

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

CENTER FOR REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS

FARMER CONVERSATIONS

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PRESENTED TO

SARE PDP Statewide Food Systems
Plan Community of Practice



PURPOSE

This work was funded through a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (North Central)- Professional Development Program grant. The proposal submitted included the following component: 'A farmer discussion group with 6-8 North Central state farmers to share what priorities will be most impactful for their businesses and communities over the next 5-10 years.' Though farmers were not identified as the primary audience for the community of practice, the discussion group was developed in recognition of farmers as the essential foundation of any state food system.

The final version of farmer input was structured around five distinct 1:1 conversations with farmers, plus information gathered in Michigan and Iowa via statewide planning processes that included farmer perspectives. This change was due to timing - both seasonal time commitments for growers, and the grant timeline.

OUTREACH

To identify growers for 1:1 conversations, an announcement was made during the initial Planning Committee calls on March 9th and March 14th, and an email was sent to Planning Committee members that could not attend the meetings. Email follow-up reiterated an open call for personal or professional contacts that grow food in one of the SARE North Central states, and could speak to the experience or needs of growers in their state.

Outreach to farmers was then conducted based on the order in which Planning Committee members responded. A few states had begun, or had plans in place for, a statewide food plan and were prioritized for initial calls.

SCRIPT CREATION

Staff at the Center for Regional Food Systems and an outside consultant developed the questions for the calls. In creating the questions for the 1:1 conversations, strong consideration was given to the overarching goal of the SARE Professional Development Program, as well as what might be useful information for the Planning Committee members in designing learning sessions.



RESPONSES

- 1. Can you tell me a bit about the type of farming operation you have?**
 - a. This can include the methods you use to grow food...**
 - b. This also can include types of markets (farmers markets, CSA, institution, etc.) that you sell your product through...**

Farmer 1

- I am an urban farmer, both direct sales, educator and consultant, food access coordinator – works with nonprofits across the city, community stores across the city; activist, educator, consultant, direct sales, local partnerships to beautify neighborhoods
- homegrown and sustainable practices, no till tending towards urban forestry...Maintaining sanctuary of natural habitat, agroecology and biodiversity
- Just me and a couple other family members
- Dried flowers, ornamentals, microgreens grew herbs for one store, friend as chef - moved a lot this way
- Drive through, come on and get some produce, can call it a farm stand, it's my growing space and it has a sign; most people know about it been there 10 years
- Specific type of insurance needed to make it a different type of space; very careful with this
- Unique way able to aggregate food - farmers market at brick and mortar of community store to help expand fresh produce access;

Farmer 2

- One thing I can see being an issue, transitioned from commodities to becoming a food producer, in infancy
- Lost a lot of land; 3rd year focusing on food production
- Growing typical garden varieties of fruits/veggies, chickens,
- Anything animal production is limited to family consumption beyond chickens
- Watermelon, cucumbers, peppers, cauliflower, collard greens, beets,
- Sell to farmers markets, delivery and popups around region
 - CSA community deliveries in nearby state, considered local to our market as well - more informal, not formal CSA, less than 30 people ...don't require people to pay upfront, do installments and payments
- State farmers in midst of a lawsuit; dad and grandpa were involved
- Just starting out, not veteran produce growers



Farmer 3

- "Me and my husband started this; I was not born in the U.S., came from tropical weather, growing fruits and vegetables is a lot different over here"
- 'Husband had open land when we got to U.S. - bare ground so I started planting veggies, in 2006'; have neighbors that work in extension
- Why don't you do a high tunnel program, through EQIP? Through NRCS office, part of foreign service agency, grant program for high tunnels; grants for farm infrastructure
- "Because [name] is female and Asian we got higher amount approved, that's how we got started in FM and garden"
- 'I don't know anything about that, my husband doesn't know because he's a grain farmer'...Had never seen growing in plastic high tunnel before - that's how veg garden started, 2014....now have 6 high tunnel gardens
- For husband, it's wheat, soybean, corn, hay.....for quite some time was also organic farmer for grain (small grains and soybeans - not sold customer direct, sold to processor...no longer doing this as much)...it's a lot of waiting, weeding...it's hard sometimes, the longer we got into it production is less and less and price is not that high to cover expenses
- First year didn't know, just planted tomato...weather is unpredictable so this wasn't a good idea
- Direct marketing of meat through Farmers Market (FM), 3 FMs a week from May to October; most produce all marketed direct to customer....meat and eggs as well...Improving each year, something people are looking for
- Has 200 acres, had 1,000 before

