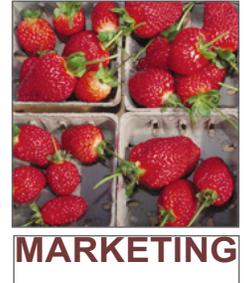


Connecting family, community and health from a food system perspective

Abstract: This project focused on identifying reasons why families with school-age children do or do not regularly consume locally grown foods, as well as strategies to increase consumption of locally grown foods by families.

Findings revealed that parents desire locally grown food, but it needs to be affordable and accessible. Many parents lack knowledge, skill and confidence on how to include locally grown foods within family snacks/meals. Involving children in growing and preparing food increases their interest in eating it. Relationships between growers and families can increase appreciation for and consumption of locally grown food. Relationships between growers and influential community leaders are key to increasing availability of locally grown food in the community.



What was done and why?

Strengthening awareness of and access to locally-grown food (whether grown by a family or by a local producer) can help strengthen a local economy and potentially increase food security among families. It also may increase the consumption of specific foods such as fruits and vegetables by a local population, which can help reduce the prevalence of diet-related chronic diseases (i.e., obesity, heart disease and diabetes). Both families and the communities in which they live have assets that can be tapped to make environments more supportive of healthy eating practices and to improve the availability, access and appreciation of locally grown foods.

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The project focused on these objectives:

1. Explore how to make locally grown food a regular viable healthy food source for Cass County families with school-age children.
2. Identify values, priorities, experiences, and knowledge of Cass County families with school-age children that shape how they make decisions about food and whether or not to include locally grown foods in their daily eating.
3. Identify assets in Cass County that can be invested to improve the appreciation, availability and accessibility of locally grown food to families with school-age children.

What did we learn?

The activities included in this program can guide other communities in moving toward the Iowa Food and Farm Plan goals of increased food dollars spent on locally grown and processed foods and building local coalitions of consumers/co-producers with producers, distributors and other food system stakeholders for collective planning. The networks that were formed among parents and food providers as part of the project activities can facilitate new innovations in healthy eating for Cass County families beyond this project.