Value Chain Partnerships
Phase III, Year 3
Final Project Evaluation

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INTRODUCTION

VCP convenes and galvanizes people, organizations, institutions, agencies, and businesses with a common stake in agriculture to work together to create economic, environmental, and social benefits. These stakeholders constitute a vast range of disciplines and interests ranging from educators to lenders, consumers to producers, processors to policymakers, transportation and logistics professionals to health professionals, input dealers, school administrators, researchers, Extension specialists, conservationists, farm insurance providers, food service directors, youth, and more. The sheer breadth of actors involved in this work makes any effort to coordinate their actions truly colossal. Yet coordination, especially effective coordination, is critical. Effective coordination is vital for keeping each part of the system engaged to create the benefits that only systems can deliver.

VCP and its partners have become respected leaders statewide in such efforts by pulling together a strong network of working groups with a shared sense of purpose, responsibility, and keen understanding of where they fit into the system. These groups are tackling timely and often tender issues in agriculture and food systems. VCP's niche in strengthening local and regional food systems is knitting together enclaves or islands of previously unconnected people, groups, and activities and creating a culture of collaboration.

VCP has worked diligently to create the social structures in which coordination of efforts has become easier than before, if not the norm, among stakeholders along the value chain in Iowa. However, coordination requires constant attention to human relationships and trust at both the working group level and overall project management level. Building trust and relationships requires constant maintenance; as the dynamics among partners change, so too do coordination requirements. Success is not achieved in a day, a week, or even a year in some cases and can be difficult to measure. However, evaluation of this project shows empirical and qualitative evidence of positive change, and strong evidence of cultural change. Evaluation reports of project results have already been submitted. Therefore, the discussion that follows outlines key evaluation lessons learned over the course of the project regarding measurement challenges and appropriate success indicators.

WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE

Consistently, the primary strategy for coordinating efforts in VCP is to bring people together face-to-face on a regular basis—not so often to be cumbersome, yet often enough that participants have something new and meaningful to share with the group upon reconvening.

Table 1 shows basic statistics from a culmination of the quarterly meetings held over eight years of VCP (including the years prior to Wallace funding). These are basic attendance statistics and nothing more; however, they do show that over 650 different people have participated in the working groups. Moreover, some groups (FVWG in particular) are successful at recruiting new members to meetings. While some participation consistency and stability is necessary for continuity of group efforts, it is a testament to their inclusivity and democratic principles that new people regularly attend meetings (excluding the closed meeting of the SMPWG). With the
exception of the SMPWG, the average percent of new participants attending each meeting for the remaining three groups is 29 percent. A blend of both new and returning participants is desirable for:

- Ensuring that progress made at previous meetings is not derailed with the influx of new participants with different agendas or notions about what the group should be doing;
- Infusing new ideas and experiences into the discussion to ensure continuous relevancy and exchange of timely information from the field;
- Encouraging the balanced exchange of “historical” information and “fresh” information, both of which are needed for wise forward momentum;
- Generating new enthusiasm and energy for new issues and new perspectives on “old issues;” and
- Linking new-to-the-scene partners and resources with established partners and resources.

### Table 1. VCP Working Group Meeting Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working Group</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Number of quarters (meetings)</th>
<th>Total number of different participants</th>
<th>Average number of participants per meeting</th>
<th>Average percent of new participants per meeting</th>
<th>Maximum number of meetings attended by one participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PNMWG</td>
<td>Jan 02-Sept. 09</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FVWG</td>
<td>Nov 07-Mar 10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFSWG</td>
<td>Oct 03-Sept 09</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMPWG*</td>
<td>Sept 06-June 09</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10%**</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>77</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>35***</td>
<td>29%***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Meetings were not open to the public.
**New attendees were guests invited to speak or designated representatives of others.
***Excluding the SMPWG which were closed meetings

In short, statistics in Table 1 suggest the working groups have proven their relevance given continued participation of returning participants over the years, steady interest from new participants, and in the case of RFSWG, recent increased attendance rates. In RFSWG, the average number of participants at meetings jumped from 36 in 2003 through 2008 to an average of 86 in 2009, despite the fact that some former RFSWG participants attend FVWG meetings more regularly. These figures in particular illustrate the high demand for opportunities to convene partners along the value chain and influential in the food systems arena.
FROM RECIPIENT TO FUNDER: REDISTRIBUTING WEALTH

Financial indicators are almost always of interest when measuring success. This project was no exception. The primary funder, the Wallace Center, was keen to measure success in terms of how well VCP and the working groups contributed to individual participant and/or business profitability and financial stability, and how well participating organizations and individuals were able to leverage new grants or investments as a result of the project. These are considered key tenets of financial sustainability necessary for continuing the work. However, financial measures of individual, business, and organizational success can overlook the capacity of the collective to change the culture of individual, business, and organizational partners to become focused less on securing financial resources for private use and more on securing financial resources for others’ use. In this regard, VCP has managed to change the culture of resource management within several groups by assisting them in transitioning from the solitary role of grant recipient to taking on the blended role of recipient and funder.

To illustrate, funding awarded by the Leopold Center to two geographically based regional food system groups in the RFSWG was voluntarily turned over by those groups to two new geographically based adjacent groups (with approval from the Leopold Center). The mere thought and of course implementation demonstrate those partners’ commitment to collective outcomes, not just individual group outcomes, and is an indicator of trust, strong relationships, and commitment to achieving long-term goals. It also complements local regional food system group efforts to develop mini-grant programs better engage new and existing partners in their communities.

When groups voluntarily divide equal financial resources they were promised into more equitable arrangements that support groups with more limited financial resources, something significant is taking place. Such actions reveal an advocacy for the work and recognition that what is good for our neighbors is also good for us. Stronger neighboring food system champions make stronger food systems, thus improving regional food system prospects for everyone.

The phenomenon of voluntarily sharing resources between the RFSWG groups was also demonstrated by the VCP core team. Several times, when the working group leaders and facilitators were discussing the project’s annual budget and equal allocation of funds to each working group, leaders of more well-funded working groups donated a portion of their share to working groups with more limited financial resources. That working group leaders are willing to forego short-term benefits to protect the long-term goals of the project again demonstrates a commitment at the leadership level to the greater good of the project and adherence to the notion that a single working group is only as strong as the network of complementary groups that support it. However, like all relationships, those are subject to change and the VCP core team is no exception. Composition of the core team will change as working groups come and go.

The fact that partners at the working group level and core team level are willing to sacrifice financial resources to strengthen the position of their partners demonstrates some level of trust in partners and trust in the process. Yet it would be naïve to believe that trust is always constant. From a coordination standpoint, it is ruinous to think that once high levels of trust are attained, everything will fall into place. Trust requires time, constant monitoring, and maintenance. We
have noted in VCP over the years what has been commonly noted in the literature on social capital: As trust increases, risk and transaction costs decrease, prompting new partnerships to develop which bring the greatest rewards and dividends to partners. When trust declines, risk and transaction costs increase and collaboration wanes. Trust issues warrant attention from evaluators because trust is a bellwether for change—both positive and negative—and prompts deeper collaboration with the greatest chance for rewards.

CHANGE AND REPLICATION OF THE MODEL

The capacity of groups to redistribute wealth with no expectation of repayment ultimately optimizes the joint impact of the partners, and makes the work more sustainable from a financial standpoint. Yet sustainability is also impacted by a whole constellation of other factors as well. The most important factors include (in no particular order) monitoring and responding to market conditions, developing and maintaining trust in leadership and each other, developing and strengthening relationships, providing competent leadership, securing funding, maintaining group interest and relevance, and providing effective and strategic group management and coordination.

In the early years, the Flax and Bioeconomy Working Groups were formed but ultimately were unable to strike a balance between these factors and folded. The Small Meat Processors Working Group and the Fruit and Vegetable Working Groups took their place at the VCP table by joining the partnership. Recently, a Food Access and Health working group was added to the mix. As market conditions, leadership, relevance, and relationships change, groups may drop out and new ones may form. Change is to be expected. However, we have seen growth in the adoption and use of the Working Group model both at the Leopold Center and among partners. Local partners use the principles in the daily work they do as do the geographically based working groups in the RFSWG. The Leopold Center has also expanded its application of the model beyond the VCP project by funding and facilitating the Mid-American Agro-Forestry Working Group (covering 15 states) and the Iowa Farm Energy Working Group. The Leopold Center has also helped fund the Grass-based Livestock Working Group in cooperation with ISU Extension. In 2002, there were two working groups (PNMWG and RFSWG). In 2006, there were four. Now in 2010, there are eight. No single working group is a mirror image of another, but they can and do borrow concepts and methods from each other to see if they will work in new settings. The benefit and luxury of having eight working groups is that they can learn and borrow concepts and methods from each other and apply them to new settings with new content to see if it works. The working group facilitators know there is no template for success, but there is a toolbox of lessons that blooms with the addition and loss of each new working group.

SHARING DIFFICULT LESSONS OF LOSS

While on the subject of loss, we learned an additional important lesson in the process of measuring individual financial success attributable to the VCP. Although farmers and farm businesses, like other proprietorships, often refuse to share specific financial data, we were able
to gather some of these data in response to non specific questions about the role of VCP working groups in contributing to the financial health of participants and companies they represent.

In terms of strengthening the financial viability of participating farmers and companies, there was some measurable success already described, particularly in the case of PNMWG. However, we learned that increased productivity does not necessarily equate to increased profitability so it is important to track a number of measures to determine financial gain (or losses) such as increased productivity, more efficient operational management, access to diverse markets, reinvestment into the business, and changing input and output costs.

For PNMWG, changing input costs—beyond control of the working group—have been particularly influential in determining financial change to participating operations. The ethanol boom in Iowa peaked around 2008, which prompted corn prices to climb, thereby increasing feed costs so steeply that several participating niche pork enterprises went out of business. Obviously beyond the control of the PNMWG, the group could do nothing to combat the onslaught of high grain prices and their negative impact. But there was something the group could do when market forces took a turn for the worse and entrepreneurs were faced with the prospect of going out of business. In PNMWG, niche pork companies forced to go out of business or sell their companies shared lessons they learned in 2009 about challenges, mistakes, and loss with other PNMWG participants, some of whom were direct competitors. Those who attended that particular meeting said it was the most valuable PNMWG meeting they ever attended. For affected business owners, sharing their stories became a learning tool to help others in the industry, the survivability of which is important for creating future opportunities for others once the market forces ease. Like the ability of working groups to offer coveted financial resources to fledgling groups in times of economic stress, giving sensitive information to others—especially competitors—who are also vulnerable is an indicator of shared identity and thus some level of trust, as well commitment to the principles of the group. Even as some companies go under, several niche pork companies are committing cash resources to convene the PNMWG regularly. The willingness to pay in a time of severe financial hardship buttresses the data on attendance, both of which are a testament to the value private sector participants place on PNMWG.

More evidence of value for the working groups comes from participants of the Fruit and Vegetable Working Group. Our 2009 survey of participants found that the FVWG is not improving the financial health or stability of participating producers or businesses, in contrast to data we collected from PNMWG and SMPWG participants who are producers or company owners. However, when these results were shared with the group, growers strongly responded by articulating very clearly that financial benefits were not the reason they were participating in the FVWG. They said they joined the group to create better conditions in which they and others such as new farmers operate, and to connect and collaborate with other fruit and vegetable interests around the state. They also stated that the lack of direct financial benefits would not preclude them from future participation.

The evidence is clear that many if not most working group participants are cooperating less for financial reasons and more for other reasons. Those reasons may be social or philosophical. They may be are altruistic. Or they may be a combination of factors. In 2007, qualitative interviews of RFSWG and PNMWG participants were conducted. A key question asked at that time concerned
what participants and/or their respective organization/business/agency gained from getting involved in the working groups. While participants could easily name any list of benefits, roughly half also volunteered unsolicited information about what they gained from giving. They liked the fact that they were helping make decisions at the working groups meeting, were having a positive influence on policy matters or the state of affairs, and were successfully changing other people's attitudes and the way they do things either within the group, in their own communities or service areas, or within their field. Examples participants provided ranged from simple acts of sharing valuable information with their peers to more complex issues such as influencing policies or establishing local mini-grants programs.

Regarding the latter, several participants were proud of the producer mini grant programs their regional food system groups had established. While the funding amount was admittedly quite modest, they mentioned the benefits were vast in comparison because the program increased local buy-in to the work they were doing. The grant programs were serving to distribute some of the local/regional food system wealth to locals who would later become ardent champions and participants of the work at the community level, which has been critical for gaining local support. Other groups used the mini grants to strengthen organizational partnerships by asking other non profit groups to help them weigh in on decisions during the grant-making process. These experiences taught us in subsequent evaluations to inquire about what individuals and/or their representative groups/employers were able to give or contribute to others, not just leverage for themselves, as a result of participating in the working groups.

The rational choice model that provides a framework for understanding change focuses on the individualistic, utilitarian gains people receive as a result of a specific activity. This model holds that individuals, when choosing to act, will "rationally" do so in the interest of maximizing their gains and minimizing their costs. However, we learned that participants' decisions to engage in VCP-related activities couldn’t be explained by rational choice theories, which transformed the way we thought about evaluation. Certainly rational choice may be part of the equation but so too are alternative theories of change such as existentialism, which holds that people don't always act in their own self interest, even when they know it is not in their best interest, but instead demonstrate a selfless concern for the welfare of others or other things (altruism). Thus, those of us doing work in local and regional food systems must eventually come to realize that we must expand and measure notions of success not as individual, business, or organizational financial stability, profitability, leveragability, and sustainability, but rather social and human “profitability” demonstrated by the commitment to complementary causes of other partners in the field. Attainment of this admittedly lofty goal can only be achieved when a) there is trust that others in the field are acting in the best interest of the collaboration and not in their own self interest, and b) when each participant is willing to credit the collaboration for their success, rather than claiming it as their own for their organization or business. Importantly, a good indicator of this kind of success is the branding of the work and publications as products of a multi-organizational collaboration, not one specific organization. We realized from meeting with Brian Dabson of the Rural Research and Policy Institute that credits on publications can also be a good indicator of trust when he asked us how many publications have the working group brand/logo on it and/or the names of all participating organizations versus just those providing funding for publication of print materials?
LEVERAGING MORE THAN MONEY

It is important to remember that while the VCP working groups have managed to leverage more than $1 million in grant funding to support their work, they have leveraged much more than money. Each working group has leveraged new partners; priceless, significant public support for food systems work; credibility; human resources (time); and board/administrative/ supervisory support for so-called subordinates to attend and contribute to working group activities. All of these resources are collectively moving the needle forward on local and regional food systems progress. And when these groups discover they can move the needle forward together, they are choosing to stay together to take on new projects. In the SMPWG, participants discovered a dynamic that encouraged them to stay together after achieving their initial goals in order to accomplish new ones. Few wanted to squander the hard work they had put in while building trusting relationships. After contemplating the alternatives they decided to set new goals instead of disbanding because they could achieve more together than separately.

EVALUATION RESULTS FROM THE WORKING GROUPS

The Value Chain Partnership project supports new supply networks for farmer-led food, fiber, and energy enterprises that follow sustainable. The VCP evaluator worked closely with the facilitators from each of the four working groups to conduct an evaluation that was both helpful to the documentation goals of Wallace while at the same time provided valuable information that facilitators could use to better understand and improve each working group.

Summary of Year 1 Qualitative Evaluation Results

The table below summarize key benefits we measured from 39 interviews with participants of the RFSWG and PNMWG, organized according to the four key functions of a CoP.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CoP Functions</th>
<th>Key Benefits for Producers and Businesses</th>
<th>Key Benefits for Organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Information hubs which create, capture, document, leverage, and deploy knowledge as technical assistance to create solutions for value chain partners | • Greater awareness of a wider range of support providers and services  
• Greater awareness of and access to research-based information  
• Access to larger "portfolio of expertise to draw from" and "tacit knowledge"--information unavailable anywhere else (i.e., not in print or electronic form)  
• Improved business skills and competencies  
• Opportunities to participate in research that creates new knowledge used to inform the industry/work | • Better understanding of challenges facing producers and businesses  
• Greater awareness of complementary technical assistance offered by other participating organizations  
• More effective organizations and employees due to improved knowledge and work competencies  
• Access to tools others are using to engage organizations in or conduct food systems work  
• Participating organizations are better able to manage "local politics" associated with doing 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 use of existing organizational and state resources
- Participating organizations work more with other groups and recognize other organizations as assets/potential partners
- Better relationships with unlikely partners, including commodity producers, people in other disciplines, and non profits
- Deconstruction of organizational boundaries and negative organizational stereotypes

Magnets that attract funding and leverage, channel, and distribute funding for research and development 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.

