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## Iowa's Local Food Systems: Places to Grow

By Teresa Galluzzo and Laura Krouse

You could easily live your whole life in Iowa without eating an Iowa-grown meal. This may seem surprising, because Iowa is a leading agricultural state. But the majority of fruit and vegetables we buy are travel-weary, journeying 1,500 miles to our plates.

Think about how produce reaches Iowa: Idaho potatoes summiting the Rockies, New Zealand apples sailing the Pacific and Chilean grapes voyaging thousands of miles. All these products and many more including meat, dairy and eggs, can be and historically have been grown and processed in Iowa.

Iowans' interest in purchasing food grown closer to home has recently increased. This has led to the germination of local food systems across the state. Iowans' desire for locally grown food could be motivated by a variety of benefits:

**Economic:** Growing and selling more food locally would benefit Iowa farmers and the state's economy. One study found if Iowans met 25 percent of their demand for 37 different fruits and vegetables with products grown in Iowa, the net value added to the state's economy would be almost \$140 million in sales, \$54 million in labor incomes and 2,031 jobs.

**Environmental:** Locally grown food requires much less transportation, which means less global warming emissions. Calculations from a Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture model show if Iowans purchased 10 percent of 28 selected fruits and vegetables from local sources, five to 17 times less carbon dioxide would be emitted than if this produce was purchased from the global food system.

**Health:** Locally grown food reaches consumers more quickly and more often at the peak of freshness. Thus, local food can have higher nutritional value.

**Security:** Locally grown food requires limited transportation, unlike most of our food that travels long distances, leaving us vulnerable to labor strikes, attacks, spikes in fuel prices, food-borne illnesses and other disruptions.

To continue the growth of local food systems, Iowa's leaders need to be progressive in implementing policies that encourage their development and profitability. A 2007 report by the Iowa Policy Project included several recommendations for how to expand Iowa's local food systems. A few include:

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Increasing financing for local producers through targeted loans and cost share for beginning farmers as well as farmers transitioning to local production.

Increasing local processing capacity by providing start-up funds for infrastructure in several locations around the state that could handle produce, dairy and meat.

Increasing marketing networks and fostering links between producers and distributors.

Increasing Iowa's commitment to local food by encouraging private companies and state organizations to develop a purchasing preference for local food.

To expand our local food systems, Iowans should encourage their lawmakers to recall and honor the previous state motto, "A Place to Grow," and make it apply to the food Iowans eat. It will require long-term commitment, but as local food systems grow, Iowans will reap the rewards.

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