Building regional food businesses and networks - roles for universities, agencies, NGOs

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Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture

- Iowa Groundwater Protection Act - 1987
- State funded --- at ISU
- Aldo Leopold namesake
- $1.2 million per year

Three Initiatives
- Ecology
- Marketing & Food Systems
- Policy
Building a Research Blueprint for a Healthier Food System
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How do our (local and/or regional) food system efforts appear to investors, policy makers, and influencers?
What if the work was more “synchronized” across efforts and additive in impact? Would we see more investment from local and state governments and the private sector?
How do we build regional food clusters that support these food value chains and provide economic, environmental and social benefits?
The current research/education and technical assistance landscape for local and regional foods

Difficult for farmers/communities to negotiate
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of network</th>
<th>Level of Risk (to members)</th>
<th>Systemic Change Potential</th>
<th>How they operate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooperating</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Little chance</td>
<td>Model best practices; test ideas and learn different approaches; convene problem-solving sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinating</td>
<td>Low to Moderate</td>
<td>Good chance</td>
<td>Push established organizational boundaries; engage in activities requiring greater mutual reliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating</td>
<td>Moderate to High</td>
<td>Best chance</td>
<td>Methods in place to resolve conflicts; pursuing long-term system creation; radical shifts from past operation; fundamental resource re-allocation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*From Vandeventer, P., and M Mandell, 2007. Networks that Work*
Gibb Triangle

High versus low trust scenarios

Jack Gibb – Trust Level Theory
http://www.geocities.com/toritrust/trust.htm

Collaborating networks

Superficial cooperating networks

Controls
Goals
Communication
Trust Risk Acceptance

Rules to support
Regulations
What do we do with all the research?

Information Junkyards  Empty Libraries

From: Knowing in Community: 10 Critical Success Factors in Building Communities of Practice
by Richard McDermott, Ph.D.
“Groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis”

Can’t forget tacit knowledge—knowledge that needs to be talked about to be understood

–Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002:4)
Value Chain Partnerships
An Iowa-Based Network of Food and Agriculture Working Groups

- Small Meat Processors
- Grass-Based Livestock
- Pork Niche Market
- Regional Food Systems
- Fruit and Vegetable

• Funded in part by the Leopold Center and (previously) Wallace Center at Winrock International
Value Chain Partnerships
4 core functions

• Information hubs – “multi-organizational extension service”
• Catalysts for cooperation – build trust and capacity
• Magnets – leverage funding
• Scouts – cutting edge of new ideas
### Why is Value Chain Partnerships (VCP) Different?

**A network orientation** *(Forces for Good; L.R. Crutchfield and H.M. Grant 2008)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Organization Orientation</th>
<th>Network Orientation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mind-set</strong></td>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Coopetition”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy for Impact</strong></td>
<td>Grow the organization</td>
<td>Grow the network field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Typical Behaviors</strong></td>
<td>Compete for resources</td>
<td>Grow funding pie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Protect knowledge</td>
<td>Share knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hoard leadership/staff</td>
<td>Disperse leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure</strong></td>
<td>Centralized</td>
<td>Decentralized</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Questions? Comments?
Small Meat Processors - Iowa

• In 1965 there were over 450 meat lockers in Iowa; today there are less than 150.
• **Part** of this decline can be attributed to difficulty in finding proper technical assistance
• "Everyone of these state-people I talk to gives me somebody else to talk to."

How can researchers, state agencies and NGOs collaborate to provide better technical assistance?
Grass-Based Livestock Working Group

- **WHO**: Grass-based livestock practitioners, diverse in species and management intensity, and outreach professionals who support them

- **WHY**: To promote viable grass-based livestock production, diverse market opportunities, and ecosystem services in Iowa

- **HOW**: Convene quarterly for networking and knowledge exchange; fund research and demonstration grants in priority areas
Regional Food Systems Working Group

**What is it?**
An umbrella network for all Iowan’s working to build a more resilient regional food system

**What does it offer?**
A collaborative environment for a diverse group of farmers, community leaders, and non-profit, government, and private organizations to share resources and support.

**What does it do?**
Maximizes the potential for community-based, economically sustainable, and environmentally and socially responsible regional food enterprises by supporting education, conducting research, and facilitating partnerships.
Regional Food Systems Working Group

Where is our work now?

- **Northwest Iowa Regional Local Foods**: Working in Cherokee, Ida, Monona, Plymouth, Sioux, and Woodbury counties
- **Iowa Great Lakes Local Foods Network**: Working in Clay, Dickinson, Emmet, O'Brien, Osceola, and Palo Alto counties
- **Northeast Iowa Food & Farm Coalition**: Working in Allamakee, Chickasaw, Clayton, Howard, Fayette, and Winneshiek counties
- **Northern Iowa Food & Farm Partnership**: Working in Benton, Bremer, Black Hawk, Buchanan, Butler, Grundy, and Tama counties
- **Harvest from the Heart (COMIDA)**: Working in Marshall County
- **Southwest Iowa Food & Farm Initiative**: Working in Audubon, Cass, Fremont, Guthrie, Harrison, Mills, Montgomery, Page, Pottawattamie, and Shelby counties
- **Farm Fresh, Local Harvest Food Alliance**: Working in Adair, Adams, Clarke, Decatur, Guthrie, Ringgold, Taylor, and Union counties
- **South-Central Iowa Area Partnership**: Working in Appanoose, Clarke, Decatur, Guthrie, Lucas, Madison, Monroe, Union, and Wayne counties
- **Hometown Harvest of Southeast Iowa**: Working in Davis, Jefferson, Keokuk, Mahaska, Van Buren, and Wapello counties