- Participating organizations collaborating with unlikely partners, including commodity groups, are more successful at receiving grants
- Increased credibility CoP brings to the work helps focus, coordinate, and leverage new sources of support
- Participating organizations are better able to leverage their own organizational resources to commit more staff time and resources to food systems work

Scouts that identify emerging value chain opportunities with high potential to deliver economic benefits to sustainable agriculture stakeholders

- Increased access to new markets
- Increased sales
- Increased production
- Improved financial stability
- More efficient operations
- Greater business viability due to better decision making

- Participants engage elected officials and government agency staff in conversations emphasizing the need for policy to support the work, producers, businesses, and communities

Pork Niche Market Working Group

In the fall of 2008, we contacted active members of PNMWG to invite them to complete a quantitative survey of items developed from the extensive qualitative telephone interviews conducted in Year 1. Based on analysis of results, we learned that:

- **Skills and knowledge benefits:** The PNMWG helps private sector participants better understand the context in which they work so they can better position themselves. Producers also said the group helps them make better management decisions and provides them with applicable information they cannot find anywhere else to give them confidence about making solid decisions for their operation/business.

- **Networking benefits:** Private sector participants report greater networking benefits than the public and non-profit organizational and agency partners. Private sector participants also agreed they were collaborating more with other farmers or niche pork companies as a result of PNMWG participation in comparison with the public and non profit partners.
Financial and operational benefits: While the PNMWG helped increase production capacity, market access, and product sales, other factors such as market forces are playing a more key role in whether increased production translates into better profits.

Trust: PNMWG, by providing an opportunity and safe environment for diverse groups to interact, has succeeded in building trust among unlikely partners. Private sector businesses and organizational partners both agree that no one interest dominates the PNMWG and that it is a democratic organization with a culture of open participation and equal influence. Although groups report they share general information at PNMWG meetings, private sector proprietary information and data about customers is shared less freely.

Collaboration: PFI is playing a key role connecting both private and public/civic sector interests through leadership and facilitation of the PNWMG. One reason for the group's success is the participation of diverse and varied groups that can offer a variety of resources that meet the varied needs and interests of a wide range of participants.

Attitudes: Niche pork companies and producers say they are willing to explore ways they might collaborate with other niche pork companies as well as others along the value chain. Among groups listed as strong supporters the niche pork industry, the private sector group most appreciated ISU Extension, ISU faculty, commodity pork organizations/associations, and independent consultants.

Organizational Capacity Building: Key elements of capacity building in PNMWG involve providing organizations with knowledge opportunities so they can better understand clients and the broader industry, access to new and reliable sources of information and resources, opportunities to gain credibility and influence, and tools to help them work more efficiently and effectively. While this group of respondents agreed more than they disagreed that PNMWG helps them work more efficiently and effectively, engage new partners, be more influential and collaborate with others, there is some room for improvement on this front.

Regional Food System Working Group

In the fall of 2008, we also contacted active members of RFSWG to invite them to complete a quantitative survey of items developed from the extensive qualitative telephone interviews conducted in Year 1.

- Participants in the Regional Food Systems Working Group (RFSWG) report they are spending an average of 11% more of their time on local and regional food work than they did a year ago;
- 42% say their organization is changing organizational policies and guidelines to better support such work;
- 75% of participants either initiated or participated in new collaborations or projects as a result of RFSWG participation. 65% are collaborating with other RFSWG participants while half are collaborating with people not participating in the working group.
- In terms of who RFSWG participants are collaborating with, the breadth is diverse and varied. Most are collaborating with non profits (86%), other regional food efforts/groups (80%), producers and agricultural entrepreneurs (78%), ISU Extension field and county agents (77%), economic development professionals (64%), ISU faculty (62%), dieticians
and nutritionists (59%), county government officials (58%), state agencies and government officials (55%). More than one-third of RFSWG food leaders are also collaborating with public health officials, product buyers, school officials, food service directors, Farm Bureau, city government officials, lenders, and food processors; and

- 55% say partnering with others is helping regional food system leaders connect their work with public policy change. Exemplary policy changes include the creation of buy local purchasing policies, changes in enforcement of state regulations that formerly limited health facility purchases of local food, creation of a county-based food policy councils and local food coordinator; and school participation in food systems work.

### Small Meat Processors Working Group

In late November and early December, 2008, we interviewed by telephone 10 active participants of the Small Meat Processors Working Group who represented the industry, regulatory agencies, and university-based service providers such as ISU Meat Science Extension, the Center for Industrial Research and Service (CIRAS), and ISU Value Added Agriculture Program, the Drake Agricultural Law Center.

The working group is:

- Providing education and training opportunities for small meat processors resulting in better business management decisions;
- Helping small meat processors improve the profitability of their business;
- Prompting meat processors to update record keeping systems;
- Helping small meat processors find labor;
- Connecting small meat processors with human and knowledge resources to help them make better business decisions; and
- Improving the ability of one meat processor to secure credit for his business.

The Small Meat Processors Working Group is also building the capacity of participating organizations to better serve the small meat processing industry and others who serve them. Nearly 80% of respondents for whom it was relevant reported the working group had changed the way their organization works with small meat processors and other support providers. In particular, the working group is:

- Directly connecting technical assistance providers with small meat processors, which creates more targeted, effective assistance;
- Helping small meat processors and others become aware of and make use of technical assistance providers;
- Enabled organizational participants make better referrals;
- Strengthening participating organizations’ ability to secure more resources for continuing the work;
- Educating participating organizations as they gain a better understanding of different approaches and perspectives on how to support the small meat processing industry;
- Prompting organizations that have never worked together before to collaborate;
• Helping organizations provide better services not only to small meat processors but others as well;
• Helping participating organizations meet their goals and missions, with measurable impacts on the ground;
• Increasing opportunities for educating small meat processors;
• Fostering exploration of future partnerships and programs that build on each organization's skills and strengths;
• Building the capacity of organizations to better support the processors;
• Eliminating duplication of efforts and making more efficient use of organizational resources;
• Helping change the culture of professional business associations to be more open to change; and
• Changing the way participating organizations provide technical assistance.

Fruit and Vegetable Working Group

In early 2010, we administered an electronic and hard copy survey to participants of the Fruit and Vegetable Working Group. Two in three respondents are farmers and 48% selected "farmer" as their primary employment affiliation. Among those who are primarily farmers,

• 75% engage in direct marketing, 63% sell to institutions (schools, hospitals, retirement homes, etc.), 63% sell to grocery stores, 56% sell to restaurants, and 44% sell wholesale (food distributors, grocery warehouses, produce auctions)
• 53% disagree that most retailers and wholesalers with whom they have had contact are asking small- to mid-size producers to aggregate their product with others before delivery.
• Two in three agree that some kind of collaboration among farmers is critical for increasing the production capacity of their area to access retail/wholesale markets but more than half disagree that aggregation (63%) and lack of sufficient scale (54%) are their biggest challenges in accessing these markets.
• Half cite financial constraints such as limited cash flow, net worth, or availability of credit as their biggest challenge when trying to make changes to their business to access retail/wholesale markets.
• Two in three (63%) say they communicate better with others about the fruit and vegetable industry as a result of participating in the working group and more than half (55%) make better management decisions as a result of participation.

Among farm support partners or organizational service providers,

• Nearly all (93%) say they understand fruit and vegetable production better as a result of participating in the working group.
• 85% agree they learn useful things from the FVWG that they cannot learn anywhere else and they also better understand marketing.
• 85% say they are more qualified to serve the fruit and vegetable industry as a result of participating in the working group.
• 77% say they are collaborating with other organizations, agencies, businesses, or institutions to address projects/issues related to fruit and vegetable production, distribution, and marketing as a result of the working group.
• More than half (54%) are collaborating with fruit or vegetable producers as a result of the working group.
• 83% also say the working group is an important support network and have developed new professional relationships which benefit their organization.

Among all respondents:

• Nearly two in three (61%) have used what they learned in the Working Group to change practices or programs related to their operation or work.
• 70% have made new professional contact as a result of the Working Group.
• 82% agree that if the Fruit and Vegetable Working Group decided in the next few months to pursue some kind of collaborative production, marketing or distribution/aggregation project, they would be interested in participating in these conversations and activities.

EVALUATION OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

The Value Chain Partnerships is a unique collaboration between the non-profit Practical Farmers of Iowa, the Leopold Center and ISU Extension. Each organization brings different resources to the table, but what factors make the partnership possible? How does this public/non-profit partnership function? What are the challenges? To answer these questions, we conducted key informant interviews with six administrators or key staff from all three organizations in the fall of 2009. Those interviews generated a long list of benefits they received from participating that helped each of them meet their respective missions. The collaboration enabled them to achieve things they conceded was likely not possible had they set out to do it alone. Without VCP according to one informant, "none of [the accomplishments and benefits] would have been possible. We are one organization with limited reach and resources with regard to our ability to do things. For an entity that is working by itself, there is a lot less potential to get things accomplished than you have with strategically aligned partners. VCP provides the energy and resources to do the work. In our view, it has provided us with resources to do the work and we have provided work that is good to claim."

However, a laundry list of benefits and accomplishments does not ensure that the model will be wholeheartedly adopted and incorporated into the way organizational partners do their work. Whether or not specific work or projects are institutionalized within an organization can often be used as an indicator of organizational commitment and ownership to the work, as well as their dedication to ensuring that grant-funded work in particular is sustained over time. There are a variety of ways in which work can be institutionalized within an organization. We measured the extent to which the three organizational partners have institutionalized the VCP project according to:
• Short-term or ongoing investments in the project (all three have committed significant financial and human resources relative to their respective capacity to do so);
• The extent to which each organization has either allowed or integrated associated job responsibilities into employee work plans (two of the three organizational partners have changed at least one job description or work plans to accommodate VCP work);
• Whether each organizational partner has changed or drafted organizational policies or practices that support VCP work (VCP has increased the credibility of doing CoP work among Extension administrators, allowing staff more freedom to participate in this work; the Leopold Center is requiring all grantees to participate in appropriate CoPs; and PFI's strategic plan focuses on niche pork work); and
• The extent to which each organization has applied the CoP model to other work they do (the Leopold Center has started three new non-VCP working groups and Extension has borrowed philosophical concepts of the VCP model and is using it to restructure and refocus their organization, whereas VCP has had little transformative impact on the way PFI does its work).

Primary challenges that prevent partner organizations from better institutionalizing the concepts of CoPs include the sheer amount of time it takes to develop the necessary trust and relationships that become the foundation for good collaborations, the lack of financial resources to support the time needed to develop meaningful relationships, and getting organizational administrators to both fully understand and support the work.

For organizations to support it in the future, some want to see a more equitable distribution of organizational contributions and leadership responsibility, access to tools they can use, direct benefits to the working groups, evidence that the model is serving farmers, and access to VCP staff and core team members to harness their knowledge and skills for partner organizations.

In terms of sustaining VCP into the future, each organization had a strategy for doing so. The Leopold Center and Extension are both interested in supporting VCP as a whole, whereas PFI is more interested in sustaining the PNMWG specifically. However, assembling resources to sustain the VCP work is only one part of finding a way to support VCP into the future. Determining which organizational partners have the capacity, resources, and desire to participate is another. When we solicited suggestions for strengthening or improving the partnership between the three organizations, we noted some tension between the organizations. Ultimately, the VCP may need to look beyond its current partners for new partners that will build on and contribute to future work.

**IMPLICIT KNOWLEDGE OF WORKING GROUP FACILITATORS**

In January, 2010, six facilitators of the four VCP working groups (Small Meat Processors, Niche Pork, Regional Food Systems, and Fruit and Vegetable) and a Leopold supported working group (Grass Based Livestock) responded to questions about lessons they learned in the process of initiating and managing each working group. The following is a list of highlights from those responses and the subsequent group discussion:
• The leadership capacity of CoP facilitators is greatly improved by the presence of the VCP Core Team.
• The Core Team Working Group functions for VCP much like each working group functions within VCP in that the work each is doing is additive and creates a space for individuals and represented organizations to build on, rather than duplicate or compete with, the work of others.
• Planning working group meetings and serving as a convener and catalyst is extremely labor and time intensive and involves critical skills in understanding and managing people and relationships.
• Although not intentionally opaque, most CoP management is orchestrated behind the scenes.
• Working group facilitators learn methods and techniques for accomplishing the day-to-day tasks of managing working groups for each other, thereby reducing the time they spend on these tasks and making them more effective.
• The Core Team Working Group is not only a support network but a problem solving body, combining the collective wisdom of all of the working group facilitators to address issues arising in one particular working group.
• New working groups are able to launch more quickly by picking and choosing specific strategies implemented by working group facilitators who came before them.
• Market forces are the primary reasons why CoPs have taken root in Iowa Networking and research are important but secondary reasons.
• Three main factors make it possible to initiate a CoP: 1) a source of funding, 2) people passionate about the issues, and 3) shared experiences that lend coherence to common goals. Additional factors that contribute to a successful CoP initiation are a local grassroots focus, formation of a dedicated steering team, and early commitment to deep(er) collaboration.
• An early source of funding for covering the administrative costs of initiating and managing a CoP is critical for their startup. As one CoP facilitator put it: "Use initial money to do good work. Build credibility. Ask for money again."
• One crucial element necessary for effectively managing CoPs is the adoption of a creative servant leadership model where participants are asked to organize and lead components of quarterly meetings. This increases ownership of participants in the group, builds the leadership capacity of individuals and represented organizations, alleviates some of the administrative burdens on the facilitator, more evenly distributes the work, allows people an opportunity to self actualize by contributing their skills and talents to the good of the group, and better prepares the CoP for leadership transitions.
• The process of developing a CoP brand at the right time helps CoPs clarify goals, position statements, and points of differentiation, thereby providing a more focused strategic direction for the group.
• Individual working group evaluations inform and are informed by the evaluations of other working groups, thereby reducing the overall transaction costs of doing evaluation. Furthermore, this enables the development of common evaluation measures that can be aggregated across groups to communicate possibly greater impact than isolated single group impacts.
• Both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods are important for providing a balanced evaluation. Evaluation must also be flexible and responsive enough to modify
measures of success over time to better reflect influences beyond the control of the project.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Evaluation of VCP shows that the CoP model has been effective at engaging partners along the value chain throughout Iowa and beyond in meeting and sharing information, news, problems, and solutions and changing the way partners along the value chain do business or support business. The process of regular interaction breaks down real or perceived barriers, builds trust, and prompts collaboration. Collaboration builds credibility for the work at local, regional, and state levels, which attracts new partners and resources. It also attracts considerable interest in replicating the model in new places and contexts, which creates new opportunities and its fair share of burdens on the people doing the work. Eventually, however, the effects of the work seep out. People begin to think differently, they do things differently, and things like food systems actually become different. Culture changes (everything). There are certainly some costs to account for in the process such as the unremunerated transaction costs of the time it takes to do the work well and the personal toll it takes on some of the passionate people wholly dedicated to leading the charge. However, we know that things are different in Iowa food systems as a result of this work but we also know there is much more to be done. For now, we’ll be satisfied knowing that what has been done is tremendous and the impacts likely not fully understood or even yet apparent. Long-term impacts, like trust, take time to reveal themselves. Both trust and impacts, however, are critical for building the credibility of the Leopold Center in leading this work. A clear indicator of expanded credibility was noted when the Iowa legislature wrote an amendment to invite the Leopold Center to write and submit a Local Food and Farm Plan by the end of 2010. The Food Plan is tasked with outlining specific policy and funding recommendations for the support of local food systems in Iowa. We have anecdotal evidence but have yet to systematically document the story of how this amendment came to pass and its connection to VCP. In time, however, we expect to make that connection by telling the story of VCP and its evolution from Project to Policy.
APPENDIX 1: 2008 PNMWG SURVEY RESULTS

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2008, Gary Huber contacted 33 active members of PNMWG to invite them to complete a quantitative survey of items developed from the extensive qualitative telephone interviews conducted in Year 1. We received 17 responses after two electronic contacts, for a response rate of 52 percent.

The survey was comprised of two similar, but different instruments for each major representative group within the PNMWG: One survey was developed for producers and niche pork business owners in the private sector and the other was developed for non profit, university, and agency partners. However, both surveys had in common questions asking respondents to rate the extent to which they agreed PNMWG contributed to:

- An increase in their skills and knowledge;
- Increased trust and collaboration;
- Improved professional relationships;
- Attitude changes; and
- Organizational, business, or public policy changes.

Where they differed were additional questions directed to niche pork producers and business owners on

- The extent to which the PNMWG helped them improve their operation's financial situation and

Additional questions were also directed to nonprofit, University, and agency participants inquiring about the extent to which PNMWG helped them

- Build the capacity of the organizations or agencies they represented;
- Changed the way they do their work; and
- Other specific ways PNMWG impacted their representative organization or agency.

