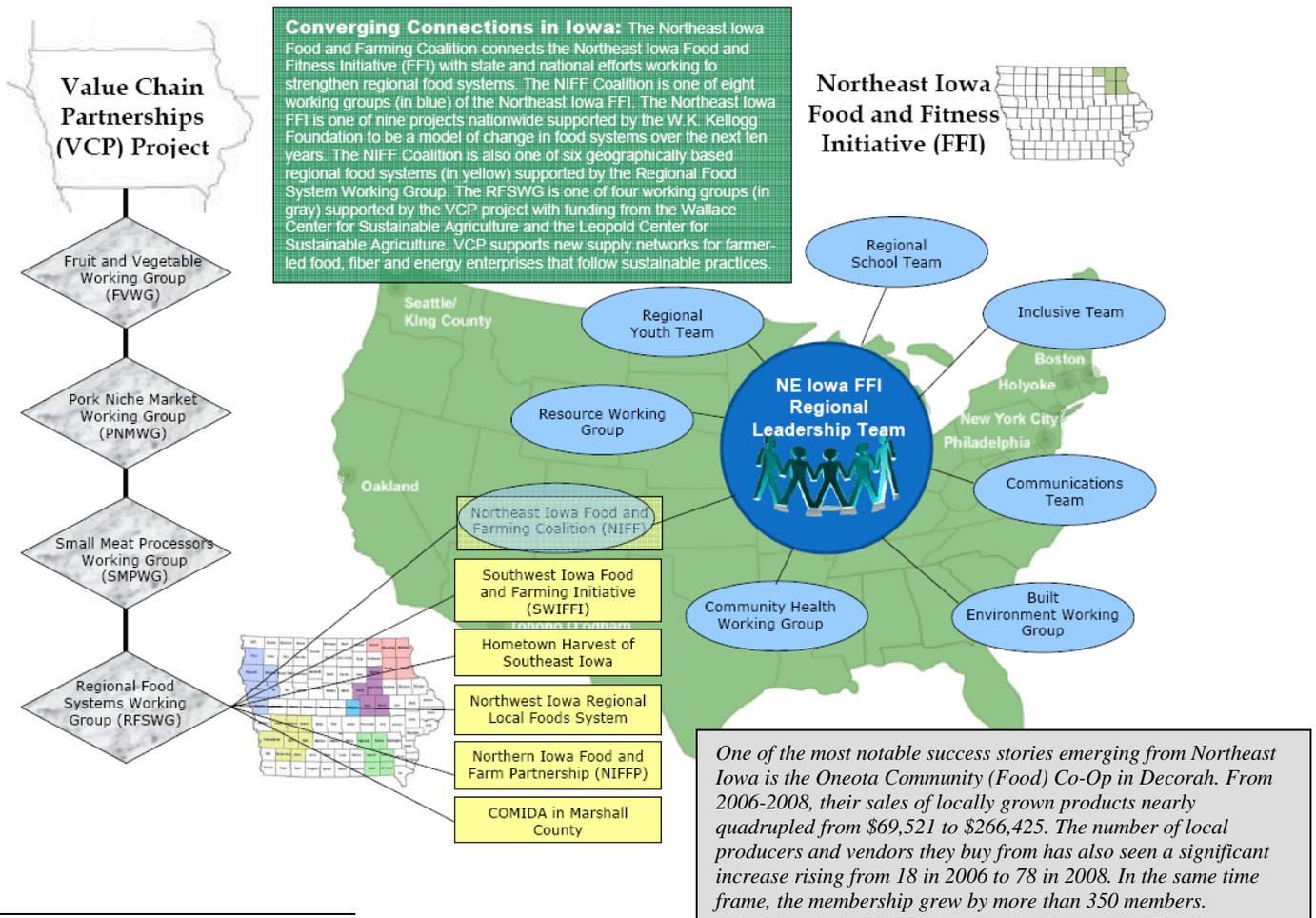


Results from Coordinated Regional Food Systems Work in Iowa and Implications for Policy Makers¹

Regional Food Systems work in Iowa is providing new farming and community development opportunities at the same time it improves access to healthy foods. Better food and more successful farms are emerging from new collaborations that bring people across the value chain together to support regional food systems. As a result of these successes, new policy recommendations include:

- Require future food system efforts to take a comprehensive approach by including partnerships spanning the value chain (from suppliers and producers to processors, distributors, and consumers) with representation from multiple and diverse organizations, institutions, agencies, and disciplines
- Provide support for food initiatives that connect multiple and diverse groups along the value chain with state and local government officials including city and county governments.
- Provide resources to support widespread information sharing, networking, learning, and joint problem solving among leaders of food system efforts to avoid duplication of efforts and maximum results.

Activities in Iowa Supporting these Recommendations



¹ This document was prepared in December, 2008 by Corry Bregendahl, Assistant Scientist, North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (NCRCD) in cooperation with Rich Pirog, Associate Director, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture; Brenda Ranum and Ann Mansfield, Co-Conveners of the Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative; and Cornelia Flora, Director, NCRCD.

Outcome of Activities in Iowa

Table 1. RFSWG- and FFI-supported Regional Food Systems Activities and Outcomes, 2006-2008.

	Northeast Iowa (NIFF)	Southwest Iowa (SWIFFI)	Southeast Iowa	Northwest Iowa	TOTAL
Increase ¹ in local food sales	\$377,595	\$164,716	\$160,569	\$175,900	\$878,780
Increase in number of producers selling local food to local businesses/buyers	11	3			14
Increase in number of restaurants buying and serving local food	11		5		16
Increase in number of new markets and businesses (excluding farms and restaurants) that sell local food (farmer's markets, Community Supported Agriculture, buying clubs, wineries, etc.)	11	1	1		13
Number of existing farmer's markets experiencing growth in number of participating local food producers/vendors	2		2		4
Increase in number of retail grocers selling local food	1	2			3
Increase in number of institutions buying/serving local food (hospitals, colleges, retirement centers/nursing homes)	3		2		5
Increase in the number of conferences, public events, and public activities where local food was served	7		3		10
Mini-grant dollars awarded to local agriculture and food entrepreneurs by Regional Food groups to initiate or expand local food production and businesses	\$10,485		\$1600		\$12,085
Number of local producers receiving Regional Food group mini-grants to initiate or expand local food production and businesses	34		5		39
Dollars leveraged	\$742,965	\$30,000	\$21,067		\$794,032
Number of programs initiated or expanded to increase access of low income families to local food	1		1		2

¹Note that these figures are not documented total local food sales but rather the total change or *increase* in sales based on benchmark data collected in previous years and provided by participating businesses.

Source: Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture

Reasons Why these Outcomes are Occurring

- Leaders 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 (see graph below). 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.