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Local Foods to Institution Projects

Organizations such as INCA, Iowa Farmers Union Education Foundation, Practical Farmers of Iowa, and National Catholic Rural Life Conference are providing opportunities for local farmers, processors and food entrepreneurs to profitably market their products to institutions such as universities, nursing homes, hospitals and schools.

The average number of miles that Iowans' food travels is now over 2,000 miles. Linking local food production with institutions will contribute to economic vitality for rural and urban communities and help with the sustainability of local agriculturalists.

Meetings with food service institutional directors have opened the doors to rethinking the use of local production and incorporating it into their line of products on a continuous basis.

"While each institution is unique and has different needs, it is a work in progress that can benefit everyone in many ways," stated Gina Lloyd, IFU Food to Institution Coordinator. "Public sentiment is growing towards knowing where their food comes from and how it is grown."

National Catholic Rural Life Conference and Prairie Rivers RC&D began connecting retirement homes and farmers this year. The program, Health for Life, is focused on selling local foods to help improve the freshness and taste of food available for seniors in their communities. "The goal of this program is to connect the farmers, fresh food and a taste of food they remember on the farm that stimulates the senior's appetite" said Penny Brown-Huber.

Iowa producers are building a new Iowa food system that promotes environmental integrity, sustainable practices and protection of our agricultural heritage and future. The public needs to support these efforts individually and through public demand of locally grown foods in their supermarkets, restaurants and institutions.

If you would like more information on selling to institutions, you may call any of the following INCA members:

Gina Lloyd, IFUEF 641-757-2116

Penny Brown-Huber, Health for Life

515-232-1344

Steve Smith, INCA 641.751-2851



INCA Mission
"To promote relationships among people who are developing sustainable local food sources that are safe and healthy for people, the land and, all creatures."

FROM THE INCA CHAIR...



Our template for planning the annual local food conference continues to be a winner. The 12th Annual Local Food Conference, “Breaking New Ground: Food and Farming for the Future” had over 150 participants with more than 25 students and nearly a third of the crowd attending for the first time. The key is two fold: a local planning committee and moving the conference every year.

INCA is about building capacity, both the individual capacity of our members and local, community capacity. Look for exciting things coming out of this year’s conference in Marshall and surrounding counties. In 2005 we held the conference in Cass County. The local planning committee has continued to “plan,” and in December this group of Cultivators received the second Regional Food System Working Group (RFSWG) grant from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. We are still looking to land the 13th Annual Local Foods Conference, but we are certain that good things will happen for the host community’s food system.



Thank you to everyone who made this year’s conference in Marshalltown such a success. And thank you to all who have contributed in the last 12 years to planning and implementing the Annual Local Food Conference.



Senator Harkin at Pauls Grains Booth



Penny Huber, Matt Russell and Sen. Harkin presenting the Birthday Cake to the Leopold Center; Jerry DeWitt and Rich Pirog

Asparagus and Spring Pea Toss



Prep Time: 10 minutes, Cook Time: 6 minutes, Serves: 6

- 2 lbs. asparagus
- 1 tbsp. sea salt
- 1 c. fresh peas, shelled
- 4 tbsp. Unsalted Butter
- 1/3 c. Parmigiano-Reggiano Cheese, grated
- 2 tsp. lemon zest
- 2 tbsp. fresh mint, minced
- sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Fill a large saucepan half full of water. Add one-tablespoon salt and bring to a boil.

Clean asparagus and break off woody ends. Cut into 1 1/2 inch pieces.

Reduce heat to a simmer. Add asparagus and boil for 2 minutes. Add peas and cook 30 seconds longer.

Drain and place in a bowl. Add butter, cheese, lemon and mint. Toss to coat evenly. Season with salt and pepper

GROW INCA

It seems like every week we see another national news feature on locally grown food. They tout the benefits to health, enjoyment, food safety, security and the environment of buying locally and supporting the small sustainable farms producing and marketing locally.

INCA exists solely to promote this networking of farmers and the folks they grow for. In the last year INCA has helped Iowa communities form local networks, grow farmers markets, and worked to educate Iowans about the opportunities eating locally brings. We help direct information and resources to beginning farmers and experienced farmers alike, and connect them with new friends and new markets. And we are aiding linked communities in planning for regional local food systems. The growing demand is almost overwhelming. Help us to GROW INCA to answer it!