ABOUT RESPONDENTS

Most respondents were long-time, frequent participants of PNMWG. Three in five indicated they had attended meetings for three years or longer and 82% said they had attended either all or most of the quarterly meetings since attending their first meeting.
Figure 1 shows the occupational affiliations of respondents. We asked them to indicate all occupational affiliations (noting that some would have multiple affiliations), followed by a question about their primary affiliation. Nearly half (47%) identified with the University or Cooperative Extension. Nearly one in three (5 total) indicated s/he was a farmer, while only one respondent indicated farming was his/her primary occupational affiliation. Niche pork company owners/employees and industry representatives comprised the second and third largest primary groups, respectively, with 18 percent of respondents in each.

Of six who indicated they were a producer or small business owner, four of the seventeen (24%) respondents chose niche pork farming or niche pork business as his/her primary occupation. Of those four, three were niche pork business owners and one was a niche pork producer. Three in four respondents (75%) represented public sector or non profit agencies or organizations.

![Figure 1. Occupational Affiliation of Respondents](image)

**Skills and Knowledge Benefits**

With only four respondents selecting niche pork farming or business ownership as their primary affiliation (thus directing them to answer farmer/business owner-specific questions), there are obvious limitations to interpreting the data especially in terms of how well these data reflect the extent to which PNMWG impacted all participating, but nonresponding niche pork companies and farmers. However, the numbers nonetheless show benefits of participation to private sector producers and businesses (Figure 2). The greatest skills and knowledge benefits among this group are associated with better understanding of the particular niche their operation fills within the pork industry (mean=6.5) and their ability to communicate with others about the industry (6.5). Participation also provided producers and business owners a greater understanding of the niche pork industry overall (6.0), which they are better able to communicate (6.5). Thus the
PNMWG helps private sector participants better understand the context in which they work so they can better position themselves. Producers also said the group helps them make better management decisions and provides them with applicable information they cannot find anywhere else to give them confidence about making solid decisions for their operation/business (a mean 5.8 on a 7 point scale).

**Figure 2. Skills and Knowledge Benefits**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This set of questions relates to skills and knowledge benefits you may have received as a result of participating in PNMWG. Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements on a scale of 1-7 where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree.</th>
<th>Producer/Partner Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean (n=4)</td>
<td>Mean (n=13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in PNMWG has given me a greater understanding of the niche pork industry.</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know more about my own operation/business as a result of PNMWG.</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I better understand the niche my operation/business fills as a result of participating in PNMWG.</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I better understand how my organization can provide better support to the niche pork industry as a result of participating in PNMWG.</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In PNMWG, I learn things useful for my operation/business or work that I cannot learn anywhere else.</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have gained valuable marketing skills as a result of participating in PNMWG.</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand niche pork markets better as a result of participation in PNMWG.</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand niche pork production better as a result of participation in PNMWG.</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I make better management decisions as a result of participation in PNMWG.</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I communicate better with others about the niche pork industry as a result of participating in PNMWG.</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more confident about the decisions I make for my operation/business as a result of PNMWG.</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more qualified to serve the niche pork industry as a result of participating in PNMWG.</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 also shows that organizational and agency partners agreed strongly with statements about the group's contribution to increasing their understanding of niche pork production (6.0) and markets (6.1). Furthermore, like producers and business owners, they agreed PNMWG has helped them communicate better about the industry (5.9) and be more qualified to serve those within the niche pork industry (5.9). If we analyze the value of PNMWG to participants and their business or work, we find that the private sector group is more likely to agree they learn useful things in PNMWG that they cannot learn anywhere else (5.8), whereas organizational partners are less likely to agree with this statement (4.9).
Networking Benefits

Niche pork business owners and producers highly value PNMWG for the networking advantages it provides. Private sector participants report greater networking benefits than the public and nonprofit organizational and agency partners. Figure 3 shows that while the non profit and public sector partners reported a reasonably high level of agreement with having received networking benefits (ranging from 4.9 to 5.8), private sector partners agreed more strongly with statements about the benefits new and existing relationships brought their operations as a result of participation. They also agreed they were collaborating more with other farmers or niche pork companies as a result of PNMWG participation (6.5) in comparison with the public and nonprofit partners who were less apt to agree they collaborated more with either farmers/niche pork companies (5.2) or other organizations (5.2).

Figure 3. Networking Benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Producer/ Business Mean</th>
<th>Partner Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PNMWG is an important support network that connects me to people and organizations working on niche pork issues.</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past year I developed new professional relationships through PNMWG which benefits my operation/company or organization.</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past year I strengthened existing professional relationships through PNMWG which benefited my operation/company or organization.</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a result of PNMWG, I have or am currently collaborating with (other) farmers or niche pork companies.</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a result of PNMWG, I have or am currently collaborating with organizations, agencies, or institutions to address niche pork related projects/issues.</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Financial and Operational Benefits

We learned from Year 1 interviews with PNMWG participants that farmers and business owners received financial and operational benefits that public sector partners did not. Without asking for specific financial records which business owners and producers are often reluctant to provide, we tried to quantify the extent to which participating farmers and business owners agreed PNMWG contributed to increased production capacity, provided access to new markers, increased profits, increased their access to credit and helped financially stabilize of their operations. Figure 6 shows the mean results from those questions.

Figure 4. Financial and Operational Benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Producer/ Business Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This set of questions relates to financial and operational benefits your operation/company may have received as a result of participating in PNMWG. Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements on a scale of 1-7 where 1= Strongly Disagree and 7= Strongly Agree.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am better able to finance my operation/business as a result of PNWWMG.</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My operation/business has increased production as a result of participating in PNWWMG.</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My operation/business has sold more product as a result of participating in PNWWMG.</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have gained access to new markets as a result of participating in PNWWMG.</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My operation/business enjoyed increased profits as a result of participating in PNWWMG.</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My operation/business operates more efficiently as a result of PNWWMG participation.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My operation/business is more financially stable as a result of PNWWMG participation.</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A mean of 3.5 is the middle of the scale. Responding producers and business owners therefore did not agree that PNWWMG helped them gain access to credit or help them operate things more efficiently (the latter in direct contrast to qualitative testimony in year one that it did), but there was some mean level of agreement that the PNWWMG did help them increased production and sell more products, some in new markets, with some but no particularly noteworthy impacts on profitability and financial stability. While the PNWWMG helped increase production capacity, market access, and product sales, other factors such as management decisions and market forces are playing a key role in whether increased production translates into better profits, especially given that the livestock industry tanked in this time frame when feed prices rose in response to increased demand from the ethanol industry for corn. It is likely that with more favorable market conditions, the financial benefits of private sector PNWWMG participation would be more impressive.

**Trust within PNWWMG**

One of the greatest challenges of the product-based PNWWMG has been developing trust within the group. While the agro-political landscape of Iowa is indisputably dominated by industrial agricultural interests, skirmishes on the edges are increasingly fought and won by alternative interests. In rare cases, groups along the agricultural spectrum, private and public sector alike, are able to come together to work on common goals despite entrenched, polarized views about each other and the way things should be done. As private sector businesses jockey for position to command the most market share possible public sector groups get pulled in all different directions, making it difficult for them to adequately serve everyone at once.

PNWWMG, by providing an opportunity and safe environment for diverse groups to interact, has succeeded in building trust among unlikely partners. Private sector businesses and organizational partners both reported they are more likely to call someone they have met through the group than if they had never met them before (6.0). Both groups are also equally likely to agree (6.5 and 6.2) that no one interest dominates the PNWWMG and that it is a democratic organization with a culture of open participation and equal influence. Both groups also report they are equally likely to share general information at PNWWMG meetings about their business or organization and that they feel comfortable doing so, however private sector proprietary information and data about
customers is shared less freely. Organizational partners are more trusting of the group (5.9) than are private sector partners (5.0) in terms of whether or not they believe information exchanged in PNMWG meetings will be used to harm niche pork operations. Thus, organizational partners seem to trust niche pork business owners more than they trust themselves.

**Figure 5. Trust within PNMWG**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This set of questions relates to trust within PNMWG. Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements on a scale of 1-7 where 1= Strongly Disagree and 7= Strongly Agree.</th>
<th>Producer/ Business Mean</th>
<th>Partner Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I share general information about my business/organization at PNMWG meetings.</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel comfortable voicing my thoughts and opinions at PNMWG meetings.</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I share information about my customers/buyers at PNMWG meetings.</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I sometimes share proprietary information with other PNMWG participants.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more likely to call someone I've met through PNMWG than if I have never met them before.</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I trust that other PNMWG participants will not use information I share with the group to intentionally harm my operation/business or other niche pork operations.</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNMWG is a democratic organization. That is, anyone who wants to participate can. Furthermore, participants are able to influence the group's direction and activities.</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Collaboration Arising from PNMWG Participation**

Trust is an important precursor to collaboration. While we measured attitudes about trust, we also wanted to measure trust-related behaviors--particularly, the extent to which trust is actually shared in the group. We did so by asking producers and organizational partners whether they collaborated with someone from a list of different groups in the past year as a result of PNMWG participation. We defined collaboration as working together on a niche pork-related project, program or initiative; engaging in joint problem solving around issues concerning the niche pork industry; or planning niche pork related programs, events, or activities.
Figure 6 shows the extent to which the responding private sector participants rely on a variety of agencies, organizations and private sector entities to participate in niche pork markets. All of the four private sector respondents reported they collaborated with other farmers and entrepreneurs, ISU faculty, private practice vets, lenders, and government agencies in the past year. Three in
four also collaborated with processors, the Iowa Pork Producers Association, PFI, and the ISU based Iowa Pork Industry Center, ISU Extension, Leopold Center. Public and on profit partners also reported strong collaborative relationships with niche pork farmers and businesses (76.9%), and PFI (72.7%). Based on these data, PFI is playing a key role connecting both private and public/civic sector interests through leadership and facilitation of the PNWMG. In contrast to producers and entrepreneurs, public and civic sector partners were less likely to report collaboration with government agencies (18.2% versus 100%), and lenders (25 versus 100%). However, there appears to be someone for everyone in the group. Hence, one reason for the group's success is the participation of diverse and varied groups that can offer a variety of resources that meet the varied needs and interests of a wide range of participants.

Attitudes

We measured perceptions participants had about other groups and their general attitudes about collaboration as a way to corroborate or explain possible differences in collaboration between groups. Figure 7 shows these results. Some general trends are noteworthy. First, responding producers and entrepreneurs strongly agree that each is ensuring his own success by supporting the niche pork industry as a whole (6.5). In addition and also somewhat surprising, this group also say they are willing to explore ways they might collaborate with other niche pork companies in particular (6.5), as well as others along the value chain (6.0). We suspect that the collaborative success of PNMWG deserves acclaim for these results. Among groups listed as strong supporters the niche pork industry, the private sector group most appreciated ISU Extension, ISU faculty, commodity pork organizations/associations, and independent consultants. In some contrast, their public sector and non counterparts held a greater regard for ISU Extension, faculty, and non profits. For both groups, vets and lenders rated relatively poorly as a good source of support for the niche pork industry but they were also very seldom, if at all, represented at PNMWG meetings.

Figure 7. Attitudes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Producer/ Business Mean (n=4)</th>
<th>Partner Mean (n=13)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In order for my operation/business or niche pork companies to succeed, the niche pork industry as a whole must succeed.</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration among farmers is a viable way to create stronger niche pork operations and businesses.</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration among niche pork companies is a viable way to create stronger niche pork operations and businesses.</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration between niche pork companies and others along the value chain such as processors, distributors, and retailers is a viable way to create stronger niche pork operations and businesses.</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am willing to explore ways my operation/business or organization might collaborate with other niche pork companies.</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I am willing to explore ways my operation/business or organization might collaborate with others along the value chain such as processors, distributors, and retailers.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Support</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISU Extension field and county agents are a good source of support for the niche pork industry.</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISU faculty are a good source of support for the niche pork industry.</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non profits are a good source of support for the niche pork industry.</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commodity pork associations and organizations are a good source of support for the niche pork industry.</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenders are a good source of support for the niche pork industry.</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government-based funding agencies are a good source of support for the niche pork industry.</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent consultants are a good source of support for the niche pork industry.</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterinarians are a good source of support for the niche pork industry.</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Policy Impacts

Market based change championed by PNMWG appears to be having minimal effects on business or organization policy and no known effects on public policy. Only two respondents said PNMWG had a localized policy impact on their organization by changing their plans of work, organizational goals, and reinforcing the commitment of one organization to a specific strategic direction. No respondents reported any public policy changes that were linked to the work of the group. PNMWG did prompt some to talk with colleagues about policy changes needed to support the industry (4.0), most disagreed that it had prompted them to take it one step further to talk with elected officials about policy changes (3.0).

Organizational Capacity Building

During our interviews with PNMWG participants in Year 1, many said PNMWG was helping build the capacity of represented organizations, agencies, and institutions in a variety of ways. The specific ways are listed in Figure 8. We learned in those interviews that key elements of capacity building involve providing organizations with knowledge opportunities so they can better understand clients and the broader industry, access to new and reliable sources of information and resources, opportunities to gain credibility and influence, and tools to help them work more efficiently and effectively. According to the public and non profit participants, PNMWG helps build the capacity of their organization to varying degrees. While it's been a challenge for them to marshal new financial and human resources to do niche pork work, PNMWG has helped them better understand niche pork clients and the industry, and helped organizations gain credibility for the work they do in this arena. While this group of respondents agreed more than they disagreed that PNMWG helps them work more efficiently and effectively, engage new partners, be more influential and collaborate with others, there is some room for
future improvement in helping build the capacity of the public sector and non profit organizations that participate in PNMWG.

Figure 8. Organizational Capacity Building

| Better understand niche pork systems so my organization can provide better support to the niche pork industry. | 5.0 |
| Better understand niche pork clients. | 5.4 |
| Serve a broader array of clients. | 4.4 |
| Access a broader spectrum of people with knowledge valuable to my organization's work. | 4.8 |
| Collaborate with other organizations, agencies, or institutions doing niche pork work. | 4.8 |
| Develop stronger relationships with other organizations, agencies, and institutions to provide better, more coordinated support to the niche pork industry. | 4.5 |
| Leverage new financial resources to do niche pork work. | 3.9 |
| Leverage new human resources to do niche pork work. | 3.8 |
| Improve relationships within my organization, agency, or institution. | 4.3 |
| Change attitudes or assumptions my organization has about other organizations, agencies, or institutions doing niche pork work. | 4.4 |
| Occupy a position of new leadership responsibility and influence in niche pork work. | 4.6 |
| Work more efficiently by providing access to field-tested information, resources, strategies, and tools. | 4.3 |
| Work more efficiently by helping us find information more quickly. | 5.1 |
| Be more effective by helping us achieve our goals/mission. | 4.8 |
| Gain credibility for the work we do in the niche pork arena. | 5.3 |
| Effectively engage new partners in niche pork work. | 4.7 |
| Leverage resources outside my community/region. | 4.1 |
| Leverage resources within my community/region. | 4.2 |

Despite the challenges associated with leveraging new sources of funding for participating groups, we learned a valuable lesson about sustainability and support for this work during the interviews in Year 1. At that time, we were asking narrow questions about the extent to which the working group was helping participating leverage funding for their niche pork work. What we weren't asking then but are now after that process is the extent to which the PNMWG is helping their organization provide funding to niche pork businesses or efforts as a result of participation in PNMWG. When this question was asked in the quantitative survey, one in three public sector/non profit partners confirmed that their organization was able to leverage funding as a result of contacts or collaborations developed through PNMWG. However, 40 percent confirmed they were able to provide funding support for the niche pork work of others as a result of PNMWG, suggesting that the ultimate sustainability of this work relies on partners to be the originators and funders of this work.
PNMWG Impacts on Organizational Support for Niche Pork Work

Besides building the capacity of participating organizations, we wanted to know specific ways in which PNMWG was changing the way organizations are supporting niche pork work and whether organizations have changed their practices because of their participation. Figure 9 shows that most agreed their organization was more likely to partner with others (5.0) and the idea of collaboration (4.7). However, agreement was weaker on statements that had to do with changes in the level of support their organization is provided to the niche pork industry and niche pork work.