Farmer 4

- Pasture-based livestock farm, raise sheep, pigs, meat chicken, laying hens, turkeys; sell meat and eggs through CSA, 2 year round small FMs - 30 vendors in high season, 5 or 6 in low season, 3 chefs and 3 independent grocery stores; year 9; 60-80,000 a year sales
- Weighing whether to go to Indy or not for bigger markets, but keep selling out and at capacity, going to keep feeding our neighbors; 1.5 hours

Farmer 5

- 'The big reason we do what we do is lifestyle choice, children from 8 to 15, do this level to involve family, we homeschool'; family dynamic, not interested in hired labor - previously did that and was overwhelmed
- Produce grown on under an acre, sweet corn is more - 3 to 4 acres (now alfalfa for cover crop), acre of asparagus, 2 high tunnel 30x95, 15,000 sq feet of veg production outside - on the acre....we've amended high tunnel soil so much it's high quality/high capacity production - fine line with growing season, and every year is different - try to keep a steady rotation
- 'Watermelon, sweet corn, cantaloupes, zucchini squash, all types of cukes, radishes, turnips...More herbs this year, cilantro, rosemary, sage, oregano, basil - add a lot of value at market'
- Rent 120 acres of farm that came out of CRP (one of the subsidized programs....paid not to raise a crop) but landowner has to mow, there's a burn program.....sign a contract for a set amount of time....so many programs you can get into with NRCS, depends on what landowner signs up for - in a watershed? Save the beaver?) a few years ago - owner knew we used organic methods - got lease, pulled trees, 120 acres of wheat (was under water and it recovered well!)



- Used to sell 3x week at [City], with Covid just Saturday - Saturday sales are 4x as much...Sell to another little country store that resells - mostly asparagus, tomatoes...herbs don't sell as well there
- Once in a while we'll sell to a restaurant...asparagus...broccoli/cauliflower....Sirloin Stockade....US Foods raises price in the winter, so we bring them cheaper cauliflower that's twice as big
- Organic methods, but not certified organic....some say USDA grants can help them go that way; only 2 use organic methods; not 100%, transparent with customers - will use treated seed if it works good, but we don't use herbicide or pesticide on crops once they've sprouted
- Haven't gone full organic bc it hasn't benefited to pay to go through hoops to get it...State people weren't as helpful
- Intensive rotation of crops, 3 to 4 per year in little plot of greenhouses directly in dirt
- No certified organic grower at our market, [name] pioneered our market (with my father)....
- A lot more loss with organic methods, but kids are here and we're out here picking and I don't have to worry about studies that show harmful effects of pesticides
- We're not CA, not a more progressive in our part of the state like the big cities...but more people are asking this every year, people are getting more educated and want to know what they're putting in their body and what they're feeding their animals
- Every day is a learning day, always experimenting, always trying new things, 'I would try every YouTube experiment if I could'....when it comes down to it we still have to produce
- Did some ornamentals at some point, but not now

2. Could you give me an example of a local or state policy or regulation or state funded program in your state that you find to be a challenge as a local food farmer? Or that affects your work?

Farmer 1

- It is difficult to navigate that in [state]; communicates with people well, setting the tone for what UA can be is what she's done for a lot of organizations
- Didn't have problem with zoning or Land Bank
 - Water was a problem; but were able to get water taps at gardens showing promise
- Haven't had regulatory issues, my problem is that I just need money
 - Has always lowballed; if there was a barrier it's funding
 - Racism in funding, why I can't be funded and don't want to keep going to the farm bureau's office - microaggressions (food grows well because the people are healthy and well)
- I'm normally the person someone calls because they are having problems - great communicator
- Took about 5 years to identify as a farmer...for a while it was hard to find where she fit in the market because there weren't good precedents for her type of operation or type of grower
- OEFFA serves as a nice counterpart to OSU; created a welcoming space but no one looks like me, she mentioned it and it didn't take them long to figure it out
- Cannot just live off of farming operation

Farmer 2

- Can't say we ran into anything that was an obstacle yet....nothing comes to mind