INCA is a 501(c)3 Educational Institution and all gifts are tax deductible

INCA Provides:

- INCA Newsletter
- INCA Website
- INCA Member Listserv
- Summer Field Days

INCA Supports:

- Annual Farmer Workshops
- Local Food System Conference
- Outreach Efforts
- Staff for Coordination/Support

**Begin or Renew
Your Support
Today!**

Suggested Support Level

- | | | | |
|--|------|---|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Full time student | \$10 | <input type="checkbox"/> Group/Business | \$50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual | \$25 | <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor | \$100 |

Name _____

Address _____

Email _____

Phone _____

Check Interests

- Producer
- Consumer
- Organization

Send completed form and check to:
INCA
2934 250th Street
Marshalltown, IA 50158



Iowa Network For
Community Agriculture

FOOD SLEUTH

Local food lessens contamination risk

By MELINDA HEMMELGARN

Published [Wednesday, February 28, 2007](#)

When Dan Looker took the stage this month at the Iowa Network for Community Agriculture meeting in Marshalltown, he held up a bag of ready-to-eat lettuce and called it both a challenge and an opportunity.

Looker, the senior business editor for the online publication of Successful Farming magazine, could have just as easily held up a bag of Dole baby spinach, a jar of ConAgra's Peter Pan or Wal-Mart Great Value peanut butter, a Dole cantaloupe or a 4.5 ounce jar of Earth's Best's Organic Apple Peach Barley Wholesome Breakfast baby food. All have been implicated in recent national food recalls because of possible bacterial contamination with E. coli, salmonella or Clostridium botulinum.

Such widespread recalls cost billions of dollars in lost food sales and damaged brand reputations, not to mention personal health costs and tremendous wasted energy and natural resources - numbers not usually crunched and tallied as part of the tab.

Imagine the waste for a moment: consumers were asked to throw away all jars of Peter Pan peanut butter produced since May 2006. To date, even ConAgra is still assessing the total volume lost. They estimate the cost of the recall at \$50 million to \$60 million. But that only includes the refund and work to recall, retrieve and discard the product - not the total health, environmental or energy costs.

Jennifer Wilkins, a Cornell nutritionist who examined the recent food-borne illnesses associated with spinach and lettuce, warned in the fall that it was unwise to "take all of your salad from the same bowl." Similarly, it's unwise to spread all of our peanut butter from the same jar and eat melons from the same patch.

Looker explained that the \$2.5 billion dollar bagged lettuce industry is controlled by just a handful of businesses in California. All implicated jars of peanut butter were produced at ConAgra's production facility in Sylvester, Ga.

Food production on a grand scale at single facilities that serve the whole nation might make economic sense on some levels - until energy and transportation systems fail, energy costs skyrocket, the environment has to be cleaned up or when contamination threatens public health.

Wilkins recognizes that "smaller, more localized production and processing systems are not immune to contamination." However, if problems do arise, "they're less costly, easier to trace and have less widespread consequences."

In his bag of lettuce, Looker sees an opportunity for local, smaller farmers to "move into that market."

However, for every state to meet more of its own regional food needs, Wilkins said we'd have to bring back local processing and packing facilities that once provided a local market for regional growers - and contributed to thriving rural communities.

Looker said the nation is ready for local. More consumers want fresher, healthier food, and they want to know who produced it.

Casting a glance at his teenage son, Looker said: "The next generation will drive the future and growth of direct sales. Nate and his generation are concerned about the environment."

All generations seem to be waking up to the fact that the ever increasing consolidation and concentration of our food supply might not be the right direction. One need only check the food safety recalls posted regularly by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, many of which don't make national headlines.

Looker knows that one of the most important issues for members of the National Farmers Union is local food production. In fact, the NFU has made it easier for consumers to locate and purchase quality foods from family farms and to help those farms stay viable through its Web site: www.e-cooperatives.com.

With our national farm bill being debated this year, now's the time to speak out and let our legislators know that we want more opportunities to sink our teeth into wholesome, local, safe food.

Melinda Hemmelgarn, M.S., R.D., is a clinical dietitian, advocate for sustainable food systems and 2004-2006 Food and Society Policy Fellow. She lives in Columbia.