**Figure 9. Impacts on Organizational Support or Niche Pork Work**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Partner Mean (n=13)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My job responsibilities expanded to include work on niche pork issues even though I did not work in this area before.</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I spent more time on niche pork work.</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My organization is more open to the idea of collaborating with others.</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My organization is more likely to partner with others.</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My organization is incorporating more principles of the Community of Practice model into our work.</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niche pork work has become a higher priority within my organization.</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My organization's governing board and/or decision makers are more supportive of my organization's involvement in niche pork work.</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My organization provides more support (technical assistance, information, referrals, facilitation, etc.) to the niche pork industry.</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work responsibilities of others within my organization have expanded to include niche pork work.</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others within my organization are spending more time on niche pork work.</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviews conducted in Year 1 also indicated that some respondents were spending more time on niche pork issues as a result of PNMWG involvement than they were in the past. When we quantified that with a question about the percent of work time they spend on niche pork a year ago and compared it with the percent of work time they spend on niche pork work now, we found that the average did increase from 19 percent to 22 percent, however, this difference was not statistically significant (p > .05).
APPENDIX 2. 2008 RFSWG SURVEY RESULTS

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2008, we contacted 70 people who had attended at least two RFSWG meetings in
the past two years to invite them to complete a survey of items developed from the qualitative
telephone interviews conducted in Year 1. We received 37 responses after two electronic
contacts, for a response rate of 53 percent.

The survey was developed to quantify project impacts participants reported in Year 1 interviews.
The survey asked respondents to rate the extent to which they agreed the RFSWG contributed to:

- An increase in their skills and knowledge;
- Increased trust and collaboration;
- Improved professional relationships;
- Attitude changes; and
- Organizational, business, or public policy changes.
- Building the capacity of the organizations or agencies they represented; and
- Changing the way respondents do their work.

ABOUT RESPONDENTS

Most respondents were long-time, frequent participants of RFSWG. More than half (56%) indicated they had attended meetings for three years or more and two-thirds (68%) said they had
attended either all or most of the quarterly meetings since attending their first meeting. Nearly all
(92%) reported attending a meeting in the last year.

Figure 1 shows the occupational affiliations of respondents. We asked them to indicate all
occupational affiliations, noting that some would have multiple affiliations. Nearly 60%
identified with the University or Cooperative Extension and nearly half (43%) reported
affiliation with non-University no-profits. Nearly one in three (30%) also reported they were a
farmer or owned a farm-based business. RFSWG respondents also have government, community
colleges, economic development and volunteer affiliations as well. Indeed, respondents reported
a mean of 1.7 affiliations, suggesting they are tied to regional food systems work in a variety of
ways.
Skills and Knowledge Benefits

In Year 1, respondents overwhelmingly reported short-term knowledge and skills development benefits from participating in RFSWG meetings. Table 1 lists those benefits and the extent to which respondents agree (using a 7-point scale where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree) they have received each as a result of participating in RFSWG. Respondents rated most highly the statement that their work in local and regional food systems is better as a result of participating in RFSWG (mean = 5.86). Not surprisingly, there was also a strong level of agreement that participation has rewarded participants with a greater understanding of food systems (5.76). Noteworthy, however, is the relative level of agreement with the statement that RFSWG helps participants manage the local politics associated with local and regional food systems issues (4.32) and the need to help participants better mobilize local support for their efforts (4.57). Future investments from RFSWG may be well served to focus work on these related topic areas to better support the local and regional food systems work participants are doing.

Table 1. Skills and Knowledge Benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This set of questions relates to skills and knowledge benefits you may have received as a result of participating in RFSWG. Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 7 where 1=Strongly DISAGREE and 7=Strongly AGREE.</th>
<th>Mean (n=37)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation in RFSWG has given me a greater understanding of food systems.</td>
<td>5.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My work in local and regional food systems is better as a result of participating in RFSWG.</td>
<td>5.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in RFSWG helps me work through problems in my food systems work.</td>
<td>5.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in RFSWG motivates me to continue my work in food systems.</td>
<td>5.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Networking Benefits

Another key category of contributions RFSWG provides participants are social and networking benefits, which are important factors in furthering local and regional food systems work. The range of the mean level agreement with statements listed in Table 2 is interesting. There is a strong level of agreement (6.03) that RFSWG puts participants in touch with human and organizational resources they never would have accessed or used. However, there is much less agreement (4.17) that accompanying community representatives later committed resources to local or regional food system efforts. This may be explained by the fact that the majority of participants didn't often bring with them to RFSWG meetings a partner from their community and if so, those partners may not have subsequently committed resource to local food system efforts. However, it is clear that participants agree that RFSWG is an important support network that connects them to others doing work in the food systems arena (5.86).

Table 2. Networking Benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Mean (n=36)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RFSWG is an important support network that connects me to people and</td>
<td>5.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organizations doing work in food systems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in RFSWG has put me in touch with people and organizations</td>
<td>6.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with whom I never would have interacted.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past year I developed new professional relationships through</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFSWG that strengthen and benefit my work.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past year I strengthened existing professional relationships</td>
<td>5.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>through RFSWG that strengthen and benefit my work.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past year I collaborated with people from other organizations,</td>
<td>5.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agencies, or institutions on food system projects or issues as a result</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of participating in RFSWG.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past year, I brought representatives from my community/area with</td>
<td>4.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>me to RFSWG meetings or events who later committed resources to local/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regional systems.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Trust within PNMWG

The extent to which collaboration is possible in depends on trust people have both for each other and participating organizations. We measured trust in terms of attitudes participants hold about other participants in the group and the overall atmosphere at RFSWG meetings.

Table 3 shows that trust is high in RFSWG, which provides an environment in which participants feel safe and comfortable voicing their thoughts and opinions (5.73). Moreover, there is a sense that participants will not misappropriate information learned or shared at the meetings for personal gain or to harm others (5.61). There is also a general sense that participants are not struggling with "turfism" that can sometimes pervade cooperative relationships (5.46). For the most part, there is a general level of agreement (5.32) that the group is democratic and any participant can influence the group's direction or activities although there is still some room for improvement on this account.

Table 3. Trust

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The questions below relate to trust within RFSWG. Rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 7 where 1=Strongly DISAGREE and 7=Strongly AGREE</th>
<th>Mean (n=36)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel comfortable voicing my thoughts and opinions at RFSWG meetings/events.</td>
<td>5.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFSWG participants generally are not interested in protecting their &quot;turf.&quot;</td>
<td>5.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more likely to call someone I've met through RFSWG than if I have never met them before.</td>
<td>5.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I trust that other RFSWG participants will not exploit or otherwise misappropriate ideas or information I share with the group.</td>
<td>5.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFSWG is a democratic organization. That is, anyone who wants to participate can. Furthermore, participants are able to influence the group's direction and activities</td>
<td>5.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Attitudes

Questions about participant attitudes elicited some of the highest level of agreement in the survey. Results suggest RFSWG participants share strong values for the power of collaboration and regard it as a viable way to create stronger local and regional food systems (6.73). Another strongly held value relates to their appreciation of diverse disciplines and perspectives characteristic of RFSWG (6.22). RFSWG also seems to be playing a key role in fostering more positive attitudes among participants toward collaboration (I am more open to the idea of collaborating with others as a result of participating in RFSWG-5.68).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7=Strongly AGREE</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration is a viable way to create stronger local and regional food systems.</td>
<td>6.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more open to the idea of collaborating with others as a result of participating in RFSWG.</td>
<td>5.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISU Extension field and county agents are a good source of support for developing and maintaining local and regional food systems.</td>
<td>5.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non profits not associated with ISU are a good source of support for developing and maintaining local and regional food systems.</td>
<td>5.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISU faculty are a good source of support for developing and maintaining local and regional food systems.</td>
<td>5.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenders are a good source of support for developing and maintaining local and regional food systems.</td>
<td>4.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I value the diversity of disciplines and perspectives represented in RFSWG.</td>
<td>6.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFSWG is helping increase public awareness about local and regional food systems.</td>
<td>5.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFSWG is helping change attitudes about local and regional food systems in my community/region.</td>
<td>5.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFSWG has played a role in changing the way food related policies are regulated/enforced in my region.</td>
<td>4.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Collaboration Arising from RFSWG Participation**

Trust is obviously an important precursor to collaboration. While we measured attitudes about trust, we also wanted to measure trust-related behaviors--particularly, the extent to which trust is enacted within the group through collaboration of efforts. We did so by asking producers and organizational partners whether they collaborated with someone from a list of different groups in the past year as a result of RFSWG participation. We defined collaboration as working together on a local or regional food systems-related project, program or initiative; engaging in joint problem solving around issues concerning food systems; or planning food systems-related programs, events, or activities.
Figure 2. Percent of respondents who have collaborated with listed organizations in the past year as a result of RFSWG participation

Figure 2 shows the percent of participants partnering in the past year with listed agencies, organizations and private sector entities as a result of RFSWG collaboration. The Leopold Center and non-profits are both taking leadership roles in terms of collaborating with participants, trailed only by the geographically based RFSWG groups, agricultural entrepreneurs, and ISU Extension. An impressive 70% of respondents report they have collaborated with at least one of these groups and over 50% have collaborated with county government, economic development professionals, dieticians, ISU faculty, other universities, and students. These data indicate a strong level of collaborative engagement among participants and organizations as a result of their involvement in RFSWG.
Organizational Capacity Building

During our interviews with nearly 40 VCP participants in Year 1, many obliquely said the working groups were helping them build the capacity of organizations, agencies, and institutions they represent. One often hears the term "capacity building" bandied about in a variety of settings, but what does it really mean? The term "organizational capacity building" is usually an abstract and thus difficult concept to grasp. However, capacity building ultimately means the ability to work better and do better work. RFSWG is building organization capacity by creating a space and environment where people and organizations freely share information, ideas, and other resources to benefit the work they do and the people and organizations they serve. RFSWG participants articulated the following elements of building capacity listed in Table 5.

Table 5. Ways RFSWG is Building Organizational Capacity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During our interviews with RFSWG participants last year, many said RFSWG was helping build the capacity of organizations, agencies, and institutions they represented. On a scale of 1 to 7 where 1=strongly DISAGREE and 7=strongly AGREE, rate the extent to which you agree your participation in RFSWG in the past year has helped build the capacity of your organization. (If you have multiple organizational affiliations, choose the one with which you identify the most strongly.)</th>
<th>Mean (n=29)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better understand local and regional food systems to provide better support for these efforts.</td>
<td>5.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better understand our clients.</td>
<td>4.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serve a broader array of clients.</td>
<td>5.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access a broader spectrum of people with knowledge valuable to my organization's work.</td>
<td>5.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborate with other organizations, agencies, or institutions doing work in local and regional food systems.</td>
<td>5.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop stronger relationships with other organizations, agencies, and institutions that provide better, more coordinated support to local and regional food systems.</td>
<td>5.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leverage new financial resources to do local and regional food systems work.</td>
<td>4.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leverage new human resources to do local and regional food systems work.</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve relationships within my organization, agency, or institution.</td>
<td>4.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change attitudes or assumptions my organization has about other organizations, agencies, or institutions doing work in local and regional food systems.</td>
<td>5.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupy a position of new leadership responsibility and influence in local and regional food systems.</td>
<td>5.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work more efficiently by providing access to field tested information, resources, strategies, and tools.</td>
<td>5.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work more efficiently by helping us find information more quickly.</td>
<td>5.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be more effective by helping us achieve our goals/mission.</td>
<td>5.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain credibility for the work we do in local and regional food systems.</td>
<td>5.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectively engage new partners in local and regional food systems work.</td>
<td>5.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leverage resources outside my community/region.</td>
<td>4.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leverage resources inside my community/region</td>
<td>4.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RFSWG participants report that the working group builds the capacity of their respective organizations by providing a collaborative work environment and opportunities leading to collaboration with other agencies and organizations (5.83). Collaboration as a factor in building organizational capacity is often overlooked as a source of organizational improvement because it's not something one can just do, especially on short notice and the perception it involves high transaction costs. Both are true, but according to participants, the benefits of investments in relationships and trust are unmatched. While leveraging financial resources continues overall to be a challenge for RFSWG participants (see Table 5), we have conflicting evidence for this. Two geographically based regional food system groups in the RFSWG have been able to leverage funding as a direct result of their connection to a statewide network. A grant administrator for the Wellmark Foundation in Iowa says their participation in the RFSWG helped tip the scales in their favor when Wellmark was considering applications for grant funding. Wellmark consulted with the Leopold Center which had already funded the work of these groups in the early stages of the application process. In the end, these two RFSWG groups were awarded a total of over $180,000 as a result. According to the Wellmark administrator, "Please share [with others] that we spoke during the Letter of Interest review to get information from your perspective. Every group/network [in RFSWG] has the ability to interplay in very positive ways with other ones and this [awarding of the grants is] a nice teachable point of view to reinforce that after the fact." In addition, Figure 4 (appearing later in the report) also shows that one in three respondents agree that RFSWG has helped them leverage funds for their work.

While RFSWG involvement has differentially affected various participants, they all agree that social learning in the working group helps them better understand local and regional food systems so they can provide better support in those areas (5.69). In addition, participants report that developing stronger relationships with other organizations, agencies, and institutions helps them provide better, more coordinated support to local and regional food systems. (5.57). Having access to a broad spectrum of people is a valuable part of building the capacity of their organization to do work (5.47). Finally, participation in a bigger network helps participants gain credibility for the work their organizations are doing in local and regional food systems (5.48), demonstrated clearly by the Wellmark example described above.

**RFSWG Impacts on Organizational Support for Local/Regional Food System Work**

The ability of RFSWG to impact organizations is not limited to building capacity. In Year 1, participants told us that participation in RFSWG was changing the way their organizations were doing work. Specific changes included, among others, more openness to collaboration, more support for employees to work on local and regional food systems work, and commitment of additional organizational resources such as the time of other employees to the work. Table 6 shows the extent to which respondents agree that RFSWG has affected their organization in the past year. Respondents agreed most with the statement that their organization is incorporating more principles of the Community of Practice model into their work (5.18). Although the mean level of agreement for each statement (with the aforementioned exception) was below 5, organizational change is an unanticipated and pleasing result of the work. The fact that there is a
mean level of agreement beyond the middle (3.5) suggests that RFSWG is changing organizational culture and support for such work.

Table 6. Effects of RFSWG on Represented Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The following statements relate to impacts RFSWG may have had on your organization in the past year. On a scale of 1 to 7 where 1=strongly DISAGREE and 7=strongly AGREE, rate the extent to which you agree your participation in RFSWG in the past year has impacted your organization in the following ways:</th>
<th>Mean (n=29)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My organization is more open to the idea of collaborating with others as a result of my participation in RFSWG.</td>
<td>4.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My organization is more likely to partner with others.</td>
<td>4.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My organization is incorporating more principles of the Community of Practice model into our work.</td>
<td>5.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local and regional food systems work has become a higher priority within my organization.</td>
<td>4.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My organization's governing board and/or decision makers are more supportive of my organization's involvement in food systems work.</td>
<td>4.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My organization provides more support (technical assistance, information, referrals, facilitation, etc.) to food system efforts or businesses.</td>
<td>4.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work responsibilities of others within my organization have expanded to include local and regional food systems work.</td>
<td>4.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others within my organization are spending more time on local and regional food systems.</td>
<td>4.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Increased organizational support, along with self-initiated change, should prompt individuals to do things differently as a result of RFSWG participation. We set out to measure this claim by asking respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed that RFSWG prompted them to change their work habits. Table 7 shows the greatest change occurred in prompting respondents to talk to colleagues about the need for policy change (5.11). Respondents also agreed their job responsibilities expanded to include a wider range of work related to local and regional food systems and they spent more time on such work (5.06 respectively). We cannot measure the collective impact of this change specifically except in terms comparing the amount of time respondents spent on local and regional food systems work a year ago versus the time they spend on it now.

Table 7. Effects of RFSWG on Individual Work Habits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The following questions relate to changes in your work in the past year as a result of RFSWG participation. Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 7 where 1=Strongly DISAGREE and 7=Strongly AGREE.</th>
<th>Mean (n=35)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RFSWG prompted me to collect more data on local food systems.</td>
<td>5.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My job responsibilities expanded to include a wider range of local and regional food systems work.</td>
<td>5.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I spent more time on local and regional food systems work.</td>
<td>5.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFSWG prompted me to talk with colleagues/co-workers about policy changes needed to support the local and regional food systems.</td>
<td>5.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFSWG prompted me to have conversations with lenders about local and regional food</td>
<td>3.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
system financing opportunities.

RFSWG prompted me to have conversations with elected officials about local and regional food system opportunities. 4.57

When asked these questions, respondents reported they spent an average of 40 percent of their time on local and regional food systems work a year ago versus 52 percent now (Figure 3). These results are statistically significant (p <.05) Based on data in Table 7 that shows agreement with the statement that respondents spend more time on local and regional food systems work, the data support the claim that RFSWG is at least partly responsible for the increase in the amount of time respondents are spending on this work.