Farmer 3

- No, not really, can't really think of anything that was an issue
- What we sell in a FM....baked goods, jam and jellies, fresh eggs, meat....and vegetables...don't have to get any license...To be able to sell eggs, canning, meat - meat has to be going to the state, we raise the animals so never had any problems
 - Have to buy the label to stamp on meat products 'state inspected'....changed cottage food law for canning; me myself never had problem doing it, but others complained about it, needed better understanding of what cottage food law is telling them what to do (tier 1, 2, 3) - before just had to take training session to tell you what to do and not,, now a different category (milk, soy, peanut, nut oil, wheat) = different category to get license for;
- Vendors get discouraged, trying to understand, selling product....Don't agree with what department from state is telling them; understood as telling people what to do; I understand it as food safety
- Even myself, trying to do a food truck, in summertime we have veg we might use for food truck; trying to figure out license - licensing, how state clarifies why food safety is needed, what needs to be done
- Some growers are retired, looking at a part-time option, but even younger growers have a hard time
- You can can at home if it's customer-direct and under a certain threshold

Farmer 4

- In [state] do not have progressive food policy; see things happening in other states (ie. MI 10 Cents) - and no one at our state level is pushing for things like that
- Specific policy needs that farmers have; lots of things we don't have that we are used to not having; positive forward options feel like a daydream
- Health Department regulations - home rule state; every county has its own iteration of state rules and regulations....In one county, what someone can do is totally different from another - egg and meat labels, value added products are affected by this
 - Know many farmers trying to do value-added this way; but no scale-appropriate set of regulations
- Know growers that want commercial kitchen operations - \$40,000 septic system - a lot for just a commercial kitchen - in larger operations can pay someone to deal with it
- To sell at FM in [county, state] - fills out same \$120 paperwork as Pizza Hut does....[different county] lowered cost of application to \$50 and adjusted paperwork for FM sales (if staff changes, this might change)
- Big guys get away with anything; 'CAFOs looked on favorably here; one was going to be spreading manure in federally-regulated wetlands - Board of Zoning Appeals, county-level body' passed Department of Environmental management rules and regulations; 107 people spoke against it
- Policies impact quality of life and small farming operations

Farmer 5

- SNAP and WIC - [city] management at FM does a really good job of informing growers - tokens and reimbursement really done well...benefits growers and needy, those who are eligible
- Historic increase in land value around here, in last year or two it has doubled - [state] is one of most affordable places for land (Amish or Mennonites are moving here from PA); land is the best commodity to invest in right now; uncertainty in stock market = everyone making real estate investments; with inflation land cost has increased
 - For future generations, I don't see my son ever being able to buy a decent sized farm (40-60 acres) for example without serious loan or structured business plan



- Don't do any value-added, no issues there
- Have to do certification (Clean Act) - check your methods; but that was easy;
- USDA organic certified - didn't pursue it enough maybe? Had heard loose numbers floated around 1500/year to get certification, some grant available...but just didn't seem like big enough incentive
- Takes time - you have to record from a given date; doesn't matter if I haven't sprayed herbicide for 10 years; the start date would be now and then in 3 years would be valid
- Just not lucrative enough; we are trusted; our FM comes out to farms to see if we're growing what we're selling - this stops a lot of the wholesaling - we have a good community (everybody knows everybody)

3. Do you think local or state policies/regulations and state funded programs in your state are adequate in supporting local food and sustainable farmers? Why or why not?

Farmer 1

- Yes, it's there; changing the language to make it more accessible
- Problem is it is based on needs of rural growers; rural model
- Time delay is just deliberation about who gets funding; racial differences less stark than rural/urban divide

Farmer 2

- I feel like policies are actually encouraging more local and smaller growers, expanding SNAP program, encouragement of healthy eating by society generally; becoming easier and more accepted
- Regulations were probably follow if they don't already
- Don't feel negatively impacted; impressed with network of how many different people we've met that offer assistance and general knowledge
- Do you often get connected with city/county/state officials?
- Have been working with people in [county], think our network is strong, feel encouragement for more local growers; we transitioned from large commodities and now have more variety, more niche smaller varieties of stuff
- People are more interested in quality of food, how it's grown

Farmer 3

- From our own experience, resources are being used; market has grown; there are programs through the state that are customers are using (voucher program)
- City has to explain how to use it and how to acquire it....for benefit programs - SNAP, WIC, senior FM,me myself, I have little knowledge about it, I have to take the training (to let people know where they can use voucher) can refer people to offices
- City and county programs have to share out information more, higher awareness 'public needs to be more informed'
- Not so much farming in general like I was doing, but programs and policies to benefit customers yes
- Direct market farming has more support than what they were doing previously
- Don't see the state doing a whole lot for farmers; other than there are federal government programs that give us benefits when we need help