Hatched counties indicate a county belonging to more than one local group.
How RFSWG functions

- Group meets quarterly to share information, network, and identify new opportunities
- Seed grants awarded to local groups to strengthen key elements needed to build a more resilient food system
- Funds used for planning, assessment, coordination, leadership development, and other activities proposed by each group
- Research needs emerge from the group and addressed by organizations represented or other groups
- Experienced groups provide feedback as new groups develop; move toward self-management
Questions? Comments
% of respondents collaborating with listed orgs in past year as a result of RFSWG participation

- Primary/secondary schools
- Bankers
- Media
- Product Buyers
- Students
- Food Service Directors
- Farm Bureau
- State Agencies
- County Government Officials
- City Government Officials
- Dieticians
- Philanthropic Organizations
- Food Processors
- Transportation and Logistics Professionals
- Public Health Officials
- Economic Development Professionals
- Other Universities
- ISU Faculty
- Federal Agencies
- ISU Extension
- Agricultural Entrepreneurs
- RFSWG Groups
- Non-Profits
- Leopold Center
Value Chain Partnerships:
An Iowa-based Network for Food and Agriculture Working Groups

- Kellogg Food & Fitness Initiative
- Northwest Iowa Regional Local Foods System
- Northern Iowa Food & Farm Partnership
- Harvest from Heart COMIDA
- Iowa Great Lakes
- South Iowa RFS
- SC Iowa
- Northeast Iowa Food & Farm Coalition
- Southwest Iowa Farm & Food Initiative
- Hometown Harvest of Southeast Iowa
- Wallace Good Food Network – national
- Food Access and Health Working Group
- Farm to School
- Leopold, SARE, projects
- Existing research networks – Upper Midwest
- Food Policy Council
- RFSWG
- Farm to School
Outcomes

• More than 50 organizations/farm groups participate
• Network participation generates funding > $4 million
  – Wellmark Foundation, USDA, Kellogg Foundation, others
• Change in local policy (economic impacts)
• Support from mainstream agriculture
• Local, state, and regional (nested) networks
• Co-operation across competing businesses (niche pork) – willing to invest in group operation
• “Creating the space” for managing knowledge from research AND personal experience
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>CoP Functions</strong></th>
<th><strong>Key Benefits for Producers and Businesses</strong></th>
<th><strong>Key Benefits for Organizations</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Information hubs** which create, capture, document, leverage, and deploy knowledge to create solutions for value chain partners | • Greater awareness of wide range of support providers and services  
• Access to larger "portfolio of expertise to draw from" and "tacit knowledge"—information unavailable anywhere else  
• Improved business skills/competencies  
• Opportunities to participate in research that creates new knowledge informing the industry/work | • **Better grasp of real world challenges** facing producers/businesses  
• **Greater awareness** of complementary technical assistance offered by other organizations  
• **More effective organizations** and employees due to improved knowledge/work competencies  
• Participating organizations are **better able to manage "local politics"** associated with food systems/sustainable agriculture work |
| **Catalysts for cooperation of diverse interests that create solutions for food and fiber producers and businesses** | • Greater sense of teamwork and low level cooperation (low risk information-sharing)  
• Opportunities for "high-level" cooperation (where businesses share some risk, resources, and profits)  
• Access to support network  
• Private sector access to no or low-cost public sector support and services | • **More coordinated and efficient use of existing organizational and state resources**  
• Participating organizations work more with **other groups** and more apt to recognize other organizations as assets/partners  
• **Deconstruction of organizational boundaries** and negative organizational stereotypes  
• **Better relationships between unlike and unlikely partners** |
| **Magnets** that attract funding and leverage, channel, and distribute funding for R&D of differentiated products | • Private sector links with research agendas and consultants who initiate work that benefits producers and businesses  
• Participating organizations invest more resources such as money and staff time on work that supports the industry and benefits producers than otherwise possible. | • **Projects with unlikely partners more likely to be funded**  
• **Increased credibility** CoP brings to the work helps focus, coordinate, and **leverage new and wider range of support**  
• Participating organizations are better able to leverage their own resources to commit to work |
| **Scouts** that identify emerging value chain opportunities with potential to deliver economic benefits to stakeholders | • Increased access to new markets  
• Increased production and sales  
• Improved financial stability  
• More efficient operations  
• Greater business viability due to better decision making | • Participants better **able to get attention of elected officials and government agency staff to get policy support** for the work, producers, businesses, and communities |
Changing roles for universities - NGOs

Past and present

• “Expert” university model – dispensing knowledge

• Cooperating networks are predominant

• Compete for scarce resources – winners and losers

• Primarily researchers and farmers

Future

• co-learning, managing knowledge across groups

• Collaborating networks emerge and flourish

• Collaborate to grow the funding pie, create clusters and foster systemic change

• New stakeholders also directly involved in the work
Turning the Flywheel: Implications for building more resilient regional food systems – for universities, agencies, NGOs

Attract Believers
- Time
- Money

Build Brand
- Emotion (heart)
- Reputation

Demonstrate Results
- Research & Education
- Trend Lines (Indicators)

Build Strength
- First Who…then what
- Sustainable networks

Relentless focus on what you are good at, and what drives the resource engine

Adapted from Good to Great and the Social Sectors – Jim Collins
Building community across research, education, and outreach networks in the food system

Websites
www.valuechains.org
www.leopold.iastate.edu

Social network sites
http://regionalfoodsystems.ning.com/
http://communitiesofpractice.ning.com/

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