

Researching and evaluating an effective web-based local food sales template

Abstract: Local producers and institutions developed and tested a web-based template designed to simplify internet retail sales of local foods.

Discussions with local food producers and institutions from across Iowa helped the project partners develop a plan for a web-based template/computer program that would provide the basic tools for web-based sales, while considering the needs and wants of the potential buyers.



MARKETING

What was done and why?

This project was Phase I of a multi-phase project to explore how a web-based local food sales template could become an integral part of a local food system. Development of the web tool was the primary task of Phase I, while Phase II will feature continued development and testing. Northeast Iowa Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) led the project, which included help from dozens of entities.

The project goal was to create an on-line sales tool that would address the needs of both the farmers and the markets. Objectives were to:

1. Complete Phase I of the development of an easily navigable web-based sales template for local food producers,
2. Facilitate input from producers and institutions to maximize template and web-site development,
3. Work with partners to identify and secure additional funding sources for Phase II of the project, and
4. Conduct outreach and education in Iowa.

What did we learn?

Advice was sought from a variety of Iowa partners, including producers and buyers, about expanding the local food system through internet sales. A computer programmer-consultant was hired to gather information and engage partners in visioning and discussion. The template was designed for producers, producer groups, and farmer networks to market to local clients, such as individuals, institutions, and large bulk buyers.

Major findings are defined by the list of features requested by partners and then included in the program. The core features of the web template were as proposed initially, but were refined to better meet the needs of producers and buyers. The institutional buyers influenced the process substantially, offering a perspective that growers could not provide. The variation in levels of experience and organizational capacity also influenced the process and led to increased understanding of the needs and resources of the producers.

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More details:

www.leopold.iastate.edu/research/grants/2009-1/M2007-31.pdf