Evaluation of Meeting Follow up Surveys

Community Capacity Building to Strengthen the Links within the Iowa Local Foods Value Chain

(Jan. 2012-Dec, 2013)

A project funded by the Sustainable Agriculture and Research Education Professional Development Program

*Arlene Enderton and Corry Bregendahl*

Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture

September, 2013

Evaluation Results

# Report Highlights

* Iowa State University Extension and Outreach (ISUEO) held four professional development events for Extension staff and partners to improve collaboration in local and regional food systems work. Two conferences were held-one in September, 2012 and the other in March, 2013. Two regional networking meetings were held--one in Independence, Iowa on April 2, 2013 and one in Iowa City on April 3, 2013.
* The primary purpose of conducting the survey was to determine the effectiveness of the four meetings in meeting the goal of connecting ISUEO personnel more closely to local food systems work going on around the state and increasing cooperation between Extension and other organizations and individuals.
* Evaluation results are based on responses to an electronic survey sent to 72 participants. A total of 35 completed surveys were received, yielding a 49% response rate.
* 71% of respondents were associated with Extension.
* 86% of survey respondents (30) followed up with Extension or RFSWG after participating in a conference/meeting. This indicates that the meetings were effective in facilitating new connections between Extension employees and RFSWG groups.
  + 92% of Extension affiliates (23 respondents) indicated they had followed up with RFSWG in at least one way (n=25), such as communicating with RFSWG, delivering programming or resources, or referring other to RFSWG.
  + 70% of non-Extension affiliates (7 respondents) indicated they followed up with Extension in at least one way (n=10), such as communication with Extension, utilizing Extension resources or programming, or referring others to Extension.
* 91.4% of survey respondents (32) indicated that as a result of the conference(s) and/or regional meetings they felt more connected with local food systems activities and programs in their region.
* 88.6% of survey respondents (31) indicated they felt more confident conducting or participating in local food systems activities and programs in their region as a result of the conference(s) and/or meetings they attended.
* 29% of respondents (10) indicated had taken on a new leadership role in local or regional food systems work in the last year.
* The average amount of time spent in local food systems development among all survey participants increased slightly from 2012 to 2013, from 25% to 27%.
* On average, Extension employees currently spend less time on local and regional food systems work (24%) than do those with other employment (35%).
* 94% of all respondents (33) indicated they have made some form of progress in collaborative local food systems work.
* 40% of survey participants (14) applied for grant funding for their local or regional food systems work since attending his/her first conference or meeting.
* 5 of those grant applications were funded for a total of $149,709.

## Introduction

A SARE PDP grant was awarded to increase opportunities for Iowa State University Extension & Outreach (ISUEO) employees to participate in local and regional food system development by increasing their capacity and improving their relationships with others already involved in the work. The funds from the grant were used, along with other funding sources, to sponsor two local foods conferences and two regional networking meetings.

To evaluate the effectiveness of these meetings, an electronic survey was sent to 72 people who attended at least one of the four conferences/meetings in 2012 and 2013. The survey was sent out on August 20, 2013 and closed on September 16, 2013, allowing approximately a month to respond.

The survey had a high response rate with 49% of those contacted responding (35 responses).

## Characteristics of Survey Participants

**Meeting attendance**

All respondents attended at least one of the four meetings sponsored by the SARE PDP. The Putting the Pieces Together conference, held in Ames in September 2012, was the most commonly attended meeting with nearly three-quarters of survey respondents attending that meeting (26). In addition,

* 43% (15) attended the SARE-supported Roadmap to Resilience Conference, held in Ames in March 2013.
* 28.6% attended one of the two regional meetings held in Independence on April 2, 2013, and Iowa City on April 3, 2013. No one attended both regional meetings.
* (Percentages do not add to 100% because some meeting participants attended more than one meeting.)

60% of survey respondents (21) attended one of the four SARE PDP sponsored events. However, some survey participants attended more than one event sponsored by the SARE PDP:

* 34.3% (12) attended two of the four events.
* 5.7% (2) attended three events.
* No one attended all four events.

**Occupation**

Iowa State University Extension & Outreach (ISUEO) employees or ISU employees with an Extension appointment made up the bulk of survey respondents, with 25 respondents (71.4%). The remaining 28.6% of respondents came from a variety of occupational backgrounds, including RFSWG coordinators/members, farmers, university of community college employees, government agency employees, elected officials, and economic development professionals.

## Results

### Meeting Outcomes

**Facilitation of Connections between ISUEO and Regional Food System Working Groups**

One goal of these conferences and meetings was to increase connections between Extension and Regional Food System Working Groups (RFSWG). ISU Extension employees (n=25) were asked to indicate in which ways they have followed up with RFSWG since the conference(s) and/or regional meeting they attended. 92% (23 respondents) indicated they had followed up with RFSWG in at least one of the ways listed below (depicted in Figure 1).

* 80% (20 respondents) of ISUEO employees indicated they had communicated with someone from RFSWG.
* 56% (14) indicated they had provided Extension programming or resources to RFSWG.
* 48% (12) referred others to their local RFSWG group.
* 12% (3) followed up with RFSWG in some other way, including collaborating with RFSWG members for a federal grant submission and Good Agricultural Practice training, talking with RFSWG members about Extension programs in their area, and/or working with RFSWG to find funding to hire an area local food coordinator.

Similarly, respondents who do not work for Extension were asked to indicate the ways in which they have followed up with Extension since the conference(s) and/or meeting they attended. 70% (7 respondents) indicated they followed up with Extension in at least one of the ways below; data are also presented in Figure 2.

