

**SUMMARY OF CHAT POD DISCUSSION FROM FAMILY FARM FORUM
WEBINAR ON "LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS," HELD ON NOVEMBER 18TH, 2008**

Question: Is there a definition of a local food system?

Answers: There is no definition that is widely accepted but each "foodshed" area tends to make its own definition of "local" and that seems to work well.

However, Section 6015 of the Farm Bill modifies the Business and Industry Loan Program to reserve at least five percent of annual program funds (~ \$50 million) to provide loans and guarantees to individuals, cooperatives, businesses and other entities to establish and facilitate enterprises that process, distribute, aggregate, store and market locally produced agricultural food products. For this purpose, the Farm Bill defines "locally-produced agricultural food product" as one that is raised, produced, and distributed within a locality or region and is transported less than 400 miles from its origin. (Thanks to Dennis Brown, ERS, for this information, and for the reference to the September '08 Rural Brief from the [Center for Rural Affairs](#), highlighting a new emphasis on Local Food in the Farm Bill.)

Question: Are there any good state programs that allow small scale growers to process "safe" foods for sale in their homes?

Answers: Kentucky passed a House Bill 391 a few years back specifying what could be produced in home kitchens and how. University of Kentucky has the [home based microprocessing program](#). Tennessee has rules for manufacturing of [non-hazardous foods in domestic kitchens](#). There are state statutes, but a lot of different interpretations of them by local health departments and local farmer's market managers. It will be good to have a list of these programs for others to learn and adopt.

Other institutional barriers:

In the North East, at least, there is a shortage of organic butchers or butchers who will process small numbers of animals. Institutional constraints from state health dept personnel who believe large scale meat and vegetable processing is safer

Question: Is there a consensus definition of "family farm"?

Answers: The first Family Farm Forum webinar emphasized the USDA definition of a family farm (ref. the ERS link <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/EIB24/>) Wendell Berry's definition = most of the work is done by family members or hired help that lives on the farm and partakes in the bounty. Similarly, a family farm is one where the family makes most of the decisions, takes most of the risk, and does most of the work.

Question: Can we have more Information on Local Food Systems (e.g. analysis, models, and Extension training outlines?)

Answers: the [Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems](#) at the University of California are interviewing local food groups around the country;

Someone noted that indicators of a healthy food system are being developed by people at Cornell; the [National Agricultural Law Center](#); the [Community Food Security Coalition](#), and Ken Meter of [Crossroads Resource Center](#)

Question: What are the special audiences in Local Food Systems?

Answers: Among farmers, Hispanic youth, Amish and Mennonite communities; urban farming / greenhouse growing / aquaponics.

Question: What is Walmart's involvement in the local foods market?

Answers: Walmart is using Market Maker and other tools to find and contact local farmers; some participants attended meetings with WalMart and found some encouraging cases

Question: what are the issues in enhancing applications to competitive grants programs?

Answer: Better communication of grant opportunities; simplify the grant writing process; RFA's often difficult to understand; accommodate farming seasons when setting grants cycles; provide more materials in Spanish. On-line application processes generally unpopular; many farmers do not have access to high speed internet; CBO's not always considered full partners. Suggestion: webinar participants identifying CBO's and others in their areas and networks

Question: how do we improve post-award evaluation of funded projects to identify impacts?

Answers: Make success stories part of annual reports; include funding for project evaluation in RFA's; set evaluation procedures prior to the project because *post hoc* impact measurement is costly and less effective; encourage graduate student research on quantifiable impacts; short electronic survey with very specific measures; electronic story board where grant recipients show impact; after grant expires: seek progress reports from previous grantees and fund continuing evaluation after funding period finished

Further information:

- ERS a workshop on local foods, on June 26, 2009. Interest/Info on ERS workshop, please email to dennisb@ers.usda.gov
- [local foods conference](#) in the Northeast
- [The Dynamics of Change in the U.S. Food Marketing Environment](#)