Farmer 4

- Can't think of a single one
- The only thing the state has done - [state] initiative - the one in [state] is pretty basic, struggle for funding, Director position hasn't been filled for months; labeling program, stickers to put on packages, sell through their marketplace, staff work hard, but from budget and policy level just checking that box; for our farm we don't see any reason to bother with it; see what [neighbor 'Buy Local' campaign] has done and *would* participate there
- [neighbor 'Buy Local' campaign] is so powerful there is a disincentive for us because we're from [state]
- Dept of Ag
- [County] - casual FM for years in [city], a number of growers were leaving county to go to FM with more officials hours, website, staff, etc - group got together and decided on bike path and FM; made legit FM; thriving due to volunteer efforts - one of the things they did was reach out to Health Department and ask if we can make it easier for vendors = simple, one-page form, simpler than what restaurants fill out, department comes to check out the stall right at FM (temperature checks)

Farmer 5

- No personal experience with this 'not really' - a lot of people that go to the FM think that everyone grows organic; personally not a fan of more regulation - don't believe in big government....the fact that it isn't common knowledge
- Say my neighbor down the road grows big sweet corn, do I want him to have a big sign saying what he sprays? Not really....that's consumer education and ppl need to be aware...used to have a sign that ppl should know where their food comes from
- For a while there was a rule that if you used GMO crops you had to have a sign out
- Confusion between state and local FM regulations/rules
- What I didn't take advantage and could have....try to get his farm certified organic to sell certified organic wheat - some allowances for CRP because it's a regulated program; property owner signs contract, believes one stipulation is to not use chemicals, would have been easier to get certification - we felt that buyers around here wouldn't buy your wheat without using a fungicide (it gets wet around here) - risk of growing a lot of crop and you can't sell because it has fungus - decided not to do certification for wheat/row crop.....owner was anti Roundup/Bayer

4. Do you know if your state has developed a state food system plan or charter?

Farmer 1	Farmer 2	Farmer 3	Farmer 4	Farmer 5
Not going to say now, but believes yes – all board and commissions she's on - a lot of info is communicated to these groups; [Senator] identified fundsWants to say yes	No, not familiar with it, curious to see Michigan's	Yes; Food safety is in [state] Food Charter, but not it's own pillar; embedded throughout	I know it has been in the works but I have never once gone to one of the meetings; RFSP grant idea is to take all those meetings and conversation and make it real	"No idea"



...IF so, from your perspective, what type of agenda priorities need to be in that plan to benefit you and other local food farmers in your state?

Farmer 1

- A plan to allow cushion to freely allows stores already selling produce to sell more of it with no cost to the store
- [State residents] are going to same brick and mortars
- Wants corner stores to receive produce, see what's it like to provide high quality produce to customers; don't have to create a space, these spaces are here
- Need better business models as well; a lot of buildings aren't up to code to be able to sell produce
- 3 year plan, give produce, stores sell it, make money, put earnings back into infrastructure
- Example - Put a farmers market in a corner store and watch it come to life
- People are doing it let them do it better
- Opens up market opportunities for the grower; fair amount; remove middleman
- Let me feel good about planting 20 rows of collards, that I'll have a good market to bring it to; give an opportunity to be sovereign; buyers have to feel comfortable saying yes
- We don't spend all of Double Up, WIC vouchers, Rx - not enough stores to take them; big burden for stores - wash, store, waste food

Farmer 2

- Worth to prioritize to develop network
- Link distribution network - emergency food network, more transparency, more requirements for local food among larger distributors
- Grocery stores to require locally-produced food...provides more markets for farmers to sell to
- No large city in half of the state....push for more healthy food is coming from urban areas...reaching out to rural areas to do that; just as valuable for rural areas to be able to access that; smaller towns there is less opportunity to grow everything needed; more market in cities....produce production on eastern side of state in big cities; big ag in the rest of the state, rural area
- Natural environment and resources more conducive to growing on eastern side
- More requirements for locally-produced f/v
- Weather conditions impact growing and production