![Figure 3. Average percent of time respondents spent on local/regional food systems work](image)

**RFSWG Impacts on Funding and Policy Support for Local/Regional Food System Work**

According to respondents, RFSWG is not only helping increase the level of human resources dedicated to local and regional food systems, it is also improving the ability of respondents to leverage and dispense funding for such work and is partly responsible for organizational and public policy change as well.
Figure 4. Percent of respondents attributing specific funding and policy changes to RFSWG

Figure 4 shows that nearly one-third of respondents say they were able to receive funding due to RFSWG participation. However, it is perhaps even more important that 40% of respondents are able to provide funding to other groups and efforts as a result of RFSWG participation. The Year 1 evaluation showed just how important this was, particularly the producer mini-grants programs, in attracting local interest, resources, and buy in for such work. From that experience, we learned to focus not only on the ability of organizations to receive funding but the ability and willingness of participating organizations to share their resources with others. Additional evidence we have that RFSWG is doing this exists in terms of the geographically-based regional food system groups supported by RFSWG. Two groups, the Northeast Iowa and the Southwest Iowa groups, have voluntarily offered at no encouragement from anyone but themselves to pass along funds they have received from VCP to fledgling startup groups in neighboring counties. In so doing, they demonstrate an understanding of and investment in building the long-term capacity of themselves and others to support work statewide on local and regional food systems.

RFSWG is also apparently having an effect on changing organizational policy. Figure 4 shows the percent of respondents who report their organization has changed or added any policies or guidelines as a result of their participation in RFSWG (“For example, have your organizational vision or mission statements changed? Have organizational goals, individual plans of work, or strategic plans changed?”) Nearly 2 in 5 say their organization has.

When asked for examples of change, respondents report
- Changing informal customs and practices of how the organization operates;
- Adding new staff to support the work;
• Instituting policies to buy locally grown and processed foods; and
• Using a community of practice approach to do their work and partner with others.

Not all change was positive, however. One non-profit respondent reported "we will be less likely to work with local food systems than in the past and less likely to work with ISU Extension."

Surprisingly, nearly half of respondents credit RFSWG for playing a role in helping change public policy. However, this is because most cited either enforcement changes of existing public policies or changes to institutional policies rather than public policy change. Examples cited include the:

• Clarification by IDALS that institutions and hospitals can use locally produced foods;
• Iowa Cattlemen Association adoption of a policy platform to support local meat processors.
• Creation of the Farm to ISU program within ISU Dining;
• Creation of a Food Policy Council in Pottawattamie County and county funding for a local foods coordinator;
• Sioux City property tax policy; and
• Influence on school wellness polices and local foods to institutions policies.

Thus, while it is important to measure public policy change, it is equally important to measure incremental institutional and organizational policy changes, as well as changes in enforcement of existing policies and informal changes in organizational customs and practices.
APPENDIX 3: 2009 Evaluation of the Small Meat Processors Working Group

PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The Small Meat Processors Working Group is one of four working groups, or Communities of Practice, supported by the Value Chain Partnerships project (VCP). VCP is an Iowa-based network for food and agriculture working groups funded by the Wallace Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Winrock International and by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. The Value Chain Partnership project supports new supply networks for farmer-led food, fiber, and energy enterprises that follow sustainable practices.

The Small Meat Processors Working Group received $20,000 from VCP in 2008. As part of its formal involvement in VCP, the Small Meat Processors Working Group is part of the overall work of the Value Chain Partnerships project. Evaluation of VCP and each of the four working groups has been ongoing, and is important for tracking the impact of each group. However, evaluation of VCP is also meant to carve out time or cause pause for reflection and serve as a decision making tool for the groups. Indeed, people often focus their time and attention on activities but take little, if any, time to reflect on what they have accomplished or lessons they have learned in the process of their work, and how they might use these lessons to work more effectively in the future. This evaluation is therefore intended to increase opportunities for participants of the Small Meat Processors Working Group to celebrate the group's accomplishments, articulate what the group has learned, and use this information to think more strategically about where the group will move into future as it moves its collective foot forward.

BACKGROUND

The Working Group was formed in 2006 by Arion Thiboumery, a graduate student in Rural Sociology and Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University, who was struck by the dwindling number of small meat processors in Iowa. As part of his research, he found there were 550 small meat processors in 1965 compared with less than 200 in existence today. With further investigation, he learned that the reason for the decline was not for lack of business, but rather structural issues that were interfering in their ability to survive. Indeed, lockers often have more business than they can handle. Small meat lockers owners are often so busy managing their businesses that they often don't have or take the time to document what is happening within the business. Even though locker owners are intimately familiar with the daily operations and decision making, they might not know where they are profitable or even if they are profitable. When existing owners try to sell, new owners have no documentation to take to the bank to demonstrate whether these operations are viable businesses. Many therefore go under when existing owners get out of the business because there is no paper trail left behind to facilitate transition to a new owner.
On the other hand, if small meat lockers want to grow and expand rather than sell, in principle they can contact organizations and usually state regulatory agencies for technical assistance. However, this is when they learn the hard lesson that each agency is so specialized that even if personnel they contact are indeed the right people to help them out, the issues are generally too complex to be handled by any one agency. As a result, the locker owner (already strapped for time) is left out of the loop since few, if any, of these assistance providers communicate, much less know what the other one can do for small meat lockers. The onus therefore falls on the locker owner to connect all the bureaucratic dots. When this roadblock proves too formidable, they find themselves in stasis because locker owners can't sell (and have the business survive) and they can't grow (and have the business survive). Until the formation of the Small Meat Processors Working Group, there were simply no forums where assistance providers could jointly understand, let alone address, the bevy of processing, marketing, financing, food safety, labor, accounting, tax, regulatory and other small business development issues facing this sector. The Small Meat Processors Working Group was formed to address these challenges. Today, active organizational, institutional, and agency representatives in the Working Group hail from:

- the **Center for Industrial Research and Service (CIRAS)**, the Cooperative Extension arm of the ISU College of Engineering to support small manufacturing firms across the state;
- **ISU Meat Science Extension**, which works with meat processors to keep them informed on food processing and food safety technologies and techniques;
- the **Iowa Meat Processors Association (IMPA)**, the Iowa affiliate of the American Meat Processor's Association comprised of meat and poultry businesses;
- the **Bureau of Meat and Poultry Inspection** at the Iowa Department of Agriculture & Land Stewardship (IDALS), the regulatory agency responsible for meat processing;
- **ISU’s Value-Added Agriculture Program** (part of ISU Extension to Agriculture and Natural Resources), which provides information and technical assistance to help establish or expand agricultural-related enterprise in Iowa;
- the **Iowa Farm Bureau Federation**, a voluntary membership and advocacy organization for farmers and non-farm members;
- the **Drake University Agricultural Law Center**, dedicated to creating opportunities for students to study how the legal system shapes the food system and influences the ability of the agricultural sector to produce, market and use agricultural products; and
- the **Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture** whose mission is to research the negative impacts of agricultural practices, assist in developing alternative practices, and work with ISU Extension to disseminate this information.

Two participants of the working group are also small meat locker owners. Although initial meetings of the Group were face-to-face, meetings have shifted to facilitated bimonthly conference calls to reduce travel time. However, associated face-to-face meetings (usually project-based) between several participants of the group still take place as they work together to plan and implement projects, proposals, and workshops.
METHODOLOGY

In late November and early December, 2008, Corry Bregendahl, Assistant Scientist at the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, interviewed by telephone active participants of the Small Meat Processors Working Group. These were defined as people participating regularly in the bimonthly conference calls. Together, Corry and Arion developed questions for the interview, which were designed to elicit information about impact the group was having on participating individuals and organizations, new collaborations and partnerships, changes in organizational customs and practices, as well as group sustainability issues to consider as leadership changes loom in the future. The interview questions were sent to participants via e-mail to elicit feedback on question content, and to notify them of an upcoming call from Corry to conduct the interview. Ten participants were contacted and all ten responded, for a 100% response rate. The length of the interviews ranged from 15 to 45 minutes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

People tend to learn quite easily from mistakes. However, people are typically unaccustomed to learning from what they and others do well. Having a conversation about what we do well can help groups identify elements that contribute to their success which helps them preserve those elements to serve them well in the future. However, it also opens the conversation up to what could be done better in the future. This inquisitive philosophy is the basis for the following discussion about successes and benefits the Small Meat Processors Working Group has brought the group and what participants recognize as success in order to help the group continue doing good and important work.

Working Group Successes

We initiated the conversation about what's working well in the group by asking participants to name one event or accomplishment they felt successful or good about in terms of their participation in the working group. We then asked them to identify what it was about that experience that made it so successful to deconstruct the elements that are working well. Several participants mentioned more than one success. Listed below are five successes participants named and reasons why each was successful.

Success #1: Publication of the Meat Processor's Resource Guidebook (80% of respondents)

Why It Is Successful

- The Guidebook is relevant and useful to processors and service providers in the small meat processing industry. "Everyone I've directed to the materials has said it's exactly what they needed. It's been used by processors and CIRAS project managers so [they] can tie in product costing and process flow."
- The Guidebook is helping partner organizations better serve small meat processors. "[CIRAS has] two to three project managers that have copies [of the Guidebook] who were starting to bring them in to help with process flow, efficiency, throughput."
• The Guidebook prompted new work. "There have been so many avenues that [we have pursued because of the Guidebook] such as tax issues we are addressing with the state, the costing analysis, network sharing, and the small niche business development."

• It provided a reason for different groups to work together. "It tied the whole Group together..."

• It was a new, single, comprehensive source of information for the industry. "[It's] a resource for the meat processors that compiled [information] in one source and it helped meat processors identify resources they weren't aware of."

• The Group participants discovered they could achieve new things together which provided new motivation and opportunities for continuing to work together. "Completion of the [Guidebook] was pivotal for the group in showing that the collaboration would accomplish something visible and usable. [In the start], the goal was the publication and there was no other goal. That publication made it clear to the group that they wanted to go beyond the Guidebook."

Success #2. Collaboration of the group (30% of respondents)

Why It Is Successful

• Partner success is Working Group success. "Working with the small meat lockers or any company allows us to be successful when we see them maintain employment and add to employment."

• Participants can report Working Group successes to their respective organizations and agencies to marshal more support for the work. "Instead of having it be a once-in-a-while topic that I get asked about, it's probably more than 50% of my time and it was 5% before."

• It prompts new ways of doing things. "It's been a huge contribution to some radical changes [within my organization]."

• It prompts new collaborations. "We now partner with Meat Science Extension that is leading us to jointly explore future programs together."

Success #3: Work on publications, such as the Boilerplate for Meat Processing Plants and the Meat Buyer's Guide (20% of respondents)

Why It Is Successful

• They provide another reason to collaborate while providing yet another tool to help service/technical assistance providers in the group facilitate information flow and relationships between meat processors, producers, and the public.

• Publication completion is not considered possible without collaboration. "On our own, [my organization] would never have developed the [Boilerplate for Meat Processing Plants] or the resource guidebook."

Success #4. The Group's sponsorship of the costing analysis workshops (20% of respondents)

Success #5. Organization of the succession planning workshop at the 2009 Iowa Meat Processors Association meeting (10% of respondents)

Why It Is Successful
• The workshops provide a tangible and rewarding way for Working Group partners to work together to better serve the industry.

Benefits and Impacts of Participation

Understanding the individual and organizational benefits of participating in the group can be a resource for planning group strategies and activities to retain existing participants, as well as appealing to new groups to get involved. Benefits and impacts are presented together, since respondents invariably connected benefits with impacts those benefits had on their business or organization. Participation in the SMPWG offers the following benefits and impacts, sorted by group:

*Benefits and Impacts on Small Meat Processors*

Benefits the working group provides small meat processors can be described as a chain reaction. The working group helps build business-related knowledge and skills by linking small meat processors with information and people, both of which provide them with resources to make better decisions about their business. This, in turn, results in greater business profitability, greater access to new resources, and ultimately business sustainability.

• The working group is providing education and training opportunities for small meat processors resulting in better business management decisions. "The costing workshop showed me where the costs were and where we needed to bump up the pricing. I went through it with all my deer products and raised prices around 15%.”

• The group is helping small meat processors improve the profitability of their business. "It made our profit margin a lot better. We price products differently and get a better return on products now." "We did one survey round of those participating in the costing workshop. We found a lot of small meat lockers are owner operated and don't have enough time to implement what they are learning from the workshops but one couple embraced this and the impact was up in the hundreds of dollars."

• Workshops supported by the working group and organization partners are prompting meat processors to update record keeping systems. "I would say we are keeping better records now--we're getting to the point of possibly barcoding. When I [took over the business], I had black crayon and butcher paper with the inventory on it."

• Relationships developed through the working group are helping small meat processors find labor. "[The working group] helped us find labor--at one point in time, we had the Latinos in Action group based in Marshalltown to try to assist with job placement. We hired [through them] two to three different times. Sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't."

• Small meat processors report that the group is connecting them with human and knowledge resources to help them make better business decision. "Everyone [in the group] seems to have an interest and a desire to help and assist... I don't know how else I would have found out this information and that there were people at the local university that could help out. Now I know I have tools. This has all stemmed from...bringing all these people together. It provides personal benefit and industry benefit."

• One processor associated the above benefits with improving his ability to secure credit for his business, presumably because the group helps him be a better business owner. "I have had a lot of private lending groups contact me and I haven't been turned down for equipment or open credit lines."
Benefits and Impacts on Organizational/Agency Partners

In brief, the Small Meat Processors Working Group is building the capacity of participating organizations to better serve the small meat processing industry and others who serve them. Nearly 80% of respondents for whom it was relevant reported the working group had changed the way their organization works with small meat processors and other support providers. Each bullet point listed below shows specific ways they report organizational capacity has grown as a result of participating in the working group:

- The working group is **directly connecting technical assistance providers with small meat processors, which creates more targeted, effective assistance.** This point is critical given that for whom the question was relevant, 75 percent had provided technical assistance to small meat processors as a result of participating in the working group. "The working group helped us get to the topics that the industry was interested in getting help with. Having the processors come to the Working Group meetings was one of the key things for us. We could all be University or academic people sitting in a room and not learn anything. It helped [us] realize things about the industry that we never knew. The group has acted as an advisory board with industry doing the advising." "The community colleges struggle to help the processors. Typically the smaller ones don't have many employees and don't qualify for any [state] training funds through the community colleges." "We've done some productivity projects with meat lockers as a result of discussion with the small processors." "At the Iowa Meat Processors Conference, we are going to be presenting a workshop on business succession planning that wouldn't have come about if I wasn't part of the Working Group."

- **The working group is helping small meat processors and others become aware of and make use of technical assistance providers.** "The processors and the Working Group didn't know about the Center for Industrial Research and Service before." "Twice in the past three months, some businesses were referred to me by the Farm Bureau. Is it because of the Working Group? I'm not sure, but I think so."

- **Nine of the ten respondents said the Working Group enabled them to make better referrals.** "It's given me better knowledge so I can direct people to a better resource."

- **Participants attending the meetings are better connected to each other and represented organizations.** "I'm interacting with people on the group with whom I would otherwise not interact. While I know some of them, I have occasion to call them. [The Working Group] has amplified those relationships."

- Through the Working Group, **organizations are able to both contribute to and take credit for their mutual success, thereby strengthening their ability to secure more resources for continuing the work.** "We actually survey clients in regard to the projects we've done with them to capture the impact metric and we report those to our deans and the Board of Regents in aggregate on jobs retained and added. By us doing work with companies, [being] able to serve them, and capturing the impacts helps us meet our goals with federal funders and ISU." "Instead of having it be a once-in-a-while topic, it's probably more than 50% of my time. It was maybe 5% of my time before. My organization is giving me the freedom to do this work."

- **The working group is educating participating organizations as they gain a better understanding of different approaches and perspectives on how to support the small meat processing industry.** "I appreciated the fact that I got some insights into IDALS and their strategy and how they thought about the Iowa meat processing industry." "We didn't have any engineers who knew anything about meat processing [before] since they were used to working with fabrication ships. [Now] the engineers are learning and are helping the lockers learn there is room for improvement in productivity."

- **The working group is prompting organizations that have never worked together before to collaborate.** Seventy percent of respondents reported they participated in new
partnerships or projects that they otherwise would not be involved in unless they were participating in the Small Meat Processors Working Group. "Through the working group, we had never worked with [this non-profit] before. We have plans to do so [again] in the future." "The activities with the product costing [workshop] and the Working Group led me to be involved in regional economic development groups...to dig into specific topics to explore. It tied together the Working Group, the Center for Industrial Research and Service, community colleges, and regional economic development groups." "The Iowa Farm Bureau worked with CIRAS to offer a seminar to target the small meat processors in Iowa with [ISU Meat Science Extension]. We didn't do projects with [them] before."

