

MINUTES
LINN COUNTY FOOD SYSTEMS COUNCIL
Thursday, May 28th, 2020

The Linn County Food Systems Council meeting was called to order at 9:03 A.M. via GoToMeeting.

Special Statement: As a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this meeting was held electronically. All county buildings have been closed to the public until further notice.

CALL TO ORDER:

ROLL CALL:

PRESENT: Laura Seyfer, At-Large, Co-Chair
Carter Oswood, Restaurant/Institution
August Stolba, Feed Iowa First, Co-Chair
Chris Thoms, At-Large
Sofia Mehaffey, Horizons
Lynne Abbott, Linn County Public Health
Stephanie Schrader, Community Well Being Liaison

ABSENT: RaeAnn Gordon, ISU Extension
Emma Johnson, Grower/Producer
Kim Guardado, HACAP
Evan Langston, Cottage Grove Place
Jake Kundert , IVRCD

OTHERS Ilsa DeWald, Johnson County Food Policy Coordinator
PRESENT: Scott Koepke, Indian Creek Nature Center

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

Approval of Minutes

Motion by Thoms, seconded by Seyfer and carried, all members present voting yes, to approve the April 23rd, 2020 LCFSC minutes as submitted.

Guest Speaker Presentations with Q/A

- a. Food System Assessment Project (Nikki Siebert – New Venture Advisors)**

Nikki Siebert, New Venture Advisors, shared a PowerPoint with the council. The PowerPoint presentation reflected some of the data gathered by Siebert's interviews to date. Siebert explained a few of the main barriers discovered during the interview process. To summarize:

i.) Production

- a. Land access: access to land is nearly impossible in Linn County
- b. Farmers: education, or lack thereof
- c. Commodity/Transition Farming: Research, Education, Outreach relating to transition

ii.) Procurement

- a. Farmer's Markets: farmer focused consistent market with permanent structure and accessibility. Consumer demand and education; Cedar Rapids market "tapped out", producers feel a burden to educate consumers about the value of local
- b. Wholesale, Grocery Stores: hard to get ahold of during COVID-19. Right market for the right grower; wholesale is only for larger growers. Education: consumers need to be educated about where their produce comes from to leverage the "local" value
- c. Wholesale, Institutional Markets: Leadership through example – opportunities for the county to be proactive in purchasing local, or the school system

iii.) Processing

- a. Animal products: aggregation, processing & labor. Need more meat processing options in the county that are clean, humane and can handle large volume, labor challenges, need more cooler & freezer space
- b. Value Added, Produce: scaling the business. Easy to start, hard to grow/scale business, Perception that the county lacks affordable facilities, even if businesses scale, there is no local distributor

iv.) Government

- a. Education; from consumers & farmers to government agency employees & policy makers. Partnerships & culture: partner more strategically with Public Health, Economic Alliance, and other statewide organizations, including collaborative grant applications to fund efforts so staff are not so overextended.
- b. Investment, funding & taxes: incentivizing

Q & A

Tertinger wondered if Siebert was still attempting to contact someone from Hy-Vee. Siebert said yes, but has received no response.

Koepke made reference to the FSC meeting two Hy-Vee management staff attended; both guests said local food isn't uniform nor does it meet Hy-Vee's quality standards. Koepke stated this is a corporate

issue and in order to members of FSC to do more, they need to get into positions of leadership, or policy-making. He insisted budget is priority, relationship building will help.

Beck wondered what next steps are. Siebert said hiring of local foods coordinator; need to be able to be liaison between different agencies, should be focused solely on how to drive activity within the county itself, instead of creating new programs. Work with existing local agencies to implement ideas.

Siebert said NVA would do “Jam Session” next; she presents findings to her colleagues, they provide constructive criticism and put together recommendations that will make up the Executive Summary report. Executive Summary will be reviewed by FSC prior to presenting to BOS. Once presented to BOS, NVA will finalize public version prior to transitioning into Phase II. Siebert wondered if presentation of final report would be done electronically or in person. Beck said he would discuss with staff to decide.

Member Updates

Tertinger said there nothing to report on county collaboration with HACAP. He said he emailed Stacey Walker to let him know a project with HACAP was in the works. BOS wanted feedback from HACAP to see if there were duplicative efforts going on with current pilot project and whether or not any of it would be FEMA reimbursable. Tertinger will keep in contact with HACAP.

Schrader said she’s currently waiting to hear back from FEMA, sent in an application last Friday.

Mehaffey said Horizons transitioned meals to frozen in order to limit contact during pandemic. They are doing welfare checks by phone and hope to continue that way. She said Horizons will (tentatively) transition back to serving hot meals on July 6th. School district has opened nine sites, which were previously going to be used for Kids on Course, for summer meals. They are partnering with HACAP for grab & go meals. SNAP at the market is not happening this year. Double up bucks remain available at Fareway and New Pioneer.

Dewald said Johnson County is still doing online farmer’s market. A lot of questions surrounding what will happen once Farmer’s Market opens back up. She said she recently wrote a letter of support for a grant extension applied for by Courtney Long; a regional partner’s grant that will explore some of the groups that are discussing food systems across the state. Dewald also said Johnson County recently created an Economic Development Committee that is focused on local foods. Also possibly looking into finding under-utilized storage & warehousing.

Oswood will touch base with Dewald regarding under-utilized storage spaces. He also said Feed Iowa First is trying to focus on backyard growers and how to get them more involved. Oswood said new app, Fresh Food Connect, connects backyard growers with food organizations who have the ability to clean and distribute produce. He also said Farm to Food donation tax credit is not just commercial, so it will incentivize the growers using Fresh Food Connect.

Beck gave Dows Farm update:

- Currently in negotiations with SILT

- Submitted letter of support for SILT for a federal grant application to look at what goes into successful agri-communities

Koepke wondered if the next FSC meeting would be in person. Beck said possibly, but social distancing and face coverings will be required, and it would depend on number of participants. Abbott said try to limit in-person gatherings if possible.

Koepke asked if subcommittees should still be working on their 30-30 goals. Tertinger said it's up to each subcommittee.

Adjournment - The meeting adjourned at 10:41 AM

Respectfully submitted,

Approved,

Jessie Black, Recording Secretary

, Co-Chair