Farmer 3

- Asked schools if they are willing to buy product from me; have a friend that is trying to get that going, buy local products from local farmers; that would be nice; I suppose it's a school's decision
 - I work at the school, season may be difficult
- One program, FM Nutrition Program, accepting through FM, \$5 voucher...only for fruits/vegetables
 - Customers have to learn what they can buy with it (only fruits/vegetables, not jams, meat)....maybe allowing them to expand what they can buy
- Different programs allow for wider range of product purchases
- Raising vegetables, the biggest challenge is how to control the weeds, tried different ways not using a pesticide...machine that we use to control weeds between rows, no problems with state regulations



- Different if you live in town, there is a certain way you have to do things (zoning, permitting)...no issues with constructing high tunnels/building permits, because we live on a farm; have been able to do what we need
- Have to book our butchering a year out; one processor is one year out, the other is about 6 months; demand for local meats....locker plants = meat processors, not a lot of them...have to take animals about 100 miles, only place we can find, state-inspected facility that will process
 - Take meat, slaughtered, processed, freeze, you pick up
 - 'That's a problem, you have to plan ahead'....another one is 200 miles, there are other processors, but not state inspected

Farmer 4

- Would love to know what some of the options are - what are other states in the Midwest including, where are they pushing and making headway....few advantages of being in a state that's 40 years behind; husband and her worked for farms in VT for a few years, incredible state food plan
 - 'Often when you say 'on the east coast, they do this' doesn't work around here, but knowing about MO, MI...'
- Incentive for bigger institutions/buyers to buy local
- More support for aggregation
- More support for business development, [state] Small Business Dev Center - no foundation in diversified small-scale ag but usually retired folks volunteering their time, no experience in local food (race, content, generational issue) - need to work with them to figure out how to direct their expertise, or complementary service for food
- Baseline work for small-scale producers to apply to EQIP and other funds to work on environmental stewardship...waste, compost
- Anything on the food access front that can be done would be great; double bucks, triple bucks programs all over, but more help with processing equipment (\$ fee to have service - can't just get a grant every year to do that)...make these programs more ubiquitous and have more education for customers and farmers; dignity with making FM more open and diverse spaces
- Engaging beginning farmers; season extension - land access, no land link program in IN, but really needed
- Financial strategy is to be crossroads of America (in terms of warehouses and shipping, Amazon fulfillment centers) - land gobbled up for this = development pressures

Farmer 5

- "I guess I believe in capitalism - have a hard time saying 'I want local growers to have priority for selling' as opposed to bringing in huge commercial operation that can offer less quality at cheaper price...."
- "Hard for me to say I want an edge on that competition...hard for me to say I want an advantage"
- Past the point of return re: preservation of farmland - our county has a resource/map - can see very parcel every person owns...hopefully property taxes don't force out small landowner
- Not sure about limiting how much land someone can acquire
- Shooting from the hip, knee-jerk reaction - idealism around giving beginning farmers a leg up - but where is that going to come from? Who is going to fund that? Does it come back to taxpayer dollars?
 - Would love to see more small farmers, from idealistic standpoint, see community restored - again, seems irreversible at this point bc of capitalism - 'there's just never enough land for large growers'



- Everything grown organically
- Farming sustainably
- Composting, manure,
- System free from pesticide and herbicide
- Means a huge return to labor, ppl don't want less production for healthier product

5. What do you think is the greatest challenge for (state) in developing and implementing a food system plan that would benefit local food farmers?

Farmer 1

- [State] should be feeding its residents period; would rather eat [state]-grown to strengthen food system
- Historically already challenged with aggregating food the proper way; making it not mandatory, created in a way that people want to participate
- If you haven't done it right the first time, how can we make people feel that it's being done right this time?
- Include the ability for people to be sovereign
- Not just build a model where you're helping farmers that just feed people....
- Global warming, climate change is real and we see its affects now, which is why USDA is coming to us....small sustainable growers have been counted out; land is more than just food
- If we try to compartmentalize this way, still in doomsday planning

Farmer 2

- Trouble getting voices from all regions of the state; more influence from the eastern part of the state
- Some type of incentive from the state to let people see that they can do this as well; incentive to grow consumable healthy food;
 - Monetary