* 40% (4 respondents) of non-Extension employees communicated with Extension about local or regional food systems development.
* 30% (3 respondents) made use of or adapted Extension programming or resources on local food systems development.
* 30% (3 respondents) referred others to Extension programming or resources on local food system development.

Overall 86% of survey respondents (30) followed up with Extension or RFSWG. This indicates that the meetings were effective in facilitating new connections between Extension employees and RFSWG groups.

**Capacity in Local or Regional Food Systems Work**

Participants were asked several questions to evaluate the impact the meetings had on their work in local food systems. The following results were obtained.

* 91.4% (32) indicated that as a result of the conference(s) and/or regional meetings they felt more connected with local food systems activities and programs in their region.
* 88.6% (31) indicated they felt more confident conducting or participating in local food systems activities and programs in their region as a result of the conference(s) and/or meetings they attended.

Participants were also asked if they had taken on a new leadership role in local or regional food systems work in the last year. 29% of respondents (10) indicated they had. New leadership roles taken on by those ten respondents included: becoming a regional foods coordinator or educator, joining a food policy council, joining a committee on the Iowa Food Systems Working Group, joining leadership of the Food Access & Health Working Group, starting regular local foods meetings in one’s office, and joining leadership of a local farmers market.

This indicates that opportunities for leadership in local or regional food systems work are opening up and that the SARE PDP conferences and meetings reached future leaders and may have prompted them to take on leadership roles.

Of those with new leadership roles, 70% were ISUEO employees and 30% were employed elsewhere. Because approximately 70% of survey respondents were ISUEO employees, this indicates that ISUEO employees are no more likely to take on new leadership positions than those employed elsewhere.

### Changes in Time Dedicated to Local or Regional Food Systems Work

Survey participants were asked what percentage of their work time was spent on local food system work in 2012 and 2013. Results are summarized in Table 1. The change in time spent on local or regional food systems work is a measure both of increased demand for local food systems support and response to that change in demand. The average amount of time spent in local food systems development increased slightly from 2012 to 2013, from 25% to 27%.

* 57% (20 respondents) indicated the amount of time they dedicate to local food systems work increased, ranging from increases of 1% to 15%, with the average increase of 5%.
* 5.7% (2 respondents) indicated the amount of time they dedicate to local food systems work decreased, in both cases by 10%.
* 12 indicated the percentage of their work time spent on local food system work did not change from 2012 to 2013.
* On average, Extension employees spent less time on local and regional food systems work than did those with other employment, spending 24% of their time on local food systems compared with 35%. This indicates that Extension employees are more likely to be balancing local food systems work with other responsibilities.
* Both Extension affiliates and non-Extension employees increased their average percent or work time dedicated to local food systems work by 2% from 2012 to 2013.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Table 1- Average Percent of Work Time Dedicated to Local or Regional Food Systems | | | |
|  | **2012** | **2013** | **Change, 2012 to 2013** |
| Extension Affiliates | 22% | 24% | 2% |
| Employed by Other | 33% | 35% | 2% |
| All | 25% | 27% | 2% |

### Progress in Collaborative Local Food Systems Work

Survey participants were asked to gauge the progress of their own work in local food systems in the areas of networking, collaborating, and joint programming or planning since their first conference or meeting. These measures are important, because they identify the level of cooperation and collaboration among meeting attendees. Results are summarized in Figure 3.

94% of respondents (33) indicated they have made some form of progress in collaborative work. This is indicative of the collaborative nature of local food systems work. It also shows the meeting participants are willing to work with others and sought out opportunities to do so in 2012 and 2013. One should note, however, that not all of these forms of progress were necessarily tied to participation in a conference and/or meeting. However, one cannot deny the conferences and meetings were one of many factors contributing to attendees’ progress.

The most common form of progress indicated was reaching out or networking with potential new partners *in one’s own* region or service area, with 68.6% of respondents (24) doing so. Slightly fewer respondents reached out or networked with potential new partners *outside one’s own*  region or service area, with 54.4% of respondents (18) indicating they had done so. This is expected, because local food systems work is by definition local, so one would expect networking efforts to primarily focused in one’s own region.

65.7% of respondents (23) indicated they had collaborated on a local food systems project with someone *within* their organization. Similarly, 65.7% of respondents (23) indicated they had collaborated on a local food systems project with someone *outside* their organization. This indicates that survey respondents were just as likely to work with people from outside their organization as from within. This is a good sign that organizations working in local food systems development are working in a collaborative, rather than an insular manner.

57% of respondents (20) conducted joint planning or programming with partners *within* their region or service area. In contrast, 26% of respondents (9) conducted joint planning or programming with partners *outside* their region or service area.

### Applying for Grants for Local and Regional Food Systems Work

Another goal of the SARE PDP conferences and meetings was to nurture connections among participants that would lead to new grant-funded projects. 40% of survey participants (14) applied for grant funding for their local or regional food systems work since attending his/her first conference or meeting. Results from those 14 respondents who applied for grant funding are summarized in Figure 4.

* 5 of those grant applications were funded for a total of $149,709.
* 14% of survey participants who had applied for grants (2) indicated they had not yet submitted their grant application and another 28% (4) were waiting to hear if they were funded.
* Only 21% of survey respondents who applied for grants (3) had heard that their grant application was not funded.
* 11 of the 14 survey respondents (79%) who had applied for a grant did so in collaboration with people from outside their own organizations.