Make Iowa the Local Food Capital of the World

By Matt Russell

For over a century, many have dreamed of making Iowa the food capital of the world. More recently the dream has morphed into Iowa as the bio-fuels capital of the world. In February, more than one hundred and fifty enthusiastic participants embraced the challenge, put forth by Br. David Andrews, executive director of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, to make Iowa the local foods capitol of the world. The point is that Iowa has a concentration of agricultural resources that would be hard to find anywhere else in the world, and we would be foolish not to embrace all of the possibilities emerging from the fertile ground between the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. Local foods present some great opportunities that Iowans can develop.

This gathering of farmers, educators, students, health professionals, elected leaders, and those just passionate about eating threw their arms around the excitement and the challenges of the demand for local food. Iowa could very well lead this country in developing the vision and infrastructure for reconnecting farms and tables. We certainly were making a run for it in Marshalltown at our 12th Annual Local Food Conference. Participants spent the first half of the conference sharing insights with a host of national, state, and local elected leaders.

While the morning dialogue surfaced many great ideas, several themes seemed to hold these ideas together and provide some exciting opportunities to focus INCA's work.

- People share tremendous optimism and hope that we can shape a bright future for agriculture by focusing some attention on local food production and sales.
- Iowa desperately needs new Iowa farmers. Young Iowans, returning Iowans, new Iowans from other parts of the globe, and women provide bountiful opportunities for growing new Iowa farms. We must be more intentional about making sure that Iowa has new farmers.
- There is a hunger for education about local foods in schools, on farms, around kitchen tables, and with elected leaders. Those involved with INCA are well positioned to provide this resource.
- Local foods can provide real benefits for childhood nutrition especially when coupled with public programs like the School Lunch Program and WIC.
- We have a great need to build linkages and develop connections such as dialogue among state departments (Economic Development, Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Public Health, Education), coordination among bureaucrats for processing (DNR, Meat and Poultry, Inspections and Appeals), partnerships among health facilities, schools, agricultural organizations, and organizations serving new Iowans, and of course bridge building between rural and urban Iowa.
- We must preserve and expand our ability to process Iowa foods, especially in developing smaller scale technologies and encouraging farmer cooperation.

Participants at the conference surfaced big concerns but also offered concrete solutions. INCA is pursuing a number of these solutions.

Senator Tom Harkin, Chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee and leading the charge on this year's new farm bill, challenged us to provide some focused ideas for local food systems. Following the conference, INCA leaders and leaders of other organizations met with Harkin's staff to offer ideas about building infrastructure for local foods and providing more local foods to Iowa school children. INCA board and staff have also followed up with meetings with Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey about opportunities that local foods provide for beginning farmers in general and for new Iowans in particular. Iowa can provide exceptional leadership for growing local food systems to make Iowa the local food capital of the world.

And why is all of this so important? Lora Friest, the Northeast Iowa RC&D coordinator shared that she had been with fellow coordinators from around the country and someone from Florida said that it is so vitally important for Iowa to figure out how to do local food because as Iowa goes, so goes American agriculture. So if having all of these agricultural riches isn't enough, add to the list an expectation that we figure this out.

FOOD SLEUTH

Ivins' legacy feeds social awareness

By MELINDA HEMMELGARN

Published [Wednesday, February 14, 2007](#)

You might wonder why on a recent sub-zero-with-wind-chill day, I decided to drive north into the even more frozen state of Iowa. One reason: the Iowa Network for Community Agriculture, or INCA, annual conference. I wanted to reconnect with friends I'd made at last year's meeting, hear Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, speak about the 2007 Farm Bill, and meet the students, faculty and the chef from Grinnell College, who successfully brought local foods to their campus dining services. I welcomed the long drive to Marshalltown as an opportunity to let my mind wander. I ended up thinking about Molly Ivins - the outspoken, courageous and irreplaceable newspaper columnist who passed away last month after losing her battle with breast cancer.

Ivins, a political satirist and populist, was known for her sharp wit, biting commentary and for nicknaming President George W. Bush "Shrub." She wrote that our food-safety problems, including mad cow disease, E. coli-contaminated spinach and biotechnology's "genetic pollution," are "profoundly political" - the result of special interests, hefty agribusiness and food industry campaign contributions, greed and "bone-headed stupidity." In her unique Texas-speak, Ivins brought readers behind the scenes to understand how corrupted government agencies influence the food we eat.

If Ivins were alive, and if she lived in Iowa, I bet she would have attended the INCA meeting. In 2004, Ivins praised Harkin's attempts to restore the overtime pay of middle-class workers. She would have been equally pleased to hear about his tireless efforts to remove junk food from schools, link agriculture policy with health and promote conservation.