Farmer 3

- I don't know what type of plan you could put together, but in northern [state] the trend is for fewer and fewer farmers and they are bigger all the time
- State investors buying land in northern [state], which I don't like either
 - Out of state, no farming interests, but investing in land, being rented back to local producer (purely investment); some is international money = higher rent
- Nephew rented land, owner is from Washington state, land in their financial portfolio looks good...thousands of acres being bought up
- We're getting away from the small family farm; still family-operated but now 5 times bigger
- Hurting smaller towns, far less people so they can't support the little businesses
- Less people doing smaller farms like me, because it's a lot of work, but outside money coming in creates unfair competition...doesn't hurt our FM sales, but hurts young farmers - I have nephews that want to start, they would like to expand but it makes it impossible for them to do that
- Incentive for young farmers, program to encourage farmers to stay on farm, give beginning farmers a break to get started



Farmer 4

- Identifying actual strategies that will benefit farmers that could pass/get funded in a conservative state (both fiscally and legislatively)
- There has never been a statewide anything for small-scale diversified growers, Farm Bureau serves big guys primarily, we have a farmers union and our farm is a member - no PASA, OEFFA, etc - started Hoosier Young Farmers Coalition recently (beginners at the time, what are we going to do when we age out - funding has come through RFSP and private funder - launch group with 3 years of funds) - we need a community so that when legislative action is there we can speak up in coordinated way

Farmer 5

- Have to first separate crops - are we talking human consumption/veggies, value added? Corn, wheat, soybeans? Major producers are going to be simple commodities....
- I bought a mulch layer from up north of St. Joseph - farmed 1000 acres of produce and orchards, but that's not the norm
- Question is almost too diverse, regarding row crop or veggies, you have to find labor force, and most depend on migrants - or technology; ppl don't want to do the work anymore
- Migrant workers that came to our area back in the 80s, don't want to work in field, have better jobs in factories or permanent residency or citizen children - can make more in factory with benefits than picking green beans outside
- Best thing for food production (let's say veggies) - best current trend in Youtube and permaculture - mini subculture of ppl interested in raising their own food; excitement in living off land, creating interest in healthy, rural living.....small opening in getting return to farming
- You have to have a cultural revolution to create interest in growing food

6. Do you have any other insights as a farmer in (state) that a planning committee should consider in designing and implementing a learning community on state food system plans and charters?

Farmer 1

- Diversity and inclusion - not just race, but looking at land for more than just being able to feed - encouraging if they want to learn about native plant species, compatible trees, you need an ecosystem to be in place
- 'Let's do agriculture the right way; we've seen how small biodiverse spaces offer more food, higher yields'
- Breaking up urban and rural grower input; do the same both equally and fairly

Farmer 2

- Like to see demand for locally-produced fruits/vegetables; locally-grown requirement
- The conversation needs to involve large and small-scale operations; provide perspective
- Curious to see how networks function in other states;
- Engagement in winter is better; things ramping up

Farmer 3

- For me, it's mostly for the local - reach out to schools, small communities



- Mostly for us to have more time to plan and participate in winter; thinking about things a season ahead of time
- For some farmers, some more funding for small farmers, younger or older, still want to do something for the community

Farmer 4

- There's a lot of disparate work going on in [state] around local and regional food, this is what new group - Partners IN Food and Farming - is trying to address; a lot of stuff happening but not always tied together; including some content or time for those groups to talk about who is already doing what, what is needed, smooth egos, ensure BIPOC farmers have space at the table from the start; prompts to get people to zoom out and look at who are all the players;
- Who's already doing stuff and how can we tie into
- [State farmer collective] will have an advisory panel - find a group like this to run ideas by food and farm advocates; will be happy to participate in review process
- Dec, Jan, Feb; early in the week; do we have farmers meet by affinity group by amount of time in existence, type, etc
- Is there room for repetition? Hungry for connection - as opposed to one-off meeting, could farmers contribute multiple times/form connection

Farmer 5

- Dec - February is a great time to talk to farmers, honestly this a unique conversation - 'this is the first one that I've done in the last 8 years where I would just take time and talk to a relative stranger at 11 at night'.....we're just so busy....a week ago when it was raining, row croppers were looking for something to do, but we have greenhouse and were killing it and busy





SUMMARY

WHO

Demographic information was not collected, as the primary purpose of these conversations was to speak with anyone who grows food and could speak to the needs of growers in their community or state. Participants self identified as an 'urban grower' (1) and 'small-scale growers' (4). The states that participated in 1:1 calls, and will be represented in the following summary information, are Ohio, Indiana, Kansas, Missouri and Minnesota.