- The opportunity to meet, share information, and work together through the working group is helping organizations provide better services not only to small meat processors but others as well. "I can better refer people to the resource guidebook. [It] gives me something I can send people. It has provided us additional resources that we can make available to people quickly." "On our own, [my organization] would never have developed the [Boilerplate for Meat Processing Plants] or the resource guidebook."

- The working group is helping participating government regulators better serve meat processors. "We're regulators. Part of our mission is to provide outreach and we have done that for many years...[The working group] has amplified our ability to provide outreach and my goal is to educate before I regulate. Many things in the working group aren't directly related to regulation but pretty much everything is based on regulations and the success of the process."

- The working group is helping participating organizations meet their goals and missions, with measurable impacts on the ground. "Part of our mission is to provide outreach... This has amplified that ability to provide outreach." "The working group] allows us to be successful when we see [meat processors] maintain employment and add to employment. The whole premise of our program is to assist companies to be more profitable and to retain more jobs and create jobs. Any time we do that and make a company become more profitable, we have accomplished our mission."

- Participating organizations are providing funding to other group collaborators "to help support them so they can further their work to give scholarships to processors [to attend courses] who can't afford it."

- Organizational partners in the working group are jointly exploring future partnerships and programs together that build on each organization's skills and strengths.

- Participating organizations are developing a reputation for their work in supporting small meat processors, making them "go-to" organizations and building the capacity of the organization to better support the processors. "My job has grown to become the food processing expert."

- The working group is eliminating duplication of efforts and making more efficient use of organizational resources. "All these people were duplicating efforts and were not really getting all of the information together to make decisions and this is really something [different] that has come out of the working group. All these diverse people were off in their own little world doing things and now they are all together."

- The working group is helping change the culture of professional business associations to be more open to change. "The working group has made a huge contribution to some radical changes [within the association]. The cost analysis class that we introduced to the [Iowa Meat Processors] Board and the [Iowa Meat Processors] association at the convention--sometimes you can feel tension in the air and suspicion about change but we're slowly chipping away at that. ...It's slowly helping people loosen their grip when they hear some successes."

- The working group is changing the way participating organizations provide technical assistance. "In Meat Science Extension, our role is to work with processors from a meat processing standpoint. We have expanded to include food safety. We haven't been involved with them from a business standpoint. We're now involved in [providing support] on the business side. That's been a function of us working with the SMPWG and CIRAS." "The Meat Processor's Guidebook is used by
processors and CIRAS project managers so we can tie in product costing and process flow. We're educating our project managers about process flow. They have never been pulled in to work with meat processors."

The benefits and impacts of the Working Group on participating organizations is compelling. Despite this list of successes, however, one participant remarked strongly on the need for the working group to better engage small meat processors in the work to counterbalance what he termed as "technocratic" representation. "[The Group] is engaging the small meat processors but they're really not at the table. My initial reaction was fairly negative [toward the Working Group] because my expectation was that the [small meat processing] industry would be at the table setting the agenda and they're not, but maybe there isn't the capacity to do that [or] they don't see a huge need for it. [However], I think the product coming out is valuable and the business side would probably find those [products] helpful." Put in context of previous comments from the small meat processor who observed the challenges of engaging meat processors through formal channels like the Iowa Meat Processors Association, it is more likely that the capacity needs to be built to better engage this group of committed business owners in the decision making process, rather than presuming lack of activity equates to lack of need or interest. Indeed, when respondents were asked which organization had the capacity to take on leadership of the working group once the current facilitator moves on, at least one commented that Iowa Meat Processors Association was already overcommitted and might not have the capacity to adequately lead this work into the future.

Policy, Regulation, and the Working Group

Multi-organizational coalitions can sometimes do selective, "light" policy advocacy that individuals cannot do because of their employment ties to public institutions with funding mandates that limit such activities. Such is the case of the Small Meat Processors Working Group, whose focus is to "foster the success of small meat processors in Iowa and positively impact directly marketed livestock and rural vitality"(www.valuchains.org/smpwg). Although several members representing state institutions and agencies clearly stated their role is specifically NOT to advocate for change in regulations, others in the group, such as the meat processors themselves, are more free to do so and are doing so on behalf of the industry. However, the challenge has been daunting. The following are brief highlights of policy related efforts some participants in the group have led:

- Group leadership tried to reverse a policy by the Iowa Department of Revenue that excludes small meat processors from the classification of manufacturers, a group that receives tax exemptions for equipment they buy for use in their business. A letter was signed and sent on behalf of the SMPWG to the Department of Revenue, which responded by refusing to include small meat processors as manufacturers. Some participants of the Working Group responded by sending a rebuttal signed by the Iowa Meat Processors Association. According to the SMPWG facilitator, the working group and the Department of Revenue "went back and forth about the taxation issue and I went [to Des Moines] and visited with them. Essentially this issue is tied up by a pending Iowa Supreme court case brought on by Sherwin-Williams (the paint store) and the impact its ruling will have. The ruling is expected yet this year."
Although not a policy related effort by definition, one member of the group previously worked to change the regulatory framework through which policies are interpreted. This skirts the difficult issue of political lobbying while creating more (and more expedient) opportunities for groups in question. "Prior to the working group in 2002, I talked to the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship about processing goats on farm. No rules have been changed but they changed the policy framework to come up with some new approaches [that allow it]. The Working Group has opportunities like this to change the regulatory environment without going through the work of changing the regulations."

Another way in which the Working Group is getting at least peripherally involved in the policy arena is through regulatory channels. The Meat Processor's Resource Guidebook has become an important resource for regulatory officials involved in implementing meat industry policies on two accounts—-from both an internal and a public relations perspective. The first benefit is that it has helped regulatory officials get more involved in the small meat processing industry. "I took the [Guidebook] to the regulatory director and the secretary and the deputy secretary and they thought it was a good opportunity for [the meat and poultry staff] to participate." The second advantage it has provided regulatory officials is the ability to be responsive to public inquiries. "We get a lot of calls from people wanting to start a meat processing plant and I direct them to the [Guidebook]."

The policy impact of the Working Group is a dicey one, given the differential ability of different members to actively lobby for change. However, the group is finding ways to influence policy in more subtle ways—-namely, how policy is regulated and enforced.

The Future of the Working Group

Participants were asked a series of questions about the future of the Working Group given that the facilitator will be leaving in December of 2009 and the Group has yet to formally address issues related to continuation of the group. The evaluator asked these questions to initiate a dialogue about leadership possibilities. One of these question queried participants on whether the group should continue past its current grant funding which ends in August, 2009. Nine of the ten respondents said yes, citing the need to maintain relationships and continue with existing and new work. The lone dissenting voice said the Working Group would no longer be needed after August since the group had succeeded in creating a functional network that this individual expected to exist into the future without further support.

Participants were also asked whether any other groups should be participating in the Group who currently are not and if so, which groups. This question generated a wide range of responses. While all were open to the idea of having new groups at the table, five named specific groups that might be willing to participate. Groups, agencies, and organizations mentioned include:

- Producer groups such as the Cattleman's Association and the Iowa Pork Producers Association;
- More meat processors than those already represented;
State agencies including the Department of Natural Resources because of their role in regulating hunting season (thus influencing seasonal demand for meat processing) and the Iowa Department of Economic Development; the Iowa Small Business Development Center; and the Professional Developers of Iowa, an association of economic development professionals.

Future Work To Do

Among those who thought it should continue, the following is work participants would like to see the Group accomplish in the future:

- **Update publications the Group has released.** "If it stopped now, I would have [publications] in a few years that would have little or no value."
- **Coordinate the organization of small meat processors in the state to provide market advantages** such as a) aggregating and selling product to retailers, and b) increasing their collective purchasing power by buying in bulk and getting discounts on processing supplies and/or equipment;
- **Continue to focus attention on labor issues by supporting a statewide program to train small meat processors** (including youth and adults);
- **Continue to address regulatory, business development, profitability, and networking issues** that affect the small meat processing sector;
- **Bring increased attention to the important role small meat processors can play in local economic development.** "I'd like to see more businesses developed in the small meat processing area because I know local foods is a growing interest and has real possibilities for economic development in small towns."
- **Focus on the business sustainability of small meat processors.** "It's important to maintain the businesses we have. We don't want to see them close because there is no one to take over or because there is no succession plan in place." "Next year at the Iowa Meat Processors Association convention, we'll have a session dealing with business succession which relates to things that evolved from the Working Group. I would like to see expanded involvement in meat processors' business sustainability issues."
- **Better engage small meat processors in the work of the Group.** "[We are] engaging the small meat processors but they're not really at the table. The industry should be at the table setting the agenda..."
- **Focus on sustaining the work of the group from a financial standpoint and a human resources one.** "Very much of the [Group's] output has been driven by outside funding because the processors themselves aren't putting resources into the Working Group. If the funding goes away, then the output probably stops. For it to continue its current formulation, it has to have funding."

Benefits Needed to Keep Current Partners Engaged

Ever mindful of the relevance of this work and keeping partners engaged, we asked participants the kinds of benefits they and their respective organizations, business, institutions, and agencies need to receive in order to stay engaged in the work of the Working Group over the next few years. Benefits they need to receive include:
• Providing actionable opportunities for participating businesses, institutions, and agencies to support the small meat processing sector. "I need to see the group identify projects that need to be handled and see action taken on those projects. One of the really frustrating things is that groups meet to meet and never identify projects and take it on. So far, this group has done an excellent job of that."

• Providing opportunities for meat processing businesses to become more profitable. "Show me ways to make more money [and] expand my business the best way possible."

• Connecting participants to people with whom they can frequently interact to benefit small meat processing businesses, the industry, or work. "The networking function [is valuable] to be able to know who [people] are and to be able to interact with them."

• Connecting participants to information by providing a "steady stream of usable products" that they can both use or pass on to others.

• Helping participating organizations and agencies provide better support to keep small meat processors in business. "We are interested in opportunities for small meat processors to be in business. We need the industry to be strong and that's enough for us to stay involved."

Meeting Format

Part of keeping partners engaged means respecting their time and schedules to ensure they can easily participate and contribute. Respondents made the following suggestions for future meetings:

• Be respectful of meat processors' busy season (November through March)
• Schedule face-to-face meetings. Face-to-face meetings are considered by all respondents to be critical for developing strong, quality relationships and as one processor put it, "I come out of [face-to-face meetings] feeling so much better on where I'm at and that people care." Others said the face-to-face meetings "solidify relationships," are more productive, generate important side conversations, and make the conference calls effective. Everyone interviewed was willing to meet face-to-face at least twice per year.

Future Facilitation of the Working Group

Strong, effective facilitation and/or leadership is necessary for any group to hang together and accomplish work. The future of any group lies in its ability to adapt to changes in leadership, and this group is no exception. Leadership changes loom on the horizon for the Small Meat Processors Working Group in December 2009 when the group's facilitator is expected to leave. Given this change, group participants were asked which organization has the capacity and commitment to coordinate this group in the future if funding were available to support the work. In response,

• 50% of respondents suggested ISU Meat Science Extension;
• 30% suggested the Iowa Meat Processors Association;
• 20% mentioned the Leopold Center;
• 20% suggested a graduate student; and
• One person each mentioned CIRAS, Farm Bureau, and One Source Training, a partnership of 15 Iowa Community Colleges committed to linking labor with the Iowa business community.
However, many of these suggestions were either prefaced or followed by a "maybe." For example, after suggesting IMPA, one participant almost talked himself out of his response, saying that IMPA actually might not be the "right organization to do it because most of [its board members] are already committed and time-wise, they're full. They need the time and ability to get it done. I'm not sure if the executives on their board could do it."

Others were decidedly more convinced in their responses. "The [Meat Science] Extension ... [staff and] program are the ones who work with the meat lockers so it makes sense that their Extension program could play a role in continuing this."

In addition, some of the organizations participants named were not necessarily those with the capacity to take on leadership of the group, but those they would like to see as the leader.

I'd really like to see the IMPA incorporate that into the work they do but they aren't in a funding position to staff that kind of operation. I think that's why it's useful to have it done at ISU but in the long run, it needs to morph over into [the meat processing sector].

Still others offered other points to consider as the group prepares for the change.

ISU is clearly organizing staffing and keeping it going through Arion. I don't see anyone else stepping up. That's one of the downsides of not having the meat processors participating [deeply enough]; they've been mostly consumers of the group but don't have a tremendous vested stake in it. I could be wrong, but I don't see [the meat processors] putting pressure on ISU to keep it going even if it came to that point and people need to request it. The Meat Science [Extension] folks have been involved. They come to the table and add input but they are also consumers [of the group] and so if you don't have a champion, you don't know where it lands. Arion has a vested interest in this since it's tied to his program of study and there are tangible benefits for him. So it works really well but how do you keep that dynamic going? I don't know what institution at ISU that you hand this off to with the same motivation and level of interaction. Arion has done a good job of cultivating relationships with institutional representatives, processing plants, and families in the business so he has a lot of personal relationships that don't necessarily transfer.

One idea for sustaining leadership of the SMPWG has been to coordinate more closely with the Iowa Meat Processors Association by meeting with them once a year. Respondents were polled for their reactions to this suggestion and had the following to say:

- "It would get the people in the working group to meet all the members of the IMPA and it would be very beneficial to know them and how operations actually work." Additionally, another respondent remarked that it would strengthen relationships between IMPA members and all participants of the working group, only some of whom have had regular contact with IMPA in the past.
- "It would give us a deeper understanding of some of the issues they have. It would provide the IMPA Board some benefits that they could see there are lots of different people from different sectors interested in seeing their industry prosper."
- "It would provide a face, more connections across organizations, and you're more likely to see them be more supportive. I think it's essential."
In summary, respondents expect face-to-face meetings with the IMPA Board to build knowledge and trust within both groups and lead to more successful work together because of the joint support that would arise from such a relationship. Another respondent, while also supportive of the idea, suggested that "meeting with the IMPA Board is great but I don't think it stops there—what is the best series of approaches" that will best serve the needs of small meat processors in the state?

The leadership question is critical to the future of this group. The Small Meat Processors Working Group is neither the first nor the last group to tackle this issue, but the ability of the group to plan now for this change will determine the way Iowa's small meat processing sector is supported in the future. What the Working Group offers that no other group alone does is that it provides coordinated, targeted support for a whole range of business development challenges facing the industry and ties them together in a way that no single service provider or government agency can. The value of this is a more holistic approach to supporting an industry that until this point has struggled with resolving those issues on a piecemeal, business-as-usual basis—an approach that so far has proven inadequate for reversing the decline of the industry in the state. There is general consensus among group members that relying on volunteer leadership is not an option. "Volunteers won't cut it. Some burnout is [already] happening with busy volunteers [and] some...have a higher commitment to these programs than others." With funding for a coordinator firmly established as a prerequisite for the group's survivability, several participants aptly noted in the interviews that the way in which the group is funded has implications for the way the group is managed. "If it becomes more connected to IMPA and it's more of a working group of the [meat processing] businesses, it would change the dynamics significantly." Another said, "[If] it becomes a Farm Bureau [led] group, it would take a very different direction in terms of collaboration." These remarks speak to the broader issue this group is facing and that is whether it needs a) a new leader who will have an interest in particular outcomes and leading the group in a specific direction based on predetermined goals, some of which may or may not be aligned with those of the group, b) a new coordinator who helps brings about some kind of a common action or movement but has no stake in either the direction the group takes or the outcome of the efforts, or c) a new facilitator who has an interest in the outcome but not how the group gets there. Ultimately, preserving the hallmark of the group, which has been collaboration for organizational/agency and industry benefit, should be a guiding element in framing future conversations the group has about leadership, coordination, and facilitation. The benefits and impacts chronicled here show a there is measurable change and value in continuing this work into the future.
APPENDIX 4. 2010 Fruit and Vegetable Working Group Survey Results

INTRODUCTION

In early 2010, facilitators of the Fruit and Vegetable Working Group (FVWG) e-mailed or mailed 104 invitations to anyone attending a FVWG meeting or FVWG-hosted event such as a field day to gather their input on questions jointly developed by the evaluator and FVWG facilitators. Those for whom we had e-mail addresses (79) received the invitation via e-mail and were sent a second reminder e-mail. Twenty five for whom we had no e-mail address received hard copies. Because of the costs associated with mailing, we did not do a second mailing for this group. We received 29 usable surveys, for a response rate of 28 percent.

Like the PNMWG survey, the FVWG survey was comprised of two similar, but different instruments. One survey was developed for farmers and farm-related business owners in the fruit and vegetable industry and the other was developed for non profit, university, and agency partners. However, both surveys had in common questions asking respondents to rate the extent to which they agreed the FVWG contributed to:

- An increase in their skills and knowledge;
- Increased trust and collaboration;
- Improved professional relationships;
- Attitude changes; and
- Organizational, business, or public policy changes.

