

2014 Recommendations

From the Johnson County Food Policy Council

June 2014

Background:

The Johnson County Food Policy Council is charged by the Johnson County Board of Supervisors to provide the Supervisor's policy recommendations that aim to strengthen our community food system. Last year, the Council provided several general recommendations for the county to reduce obstacles for farming in Johnson County, to promote local food and to adapt the county's land use plan. This year, the Council's recommendations serve to provide specific actions the Board of Supervisors can take to strengthen our community food system by giving new farmers access to land, increasing resources to citizens and by creating a stronger market for food grown in Johnson County.

General food system information & definitions from the Iowa Department of Public Health:

A **food system** includes all processes and infrastructure involved in feeding a population: growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, transporting, marketing, consumption, and disposal of food and food-related items.

A **foodshed** is a geographic region in which there is a flow of food from where it is grown to a place where it is consumed. This also includes the land on which it is grown, the routes it travels, the markets it passes through and ultimately the tables on which it is served. A food shed is similar to a watershed in that foodsheds outline the flow of food feeding a particular population, whereas watersheds outline the flow of water draining to a particular location.

A **community food system** is a food system in which food production, transformation, distribution, consumption, and waste management are interconnected to enhance the human, environmental, social and economic health of a particular geographic area. A community food system can refer to a neighborhood, town, city, county, region or bioregion. Community food systems may be used interchangeably with "local" or "regional" food systems. However, "community" places an emphasis on strengthening existing (or developing new) relationships between all components and stakeholders of the food system. Approaching food systems from a community lens offers a framework of sustainability- the capacity of being maintained over the long term while meeting the needs of the present without jeopardizing the ability to meet the needs of future generations. A food system also includes the inputs needed and outputs generated at each of these steps. A food system operates within and is influenced by social, political, economic, and environmental contexts. It also requires human resources that provide labor, research, and education.

Sectors of a community food system include:

- Production
- Processing
- Procurement
- Consumption

- Waste Management

Supporting the community food system also brings many economic benefits to the area. Currently, most of our food dollars go toward businesses in other states and countries. By buying local, more food dollars will stay in the county. Local farmers and businesses will use local food dollars to expand their businesses, hire employees and pay taxes.

For more information on community food systems, read “Healthy Food, Healthy Iowans, Healthy Communities: Public Health Tools to Advance Healthy, Sustainable Food Systems” by the Iowa Department of Public Health, August 2013.

The 2014 recommendations from the Johnson County Food Policy Council focus on actions the county can take to strengthen our community food system, as defined above.

1. In order to strengthen our regional food system by encouraging and supporting new farmers in Johnson County, the Johnson County Board of Supervisors shall work to define & recognize fruit, vegetable and grain farmers who own less than 40 acres of land.
2. As a way to encourage Johnson County residents to grow more of their own food, to better understand where their food comes from & also to use county resources towards supporting local food and farmers, we recommend the Johnson County Board of Supervisors empower the Food Policy Council to create a special task force to research the viability of transforming the County Poor Farm into a showcase for Johnson County Community Food efforts. Community stakeholders would be invited to participate by serving on the task force. The task force would explore the potential for the County Poor Farm to become (1) a community food resource center, (2) a demonstration garden, (3) a model sustainable farm, (4) an event center; (5) an offering of 2-5 acre plots to new farmers, (6) and contain edible landscaping along already envisioned walking trails, (7) a home gardening resource center and (8) other viable ideas. The task force would also explore whether the space could be used for events, meetings, picnics and celebrations for the public.
3. Research shows that children who try vegetables and fruits at a young age are more likely to eat them throughout their lifetime. To encourage kids in Johnson County to learn where their food comes from, eat more vegetables and fruits and to learn to garden, the Johnson County Board of Supervisors shall seek ways to support the work of the Farm to School Chapters in Johnson County school districts when requested.
4. In order to promote local farmers, healthier eating and local economic development efforts, the Johnson County Board of Supervisors shall seek ways to support the creation

of a local food label to market food grown in Johnson County and join forces with Linn County and other contiguous counties interested in working together on a regional effort.

5. The Johnson County Board of Supervisors shall adopt policies that encourage new farmers, organic food production, crop diversification and new forms of soil and water conservation by providing property tax rebates to encourage these activities. The Johnson County Board of Supervisors shall:
- a) Adopt a similar policy that Woodbury County, Iowa adopted in 2006 that provides a property tax rebate on land that is certified organic for 15 years, including the first three as a transition to organic certification
 - b) Create a policy that provides a property tax rebate on land operated by a beginning farmer for up to 5 years
 - c) Create a policy that provides an annual property tax rebate to a farmer who diversifies at least 15% of their total certified crop acres to 4 or more crops up to 10 years.
 - d) Create a policy that provides an annual property tax rebate to a farmer, for up to 10 years, who implements conservation practices, such as a soil quality improvement crop, on at least 55% of their total certified crop acres that results in a loss of 3 tons or less of topsoil per year based on the soil conditioning index.

The tax break will cost very little to the county however, will demonstrate loud and clear the support Johnson County Board of Supervisors has for locally grown organically certified food, new farmers, crop diversification and conservation. The total amount of tax rebates offered shall equal a minimum of \$100,000.00 total per fiscal year the first two years with an increase each year thereafter based on demand and county resources.

6. In order to enhance the economic viability of Johnson County farmers and to allow local farmers to process meat and poultry on farm as allowed by the IA Dept. of Agriculture and Land Stewardship's Meat and Poultry Inspection Bureau, the Johnson County Board of Supervisors shall adopt the following:

A: That Johnson County amends its Unified Development Ordinance to allow for poultry processing on farms in the county subject to the following conditions:

- Farms that fall under the exemptions of the Federal Poultry Products Inspection Act be allowed to conduct business "by right" in Johnson County in A zoning districts as an accessory use;
- Farms that do not meet the exemptions of the Federal Poultry Products Inspection Act must meet all the conditions of a conditional use permit;

- The applicant must comply with all Poultry Processing Requirements of the Poultry Act administered by the IA Dept. of Agriculture and Land Stewardship's Meat and Poultry Inspection Bureau;

B: That Johnson County amends its Unified Development Ordinance to allow for meat processing on farms in the county subject to the following conditions:

- Farms that process 30 or less livestock other than poultry be allowed to conduct business "by right" in Johnson County;
- Farms that process more than 30 livestock other than poultry must meet all the conditions of a conditional use permit;
- Farms that would like to process any livestock must comply with the Meat Processing Requirements administered by the IA Dept. of Agriculture and Land Stewardship's Meat and Poultry Inspection Bureau;

C: That Johnson County amends its Unified Development Ordinance to allow for mobile slaughter units on farms in the county subject to the following conditions:

- Mobile slaughter units are allowed "by right" to operate in Johnson County under the inspection of the IA Dept. of Agriculture and Land Stewardship's Meat and Poultry Inspection Bureau;
- The property containing the processing facility will continue to be taxed as agriculture property.