Surely Ivins would have applauded Denise O'Brien, too. She's the organic dairy farmer who received a standing ovation for her impressive, close run for Iowa secretary of agriculture, despite her shoestring budget.

Ivins hoped to move people who say, "Oh, I just don't care much about politics," to become active citizens. INCA is the perfect example of grass-roots politics in action.

INCA formed in 1995 after a group of farmers, gardeners and consumers started asking questions, such as: Why are fewer farms growing and selling food, and why aren't more people complaining? They wondered whether Grandma's handmade strawberry-rhubarb pie had to be a thing of the past. Was rural community and family farm decline really inevitable?

INCA's strength lies in its leadership and members' vision: "To promote relationships among people who are developing sustainable local food sources that are safe and healthy for people, all creatures and the land."

Our relationships with people and the environment are central to our sense of fulfillment and explain the recent surge in popularity of farmers markets. INCA members understand that local food production is key to revitalizing rural economies, restoring communities and improving public health.

INCA conference planners wouldn't dream of serving a lunch of fast or processed foods that had to travel hundreds of miles. Their "All Iowa Potluck" is an INCA meeting tradition. Attendees each bring a dish that will serve at least six people. This year's crock-pot parade included lamb steaks and stew, pumpkin ravioli, black-bean and white-chicken chili, plus whole-grain sourdough breads, squash pie, apple pie and organic lemon custard - all homemade and washed down with fresh-pressed apple cider and coffee with cream from an organic Iowa dairy.

Did I mention I really attended the INCA conference because of the food?

In a tribute column to Ivins, Creators Syndicate editor Anthony Zurcher wrote: "Molly wasn't the type of woman who would want us to grieve. More likely she'd want us to 'hang in there, keep fightin' for freedom, raise more hell and don't forget to laugh, too.' "

That's why I made the trek to Iowa: to join the movement to keep small- and mid-sized farmers on the land; to fight for their freedom to farm in an environmentally responsible, economically viable and humane way; and to share delicious local food and laughter.

Melinda Hemmelgarn, M.S., R.D., is a clinical dietitian, advocate for sustainable food systems and 2004-2006 Food and Society Policy Fellow. She lives in Columbia.

INCA MEMBER PROFILE—PAUL'S GRAINS

Pioneers in Organic Farming

The early 1960s found Wayne and Betty Paul working hard to make a living from their central Iowa farm. Wayne had graduated from Iowa State University with a degree in agriculture and was now eagerly implementing chemical farming methods on the 160 acres south of Laurel, IA, which he had purchased in 1959.

Then everything changed. A friend introduced Wayne and Betty to the concept of chemical-free farming, using healthy fertilizers and natural techniques for weed and insect control. Deciding to give it a try, Wayne stopped using chemicals...and thus he became one of the brave pioneers in what was to be known as the organic farming movement.

As Wayne and Betty, with help from their four growing children, learned more about chemical-free farming, they became more and more convinced that it was the best method of raising food. Wayne began to look into grinding some of the grains into flour and cereal, starting out with basic [cornmeal](#), [oatmeal](#), and [whole wheat flour](#). As people found out about these items, the family started raising a larger variety of grains and offering more products. Soon the unique [7-Grain Cereal](#), [7-Grain Flour](#), and [7-Grain Pancake Mix](#) recipes were developed -- three items that continue to remain best-sellers.



Sen. Harkin takes time at the INCA Local Foods Conference in Marshalltown to sample Paul's Grains from Laurel, IA

Maintaining the Legacy

Wayne and Betty continued to play an active role in the farming and business until 2006. Their second son, Steve, along with his wife and six children, live on the farm and continue to work in the business they've grown up with. Paul's Grains is definitely an old-fashioned, family-operated business...big enough to have what you're looking for, but not too big to lose that personal touch.

Paul's Grains products are available for purchase on their website www.paulsgrains.com, and they attend a number of local craft shows, conventions, and farmer's markets. If you're ever in central Iowa, give them a call and visit their farm. They have a small store, open by appointment (whenever they're home!), and would be delighted to show you around. They are thankful for God's faithfulness over the years, and that they are able to continue sharing nutritious grains with people around the world. You can contact Paul's Grains at 2475-B 340th St. Laurel, IA 50141-9513 and by phone at (641) 476-3373.



Iowa Network For
Community Agriculture
www.growinca.org

INCA can also be found on
the Local Harvest website,
www.localharvest.org.

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