Where they differed were additional questions directed to producers and business owners on

- The extent to which the FVWG helped them improve their operation's financial situation.

Additional questions were also directed to nonprofit, University, and agency participants (organizational partners) inquiring about the extent to which the FVWG helped them

- Build the capacity of the organizations or agencies they represented.

ABOUT RESPONDENTS

Respondents reported attending a minimum of three and maximum of nine FVWG-hosted events including meetings or field days while the average respondent reported attending five. Figure 1 shows attendance by type of meeting: formal working group meetings or field days. Results show strong participation in one or two field days while the majority of respondents have attended two, if not three, of the formal FVWG meetings.
Figure 1. FVWG meeting and events attendance

Figure 2 shows the occupational affiliations of respondents. Noting that respondents can have multiple affiliations, nearly 7 in 10 indicated s/he was a farmer or farm-related business owner.
when asked to indicate all occupational affiliations. However, when asked to limit their selection to only one, 55% (16) indicated they were farmers or farm-based entrepreneurs. University representatives comprised the next largest group, which when expanded to include Extension, comprises 20% of respondents claiming it as their primary affiliation. Buyers/retailers, government agencies and non profits were also represented, although to a lesser extent. The "other" category included an auction manager, food service distributor, and employees in the non farm public and private sectors.

We also collected addition information about markets in which producer respondents are participating and their interest in strengthening existing markets or entering new ones. Figure 3 shows the majority are involved in direct marketing with two in three selling to grocery stores and institutions. Over half are selling to restaurants as well. Wholesale markets are less popular; however one in four producers want to either strengthen or enter whole sale markets. Nearly the same proportion (one in five) wants to sell to institutions. There is no interest in selling direct to consumers among producers who are not already doing so, suggesting that direct markets are the easiest markets to enter.

![Figure 3. Market Involvement of Producer Respondents](chart)

As the local and regional foods movement gains momentum, there is interest from several camps nationwide (mostly in civic and private sectors) to ramp up local production by selling beyond local markets. These markets, while deemed important, are considered too small to generate the demand needed to make local and regional food production more ubiquitous and ostensibly more profitable. We were therefore interested in gauging producer's impressions about the extent to which higher volume markets such as retail (defined as grocery stores, restaurants, and institutions) and wholesale markets (defined as grocery warehouses, distributors, and produce
auctions) were demanding small- and mid-sized fruit and vegetable producers to aggregate their product before delivery and whether this served as a formidable barrier to producers. Producer respondents largely disagreed (averaging 3.1 on a 7 point scale where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree) that retail and wholesale markets are demanding producers to aggregate their product. Only one respondent named a buyer that was making these demands, and that was HyVee, a member-owned grocery store chain serving the Midwest.

So if aggregation isn't the issue, what are the barriers preventing producers from entering these larger-volume markets? According to Figure 4, the greatest constraint is collaboration among farmers (but not necessarily collaboration to aggregate). The second greatest constraint among those listed were related to finances such as limited cash flow, net worth, or availability of credit. While food safety, product shelf life, distribution, aggregation, and scale are all undeniable challenges facing producers, they are not necessarily the greatest barriers impacting producers' ability to access large-volume markets. According to respondents, collaboration among producers is.

![Figure 4. Challenges facing producers when trying to access retail and wholesale market](image)

**Skills and Knowledge Benefits**

Participants repeatedly report knowledge benefits from participating in the working groups, which in turn, helps their skill sets. We therefore set out to measure knowledge benefits to producers and organizational partners of the FVWG. Results in Figure 5 show that organizational partners tend to agree more than producers that they have received knowledge benefits of
participating in the working group especially as it relates to production and marketing. And while producers also report direct knowledge/skill building benefits, they may be benefiting more from its impact on the organizational partners who say participation prepares them to provide better support to the fruit and vegetable industry (and producers).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This set of questions relates to skills and knowledge benefits you may have received as a result of participating in FVWG. Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements on a scale of 1-7 where 1= Strongly Disagree and 7= Strongly Agree.</th>
<th>Producer/ Business Mean (n=16)</th>
<th>Organizational Partner Mean (n=13)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation in the Working Group has given me a greater understanding of the fruit and vegetable industry in Iowa.</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in the Working Group has increased my awareness or understanding of market demand for fruits and vegetables in Iowa.</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the Working Group, I learn things useful for my operation/company/work that I cannot learn anywhere else.</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have gained valuable production skills as a result of participating in the Working Group.</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have gained valuable marketing skills as a result of participating in the Working Group.</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I make better management decisions as a result of participating in the Working Group.</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I communicate better with others about the fruit and vegetable industry as a result of participating in the Working Group.</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more confident about the decisions I make for my operation/company as a result of the Working Group.</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I better understand how my organization, agency, or business can provide better support to the fruit and vegetable industry as a result of participating in the Working Group.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand fruit and vegetable markets better as a result of participation in the Working Group</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand fruit and vegetable production better as a result of participation in the Working Group</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more qualified to serve the fruit and vegetable industry as a result of participating in the Working Group.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N/A is Not Asked.

Figure 5. Skills and Knowledge Benefits

Networking Benefits

FVWG participation endows participants with access to social resources. Seventy percent of respondents say they made new professional contacts as a result of participation in the working group. And for the most part, producers and organizational partners generally agreed on the extent to which they received specific networking benefits from FVWG participation (Figure 6). However, there are a few noteworthy differences, particularly as they relate to collaboration. Organizational partners were more likely to agree that they were collaborating with farmers or farm-based businesses as a result of participation (mean 4.9 on 7 point scale where 7=strongly
agree) when compared to producers (3.4). Organizational partners also are more likely to agree than are producers that they are collaborating with other organizations or agencies to work on relevant fruit and vegetable issues. These results suggest that the working group is helping organizations connect with each other and farmers, but there is more work to be done in terms of fostering collaboration among producers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This set of questions relates to networking benefits you may have received as a result of participating in the FVWG. Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements on a scale of 1-7 where 1= Strongly Disagree and 7= Strongly Agree.</th>
<th>Producer/ Business Mean (n=16)</th>
<th>Organizational Partner Mean (n=13)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Working Group is an important support network that connects me to people and organizations that support the fruit and vegetable industry.</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a result of participating in the Working Group, I developed new professional relationships which benefit my operation/business/organization.</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a result of participating in the Working Group, existing professional relationships are stronger, which benefits my operation/business/organization.</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a result of the Working Group, I have or am currently collaborating with farmers or farm-based businesses.</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a result of the Working Group, I have or am currently collaborating with organizations, agencies, or institutions to address projects/issues related to fruit and vegetable production or marketing in Iowa.</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6. Networking Benefits

Trust

Trust is essential for collaboration. Although respondents may say they are willing to collaborate, we wanted to measure the extent to which trust is shared in the group before speculating on the potential for meaningful group collaboration in the future. Following the previous patterns of agreement from producers, organizational partners tend to rate their level of agreement with listed statements about trust slightly higher than producers, with one exception. Both producers and partners equally agree (5.6 on a 7 point scale) that the working group is an open and democratic organization whose activities and direction are determined by participants. Also heartening is producer agreement (5.8) with the statement that they trust other participants will not use information they share to intentionally harm their operation or business.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This set of questions relates to trust within the FVWG. Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements on a scale of 1-7 where 1= Strongly Disagree and 7= Strongly Agree.</th>
<th>Producer/ Business Mean (n=16)</th>
<th>Partner Mean (n=13)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I share general information about my operation/business/organization at Working Group meetings.</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel comfortable voicing my thoughts and opinions at Working Group meetings.</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I share information about my customers/buyers at Working Group meetings.  & 4.9 & N/A \\
I am more likely to call someone I've met through the Working Group than if I have never met them before.  & 4.9 & 5.5 \\
I trust that other FVWG participants will not use information I share with the group to intentionally harm my operation/business.  & 5.8 & N/A \\
The FVWG is a democratic organization. That is, anyone who wants to participate can. Furthermore, participants are able to influence the group's direction and activities.  & 5.6 & 5.6 \\

**Figure 7. Trust**

### Attitudes

Besides trust, attitudes can also influence willingness to collaborate. How open are respondents to the possibility of collaboration? Based on the survey results, they are very open to the idea. Producers and organizational partners strongly agree that collaboration among farmers and other value chain partners such as processors, distributors, and retailers is a way to strengthen fruit and vegetable businesses. Both groups are also eager to explore ways they can collaborate with others. However, producers are more interested in collaborating with non profit organizations and agencies (6.3) than private sector farmers (5.8) or value chain partners (5.8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>This set of questions relates to attitudes. Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements on a scale of 1-7 where 1= Strongly Disagree and 7= Strongly Agree.</strong></th>
<th><strong>Producer/Business Mean (n=16)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Partner Mean (n=13)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In order for my operation/business to succeed, the fruit and vegetable industry as a whole must succeed.</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration among farmers is a viable way to create stronger fruit and vegetable operations and businesses.</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration between farmers and others along the value chain such as processors, distributors, and retailers is a viable way to create stronger fruit and vegetable operations and businesses.</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in exploring ways my operation/business/organization might collaborate with fruit and vegetable farmers to support the fruit and vegetable industry.</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in exploring ways my operation/business might collaborate with others along the value chain such as processors, distributors, and retailers.</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in exploring ways my operation/business might collaborate with organizations/agencies/institutions.</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 8. Attitudes**

### Financial and Operational Benefits

We learned from Year 1 interviews with other working group participants that farmers and business owners sometimes receive financial and operational benefits from working group participation that public sector partners do not. Without asking for specific financial records
which business owners and producers are often reluctant to provide, we tried to measure the extent to which farmers and business owners agreed that the FVWG contributed to increased production capacity, sales, profitability, and access to new markets. Figure 9 shows the results from those questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This set of questions relates to financial and operational benefits your operation/company may have received as a result of participating in the FVWG. Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements on a scale of 1-7 where 1= Strongly Disagree and 7= Strongly Agree.</th>
<th>Producer/ Business Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My operation/business has increased production as a result of participating in the Working Group.</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My operation/business has sold more product as a result of participating in the Working Group.</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have gained access to new markets as a result of participating in the Working Group.</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My operation/business enjoyed increased profits as a result of participating in the Working Group.</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My operation/business is more financially stable as a result of participating in the Working Group.</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My operation/business operates more efficiently as a result of Working Group participation.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 9. Financial and Operational Benefits**

A neutral response is the equivalent of 3.5 on a 7-point scale. Hence, farmers and business owners disagree that participation in the FVWG has improved their operation's financial situation. However, when these data were presented to the group at a March 2010 FVWG meeting, participants unanimously agreed that they were not participating in the working group to benefit financially but to "grow the field" and improve the conditions for themselves and others in the fruit and vegetable industry and to access a multitude of opportunities--not simply financial ones. Thus, they viewed these indicators as unimportant to track in the future as it had no consequence on their decision to participate in joint activities.

**Organizational Capacity Building**

Unlike private sector participants, organizational partners do not participate in the working group to improve profitability. However, there is often an interest in leveraging financial and human resources for their work, and a host of other organizational benefits that we are categorizing as organizational capacity. Figure 10 shows the extent to which organizational partners agree with a list of statements about the extent to which the FVWG has contributed to building the capacity of their organization to support the fruit and vegetable industry, which in turn becomes an asset for fruit and vegetable producers and value chain partners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>On a scale of 1 to 7 where 1=strongly DISAGREE and 7=strongly AGREE, rate the extent to which you agree your participation in the FVWG in the past year has helped build the capacity of your organization.</th>
<th>Partner Mean (n=13)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Better understand fruit and vegetable production systems so we can provide better support to the fruit and vegetable industry. 5.8
Better understand fruit and vegetable growers. 5.9
Serve a broader array of clients. 5.3
Access a broader spectrum of people with knowledge valuable to my organization's work. 5.8
Develop stronger relationships with other organizations, agencies, businesses, and institutions to provide better, more coordinated support to the fruit and vegetable industry. 5.8
Leverage new financial resources to do work in the fruit and vegetable industry. 5.8
Leverage new human resources to do work in the fruit and vegetable industry. 4.6
Leverage resources outside my community/region. 5.3
Change attitudes or assumptions my organization, agency, business, or institution has about other organizations, agencies, businesses or institutions doing work in the fruit and vegetable industry. 4.9
 Occupy a position of new leadership responsibility and influence in the fruit and vegetable industry. 4.9
Work more efficiently by providing access to field-tested information, resources, strategies, and tools. 5.6
Work more efficiently by helping us find information more quickly. 5.7
Be more effective by helping us achieve our goals/mission. 5.5
Gain credibility for the work we do in the fruit and vegetable industry. 5.4
Effectively engage new partners working in the fruit and vegetable industry. 5.8

Figure 10. Organizational Capacity Building

Figure 10 shows there is some level of agreement that the FVWG is helping organizational partners leverage new financial resources (4.6) and new human resources (5.1). However, the greatest impacts appear to be related to effectively engaging new partners to support the fruit and vegetable industry (5.8), improve relationships within organizations (5.8) and help participants develop a greater understanding of the industry (5.9) and make use of existing knowledge resources (5.8) to enable organizational partners to provide better, more coordinated support to the industry (5.8). In sum, these results suggest that the FVWG is serving farmers in large part by building the capacity of organizations who support and serve farmers too.

Customs, Practices, and Policy Impacts

Another feature of impact evaluation is measuring the extent to which participation in the FVWG changes the way participants do their work. These are medium-term behavioral changes that are important to benchmark so we can better understand the way in which systemic change might be occurring.

A surprising sixty-one percent of respondents confirmed they have changed practices or programs related to their operation or work as a result of working group participation. Of those, 43 percent said they changed their production practices by using better pest control, planting
different crops, or extending their season (Figure 11). One in three said they were partnering more (or better) with others and are making better use of available human resources. Two in five (21%) have adjusted their pricing structures, are crunching business numbers, or are exploring new marketing strategies. None have change policies per se (business, organizational, or public) but are implementing changes to the way they do things that ultimately may set a new pattern of operating in the future.

**Conclusions**

When asked an open-ended question about the value of the working group, several respondents acknowledged the role of the FVWG in building partnerships between diverse interests along the value chain. "There are a lot of 'farmer only' groups to network with other farmers and share ideas but we also need to network with groups that are interested buyers as well." Another echoed this sentiment, saying that the true value of the group is the variety of partners it brings to the table: educators, retailers, and farmers.

Trust and willingness of respondents to collaborate is a tremendous asset of the group. Eighty-two percent of respondents are interested in pursuing some kind of collaborative production, marketing, or distribution/aggregation project in the future, and the trust is there to make it a reality. This is quite an accomplishment, given the relatively young age of the group (two years) and the various demands on the time of participants, especially fruit and vegetable producers. Any collaborative project obviously would have to be timed according to the seasons, but the potential is there for a fruitful collaboration given the commitment of this group to the field.
APPENDIX 5: EVALUATION OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

The Value Chain Partnerships is a unique collaboration between the non-profit Practical Farmers of Iowa, the Leopold Center and ISU Extension. Each organization brings different resources to the table, but what factors make the partnership possible? How does this public/non-profit partnership function? What are the challenges? To answer these questions, we conducted key informant interviews in the Fall of 2009 with six administrators or key staff from all three organizations. Below are highlights of those conversations:

Benefits of VCP for Organizational Partners

The partnership was possible because at a minimum, it helped each partner meet its mission and goals by:

- Identifying issues important in a particular industry
- Building relationships between the three organizational partners
- Prompting organizational partners to "connect with partners that we wouldn't have been partnering with even though we should have"
- Giving organizational partners a common purpose
- Focusing organizational partners on a topic that would not have surfaced through normal, status quo programming.
- Allowing "us to become much more visible and integrate ourselves with [the work of] new partners."
- Bringing local stakeholders and technical assistance providers together on issue.
- Helping us do high impact programming that has long term sustainability
- Providing us with financial resources to do work
- Opening doors to new sources of funding
- Helping us leverage intellectual capital--human and knowledge resources that are brought to the table by the VCP project.
- Better connecting researchers at the university with real world problems and challenges of business owners and farmers.
- Creating more synergy across different but related efforts/projects
- Building channels for people and organizations who haven't had a chance to participate in these kinds of conversations before.
- Providing organizational partner staff a model to apply to other issues and challenging the staff to think of the broader context instead of the small piece they are working on.
- Providing opportunities for organizational partners to become leaders in the field and a broker of relationships
- Helping organizational partners understand and frame issues
- Helping organizational partner staff learn how they can work more effectively and serve as a catalyst for change, but not do all the work.
- Helping organizational partners make a real difference in the lives of clients/people they serve.
• Improve the credibility of the work of organizational partners so they are better able to reach and serve new clients.
• Allowing partner organization to provide sustained attention on a certain topic that makes a greater difference.
• Helping organizational partners build networks that are doing work and getting things done.