SALES CHANNELS

In general, the growers all participated in farmers markets, as well as different versions of CSAs (formal, informal). The growers also sold directly to or through:

- a community farm stand
- pop-ups
- chefs
- independent grocers/'a country store'/a community store
- a restaurant
- interest in/attempted school sales

PRODUCTS GROWN

Alfalfa (cover crop)	Microgreens
Asparagus	Oregano
Beets	Ornamentals
Basil	Peppers
Broccoli	Pigs
Cantaloupe	'Produce'
Cauliflower	Radishes
Chickens	Rosemary
Cilantro	Sage
Collard greens	Sheep
Corn	Soybean
Cucumber	Sweet corn
Dried flowers	Turnips
Hay	Turkeys
Herbs	'Veggies'
Laying hens	Wheat
Meat chickens	Zucchini squash



SUMMARY

2. A LOCAL /STATE POLICY OR REGULATION OR PROGRAM IN YOUR STATE THAT IS CHALLENGING AS A LOCAL FOOD FARMER?

Challenges

- Overwhelming requirements for commercial kitchens
- Land use: real estate investment vs. farming
- Organic certification
- Licensing: education about why food safety is needed, and required steps

What Works

- Adjusting requirements for small producers/vendors at markets
- Programs for SNAP and WIC at farmers markets

In general, call participants indicated they are able to navigate the system fairly well or have knowledgeable contacts. The urban grower did not experience any issues with zoning, or the land bank, and a rural grower flagged that they were easily able to meet the requirements for state inspection after participating in available trainings. Difficulty with policies and regulations was very dependent on the location and state of the call participant.

3. ARE LOCAL OR STATE POLICIES/REGULATIONS AND PROGRAMS IN [STATE] ADEQUATE IN SUPPORTING LOCAL FOOD AND SUSTAINABLE FARMERS? WHY OR WHY NOT?

Challenges

- Rural vs. urban: who gets funding? what are programs historically designed to do?
- State promotion campaigns can hurt neighbors (hard to compete with neighbor states because they become 'non-local', but there are funding disparities)

What Works

- There are federal government programs that give us benefits when we need help.'
- Societal shift
- Communities work to ease the vendor process for FM and smaller growers
- Federal \$ for agriculture, state \$ for consumer health

The call participants stated that policies/regulations/programs adequately meet their needs, but greater accessibility and awareness could be helpful. Programs and policies to benefit consumers (SNAP, Double Up, WIC, Senior FM Nutrition Program) were highly lauded - responses suggested that programs or policies that nudge consumers towards healthy, local and/or sustainable food, create more market opportunity for growers, and direct aid is less necessary



SUMMARY

4. WHAT TYPE OF AGENDA PRIORITIES NEED TO BE IN A STATE FOOD PLAN TO BENEFIT YOU AND OTHER LOCAL FOOD FARMERS IN [STATE]?

- Direct connections between growers and point of sale
 - Leveraging small, existing stores; creating better distribution models
- Double Up/WIC/voucher programs: learning curve for retailers, processing equipment cost is continuous, limited sites accept benefits
- Requiring locally-produced helps to expand market opportunities: at points of sale, larger distributors, schools, institutions
- Consider urban (eg. zoning) vs. rural needs (eg. land protection for agriculture)
 - Land access, development pressure
- Meat processors: limited scheduling for federally/state-inspected facilities
- Network development
- "Often when you say 'on the east coast, they do this' it doesn't work around here, but knowing about MO, MI..."

5. WHAT IS THE GREATEST CHALLENGE FOR [STATE] IN DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING A FOOD SYSTEM PLAN THAT WOULD BENEFIT LOCAL FOOD FARMERS?

- "If you haven't done it right the first time, how can we make people feel that it's being done right this time?"
 - System has historically disadvantaged certain people/growers (by race, by practices, by scale, by location), need to clarify how state plans will be different
- Food is tied to climate change and that needs to be recognized
- Who contributes?
 - Larger cities tend to dominate conversation
- Proposing changes without attaching funding
- Political atmosphere
 - Identifying strategies that could feasibly be funded/passed in a fiscally and legislatively conservative state
- Coordinated grower voice with cohesive ask
- Distinguishing growers: smaller farmers, future farmers, commodity vs. produce
- Corporations are in the equation; large-scale growers have a strong voice