

MINUTES
LINN COUNTY FOOD SYSTEMS COUNCIL
Thursday, March 28th, 2019

The Linn County Food Systems Council meeting was called to order at 9:00 A.M. in conference room 3A/3B at the Jean Oxley Public Service Center, 935 2nd St. SW, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

CALL TO ORDER:

ROLL CALL:

PRESENT: Laura Seyfer, At-Large, Co-Chair
Joe Stutler, At-Large
RaeAnn Gordon, ISU Extension
Lynette Richards, Restaurant/Institution
August Stolba, Feed Iowa First, Co-Chair
Chris Thoms, At-Large
Emma Johnson, Grower/Producer
Kim Guardado, HACAP
Sofia Mehaffey, Horizons

ABSENT: Pam Oldham, Medical Provider/Registered Dietician

OTHERS Stephanie Schrader, Community Well Being Liaison

PRESENT: Kaitlin Emrich, Linn County Public Health
Isla Dewald, Johnson County
Brian Wilken, Johnson Avenue Hy-Vee
Jeff Hoppman, Johnson Avenue Hy-Vee
Genie Maybanks, New Pioneer Co-Op
RJ Carson, Grower/Producer
Scott Koepke, Linn County Juvenile Detention
Brad Buchanan, Owner/Founder of Crop Tech Services

STAFF: Les Beck, Director Linn County Planning and Development
Mike Tertinger, Linn County Planning and Development, Staff
Jessie Black, Recording Secretary
Jake Kundert , IVRCD

Approval of Minutes

Motion by Thoms, second by Mehaffey and carried, all members present voting yes, to approve the February 28th, 2019 LCFSC minutes as submitted.

Monthly Budget Report

Tertinger said the remaining account balance as of month-end is \$3,944.15

Learning Session (Part IV) with guest facilitator Scott Koepke

Koepke briefly touched on some main points that have been discussed at the last few meetings. He reiterated the need for diversification, easier land access and defining the term, “local”. Koepke mentioned a few different people he would like to invite to be a guest speaker at a future meeting and asked that the group continue recruiting.

Guest Speaker Presentations with Q/A

Brad Buchanan – Crop Tech Services

Buchanan, from Ely, introduced himself as the owner of Crop Tech Services. He is a local crop consultant for anyone within a 70-mile radius. Crop Tech Services is also involved in seed sales. In the past, Buchanan has grown blueberries and organic asparagus. Previously, he owned a greenhouse in Fairfax.

Buchanan stressed the importance of finding the right market, as this can be a major hurdle for producers. He added that access to land is also an issue faced by beginning farmers. Buchanan suggested farmers nearing age of retirement, rent out a few acres of land to beginning farmers.

Buchanan explained to the council that while it would be ideal for local farmers to grow oats for Quaker Oats, it is just not consistently feasible. Quaker Oats requires their oats to have a heavy test weight. Oats grown in Linn County may only meet that standard once every five years due to spring temperatures.

Koepke asked if fifty acres of broccoli could be insured for a reasonable price. Buchanan answered most likely not, as there is not as much of a market for it as there is corn or soybeans in Iowa.

Brian Wilken & Jeff Hoppman, Johnson Avenue Hy-Vee Representatives

Wilken introduced himself to the council. He explained that Hy-Vee tries to adapt to customers’ needs, understanding that consumers are more and more concerned with buying local and organic. He insisted that Hy-Vee brings in as many local products as possible. However, this can vary by store. As Hy-Vee has expanded, buying local has become more of an issue. Buchanan added that freshness and quality have been a couple of Hy-Vee’s biggest struggles in buying local. He explained that it can also be difficult to source products locally if growers do not produce enough. Hy-Vee prides themselves on

buying produce within a 200-mile radius. Buchanan added that they are always looking for new relationships with local growers.

Genie Maybanks – Marketing & Outreach Coordinator – New Pioneer Co-Op

Maybanks introduced herself as the Marketing & Outreach Coordinator for New Pioneer Co-Op. She informed the council that New Pioneer signs contracts ahead of season for a sale price, no matter subsequent circumstances. She added that they have very strong relationships with their local growers.

Maybanks shared a video about growers with the council members.

A few challenges Maybanks has faced as a local grocer are as follows:

- 1.) New Pioneer has 138 local growers and producers; Maybanks explained that in order to maintain the strong relationships she has with each of them, calling to place an order can sometimes take longer than necessary due to small-talk. She is currently looking for more efficient ways to place orders.
- 2.) Food processing is another issue. Maybanks shared an example of a local organic chicken farmer that is forced to take his chickens to Minnesota for processing because there are no organic meat processors in our area. The chicken is labeled as “local”, even with hundreds of miles of travel involved.
- 3.) Climate change

RJ Carson – Grower / Producer

RJ Carson introduced himself to the council as a grower/producer. He gave background information on his family farm and the different crops he’s tried in the past. He added that he still delivers corn to Quaker on occasion.

Carson expressed his concerns for the environmental contamination involved in using herbicides, insecticides and pesticides. He insisted that he has spent millions of dollars on state-of-the-art equipment in order to avoid overspray and drift. Over the last 20 years, his concern for soil health and ground water has taken over his farming operation.

Carson explained that his biggest challenge as a producer is the market and pricing. He added that the market goes through cycles and was hopeful it would improve again.

Koepke asked Carson if there is a market for anything beyond corn and soybeans in the future? He wondered about potential for diversification. Carson said if a beginning farmer would like to diversify and rent a small piece of land from a large producer such as himself, he would be willing to help. He shared his concerns for the younger generation working sun up to sun down and their commitment to a 24/7 job, like farming, adding that the majority of the younger generation would not put forth the effort.

Johnson asked if Carson used cover crops. Carson said yes, he’s been using cover crops for six years in the farms that need them the most.

Mehaffey thanked the guest speakers for being given the opportunity to hear each one of them. She added that she's seen several stories in the media about farmers taking their own lives. She wondered what we can offer to farmers for debt counseling.

Next Steps

Koepke closed by stating that the council will continue their conversation at the next meeting.

Adjournment - The meeting adjourned at 10:43 AM

Respectfully submitted,

Approved,

Jessie Black, Recording Secretary

, Co-Chair