Without VCP according to one informant, "none of [the accomplishments and benefits] would have been possible. We are one organization with limited reach and resources with regard to our ability to do things. For an entity that is working by itself, there is a lot less potential to get things accomplished than you have with strategically aligned partners. VCP provides the energy and resources to do the work. In our view, it has provided us with resources to do the work and we have provided work that is good to claim."

**Institutionalizing the VCP Project**

The benefits of VCP were easily recognized by key informants. However, this does not ensure that the model will be wholeheartedly adopted and incorporated into the way they do their work. Whether or not specific work or projects are institutionalized within an organization can often be used as an indicator of organizational commitment and ownership to the work, as well as their dedication to ensuring that grant-funded work in particular is sustained over time. There are a variety of ways in which work can be institutionalized within an organization. We measured the extent to which the three organizational partners have institutionalized the VCP project according to:

1) Short-term or ongoing investments in the project;
2) The extent to which each organization has either allowed or integrated associated job responsibilities into employee work plans;
3) Whether each organizational partner has changed or drafted organizational policies or practices that support VCP work; and
4) The extent to which each organization has applied the CoP model to other work they do.

**Project Investments**

The three organizational partners leveraged additional resources to match Wallace funding for VCP over three years to directly support the VCP Core Team administrative costs and participation in the individual working groups (this list does not include resources each working group has leveraged). VCP administrative resources leveraged by the organizational partners include:

• $135,000 cash match from the Leopold Center
• 30% of the VCP project manager's time
• 15% of a program assistant's time
• Time for VCP student hourly assistance
• Time of Extension field staff involved in specific CoPs (former County Extension Education Directors, current Regional Extension Education Directors, and field staff)
• PFI expenses for support staff, overhead costs, and additional time of the PNMWG facilitator not covered by Wallace money

Employee Work Plans

Some changes to employee work plans for each of the three partner organizations are noteworthy. Although informal, for one partner organization, "networking work has become the core of how we do our work." When Extension reorganized, some counties heavily involved in the VCP and their own regionally based CoP did write job descriptions funded by counties to support continued participation in both local and statewide CoPs. For PFI staff, one job description has changed for the facilitator of the PNMWG. The PNMWG facilitator has "written his objective to correspond to what he's doing through PNMWG so he is providing opportunities for farmers to learn from each other." Forty percent of his time is spent on PNMWG work, and 10 percent is spent on VCP work. This means that half of his time is spent on the VCP work as a whole.

Organizational Practices and Policies

The direct involvement of Extension staff in the working groups and VCP spinoffs like the Grass Based Livestock Working Group, which is led by an Extension Small Farms Specialist, has increased the legitimacy of the CoP work within Extension. Although no formal policy language within Extension has changed, CoP work and involvement among Extension staff is viewed more favorably because of Extension's internal involvement as a partnering leader in the work. "Extension may have been more removed from it had it been external and the legitimacy of the [CoP] work would have been questioned."

For the Leopold Center, the VCP project has affected how it allocates resources and has increased its focus to build the capacity of non profits to work together. In the 2009 cycle of requests for proposals, the Leopold Center required applicants to participate in a CoP or suggest creating a new working group--that of food access and health. This group has been funded but not yet organized.

For PFI, "within our strategic plan, there is a focus on alternative pork systems. If the money is not there, the work won't happen but I'm encouraged that we're getting financial resources from the PNMWG participating businesses and the Pork Industry Center and ISU ($18,000 post VCP, $8000 of which is coming from the Leopold Center)."

Adoption of the CoP Model

The VCP project has transformed programming at the Leopold Center. The Center is expanding its use of the CoP model beyond the VCP project to affect the way they work is done in the
related Marketing and Food Systems Initiative and more recently, the Ecology Initiative. In addition the Leopold Center is funding one non VCP working groups in partnership with ISU Extension: The Grass Based Livestock Working Group. In addition, the Leopold Center has established the Agroforestry Working Group and the On-Farm Energy Working Group. The Leopold Center has also used the model in regional work it is facilitating/leading on developing more integrated food systems through the Wallace-funded Good Food Network of the Upper Midwest. This evolution or transition to the CoP model is not easy, however. One key informant warned that CoPs cannot be slapped together or built too quickly. There are logistical issues to contend with, trust and social space needs to be created, and the passion and expertise of participants must be recognized and harnessed. People must be tolerant of ambiguity and willing to participate in a "shared leadership plus" model where each organization contributes leadership but where no organization is built up at the expense of other organizations.

For Extension, "the VCP has created partnerships that maybe wouldn't have been part of the issues of an Extension-based program. We had a tendency to define our chains and partnerships more narrowly" [before VCP involvement]... I think we are taking the same philosophical concepts [of the VCP model] and using it to restructure and refocus our organization... Part of that process is to view things more holistically and less siloed, develop partnerships, and make those partnerships mutually symbiotic for all involved." However, there was concern among some interviewed that the recent reorganization of ISU Extension to regionally centralized units versus county offices will pose a challenge to locally based programming. One key informant was concerned that ISU Extension is pulling away from localized relationships and moving into a statewide programming mode, where regional specialists won't have "the freedom or creativity to move in new directions." Despite this concern, a formal workshop has been scheduled in April, 2010 to conduct training for Extension field staff to understand and implement CoP principles in their programming. This workshop follows a pilot workshop conducted with Extension staff in the Spring of 2009.

For PFI, "it's been used to inform and discuss options for doing the work but it hasn't had the transformative impact in how we actually do our work."

When asked about ideas for improving the way in which the three partner organizations could better institutionalize their involvement in VCP, Extension informants mentioned they are administratively, logistically, and financially supporting the April, 2010 training of Extension personnel. The Leopold Center is providing funding for staff to conduct the training. In addition, the Leopold Center has established the Agroforestry Working Group the On-Farm Energy Group, and the Grass Based Livestock Working Group. For PFI, "other than what we're doing with the PNMWG, I don't know whether or not within our organization, we have the people and resources to undertake that work. I can see benefits of the working group model for certain topic areas like beginning farmers but I don't see us forming a community of practice around that topic because it's a lot of work and requires skills and effort we don't have in place. I think that the CoP model is an excellent and useful framework for focusing resources on a problem area and actually making a difference, but it takes a certain organizational capacity to use it and use it well."
When we queried key informants about reasons that might prevent their partner organization from better institutionalizing the project, they cited:

- The sheer amount of time it takes to develop relationships between the "grass tops" (administrators from partner organizations) and the "grass roots" (people doing the work on the ground) although such investments were acknowledged as paying significant dividends for partner organizations.
- Getting organizational administrators to better support the grassroots work.
- Lack of financial resources to support the time needed to develop relationships and the associated value received from participation relative to the costs. "If the financial [incentives] don't compel you to be involved, then there has to be value that's provided to [our organization] that makes it worth us to be there. It's not adding value to what we're doing enough to justify the costs." Another mused, "At [our organization], we have to face the question: If we invest in this strategy, what is the lost opportunity? If we embrace this fully, are there other things we're not doing?"
- Preserving an organizational culture of creativity in grim economic times when budgets are pared to cover only the so-called "essentials."
- "If the mission of VCP gets too far removed from [our] mission [especially] in times of tight budgets."
- The need for making collaborative CoP work is a priority of organizational leadership; and
- The need for deconstructing subject matter "siloes" that allow staff to work less collaboratively and focused on only one discipline.

Organizational Commitment to Sustaining the Work of the VCP

In order for the organizational partners to continue supporting VCP, informants do not always agree on what they need to see. Prominent themes, however, include:

- **More equitable distribution of organizational contributions and leadership responsibility.** "We need to see emerging leadership within the partners. We are not interested in supporting the status quo of a partnership that can't stand on its own feet down the road." "When the Wallace money ends, what will the other partners contribute and how much have they institutionalized it?"
- **The provision of tools they can use.** "It needs to provide us with both tools and process, which is what [it has already done]."
- **Direct benefits to the working groups.** "If VCP isn't able to provide the financial support to continue the work, then it has to have enough to offer beyond the money for us to be a part of it. What is that 'enough to offer'? We've struggled with that for several years. We've tried to move to where the VCP is more about how can we as working groups be successful at what we're doing. But it's less about that now and more about how we can train others to use the CoP model.
- **Evidence that the model is serving farmers'.** profitability, diversity, and efficiency on their farms.
• **Access to VCP staff and core team members** to use what they have learned so partnering organizations can invest that knowledge within their own organizations to build their capacity.

When we asked key informants about the role their organization would play in finding resources to continue the work of VCP, responses varied. The Leopold Center has already allocated $80,000 to cover administrative costs in the year after the Wallace funding ends and is positioning itself to receive some USDA funding through the state of Iowa. However, "we don't want to be the sugar daddy that gets the funds and doles it out to [partners]." Extension informants mentioned they would go after competitive grant funding from the National Institutes of Food and Agriculture and would continue providing Extension staff time to participate and program support. PFI will continue to write grant proposals to fund the PNMWG and possibly take a leadership role in the non-VCP) On-Farm Energy Working Group.

Assembling resources to sustain the VCP work is only one part of the process. Determining which organizational partners have the capacity, resources, and desire to participate is another. When we solicited suggestions for strengthening or improving the partnership between the three organizations, we noted some tension between the organizations. We were advised by one informant "to ask that question in a group setting and let's have an honest discussion about it. A part of that conversation needs to be: Are we as partner organizations getting enough back in return for what we're investing to continue? If it doesn't seem that way, what can we do to change it? We need to address that topic straight on in a civil, respectful conversation." Another informant stressed the importance of "maintaining a science-based balance. I understand that we all interpret science differently but we need to ground what we say at ISU in science and [be careful] that we don't become advocates. We have to be able to disagree on issues and [find out what] the science supports. Are we doing advocacy or education? Sometimes that tension makes sure we are mindful and respectful [of each other]." Part of this tension was explained by another informant who thought the administrative leaders from each organization should have been more engaged from the start. "It would have helped to have had the organizational leaders better understand what this was about." Another informant summarized the issue by stating: "I'm not sure that all three partners have fully agreed up on the role of the partnership in the future. It may be a lack of appreciation for the three different missions. There is general agreement that VCP is good but I'm not convinced that each of the partners could articulate what the role each has and how we are working together. I would agree there needs to be exploration of new partners in the future [especially] because one of the downsides of the VCP is that it could [construed as] too much of a club or clique." Like the working groups themselves which adapt and change over time, the composition and focus of the VCP Core Team or Working Group is also likely to change as a new phase of investment and work begins.
APPENDIX 6: DOCUMENTING IMPLICIT KNOWLEDGE OF WORKING GROUP FACILITATORS

In January, 2010, six facilitators of the four VCP working groups (Small Meat Processors, Niche Pork, Regional Food Systems, and Fruit and Vegetable) and a Leopold supported working group (Grass Based Livestock) responded to questions about lessons they learned in the process of initiating and managing each working group. Sue Honkamp, VCP branding consultant, distributed a list of questions electronically and organized a discussion session to summarize written comments she received. The purpose of this exercise was to document critical tacit or implicit knowledge that is often overlooked, let alone articulated, about CoPs and how they actually work.

The following is a summary and discussion of lessons learned from the working group facilitators:

- The leadership capacity of CoP facilitators is greatly improved by the presence of the VCP Core Team. The Core Team functions as a working group of working group leaders who share tacit knowledge as they strive to carry out the shared goal of bringing diverse people and organizations together who themselves work together toward a common goal. VCP practices what it preaches.

- The Core Team Working Group functions for VCP much like each working group functions within VCP in that the work each is doing is additive and creates a space for individuals and represented organizations to build on, rather than duplicate or compete with, the work of others. The work of each facilitator is more effective and efficient in the process. This is made possible by overlapping connections between the working groups as participants and facilitators both attend and participate in meetings and activities of more than one VCP working group allowing them to avoid duplicating the work of another working group. In this way, resources for one CoP become resources for other CoPs, thereby compounding the impact even the smallest investments can have.

- Planning working group meetings and serving as a convener and catalyst is extremely labor and time intensive and involves critical skills in understanding and managing people and relationships. Few funders, aside from Wallace, are willing to fund this kind of work that is essential for meaningful systems change.

- Although not intentionally opaque, most CoP management is orchestrated behind the scenes. These behind-the-scenes conversations are used to unobtrusively maximize everyone's time at the meetings by sorting out issues ahead of time to facilitate quicker and more effective collective decision making at meetings.

- Working group facilitators learn methods and techniques for accomplishing the day-to-day tasks of managing working groups for each other, thereby reducing the time they spend on these tasks and making them more effective. For example, the SMPWG facilitator met with the PNMWG facilitator about a project in to support small meat processors through better assistance provision. The PNMWG facilitator advised the SMPWG facilitator to get the assistance providers involved on the front end so they buy into the results. This was "great advice" according to the SMPWG facilitator.
• **The Core Team Working Group is not only a support network but a problem solving body**, combining the collective wisdom of all of the working group facilitators to address issues arising in one particular working group. For instance, in the absence of Wallace funding, PNMWG is taking cues from SMPWG regarding transitioning to a project or program of an existing entity rather than creating a relatively more costly new organization or non profit.

• **New working groups are able to launch more quickly** by picking and choosing specific strategies implemented by working group facilitators who came before them. The GBLWG is learning about designing needs assessment process, managing and facilitating the working group, delegating responsibility (because of challenges PNMWG is experiencing in this arena), uniting disparate interests from producers with different production philosophies, and managing the grant-making process. Facilitators of the FVWG have learned from the PNMWG facilitator how to initially gather information and identify priorities among participants, specifically how to listen to members needs and develop programming to meet those needs. The FVWG also learned from PNMWG and RFSWG about when to schedule meetings, how to recruit members, and how to increase ownership by establishing a steering team/advisory committee.

• **Market forces are the primary reasons why CoPs have taken root in Iowa** (e.g., to meet demand for fresh produce, address unique challenges facing niche pork create conditions for better technical assistance, etc.). Networking and research are important but secondary reasons.

• **Three main factors make it possible to initiate a CoP:** 1) a source of funding, 2) people passionate about the issues, and 3) shared experiences that lend coherence to common goals. Additional factors that contribute to a successful CoP initiation are a local grassroots focus, formation of a dedicated steering team, and early commitment to deep(er) collaboration.

• **An early source of funding for covering the administrative costs of initiating and managing a CoP is critical for their startup.** A single, large source of funding is considered preferable to small, multiple sources given the potential for many small pots of money to steer the mission off course. As one CoP facilitator put it: "Use initial money to do good work. Build credibility. Ask for money again."

• **One crucial element necessary for effectively managing CoPs is the adoption of a creative servant leadership model** where participants are asked to organize and lead components of quarterly meetings. This creates many different impacts: It increases ownership of participants in the group, builds the leadership capacity of individuals and represented organizations, alleviates some of the administrative burdens on the facilitator, more evenly distributes the work, allows people an opportunity to self actualize by contributing their skills and talents to the good of the group, better shares "institutional" knowledge about facilitation, and better prepares the CoP for leadership transitions in the event a key facilitator has to move on (building leadership capacity of the CoP). Product-based CoPs may be hard-pressed to take this approach, however, because of their focus on market conditions and the difficulty in asking self-funded individuals to donate their time to work that does not translate into direct financial gain.

• **The process of developing a CoP brand at the right time helps CoPs clarify goals, position statements, and points of differentiation,** thereby providing a more focused strategic direction for the group.
• Individual working group evaluations inform and are informed by the evaluations of other working groups, thereby reducing the overall transaction costs of doing evaluation. Furthermore, this enables the development of common evaluation measures that can be aggregated across groups to communicate possibly greater impact than isolated single group impacts.

• Both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods are important for providing a balanced evaluation. Numbers are easy to grasp and can quickly tell a story, however, words are often needed to explain the story when numbers distort interpretations about impact. For example, evaluation of participating businesses in PNMWG show that profits have fallen precipitously not because of the work of PNMWG but because market forces such as skyrocketing feed prices are pricing niche pork farmers out of business. Evaluation must be flexible and responsive enough to modify measures of success to better reflect the context and real world influences beyond the control of the project. Instead of measuring profits, PNMWG is now starting to measure how many enterprises are simply staying in business and how many are contributing money to PNMWG to keep it going. Other, perhaps more appropriate ways to track CoP success include measuring the increase in cooperation across groups and the increase in the number of counties investing in local food.