas in close proximity to farmers
4. Evaluate campaigns in NYS, what they have done and how effective they have been.
5. Identify, then compare-contrast distribution models of best practices; determine what is working.
6. Conduct/ share studies regarding economic impacts of various consumers messages.

Education strategies inform and assist farmers.

1. Continue and expand farmer to farmer discussion groups, networks and mentoring.
2. Offer business management services to farmers or encourage farmers to attend community college business classes.
3. Conduct classes on processing and business development for farmers.
4. Utilize existing distribution capacity that might be underutilized (e.g. back-haul product).

5. Create regional marketing cooperatives to assist farmers in marketing and selling products.
6. Educate economic development community, help them to see advantages of investment in local farms, agricultural business and markets. Help them to understand capital investment and resource needs.

Outreach strategies strengthening the connections between farmers and others.

1. Work in schools. Teach students the importance of local food and agriculture.
2. Organize NY wine and food summits (chefs, writers, restaurateurs, producers).
3. Utilize various existing distributors to help move product.
4. Recognize shared use kitchens; utilize as a beginning value added option.
5. Encourage marketing opportunities based on collaboration or cooperative promotion.
6. Prioritize agriculture as an economic development component and encourage farmer participation in chambers and other business associations.