

March 2010

# A HEALTHY SEASONAL LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM PLAN

for the IOWA CORRIDOR FOOD & AGRICULTURE COALITION



Developing strategic partnerships to revitalize a local food system within the Iowa Corridor Region



A corridor that embraces local foods in a diversified and environmentally conscious agricultural community; serving as a hub for a revitalized regional food system



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# introduction

Many would agree that whenever they hear the phrase, “local food system” they think of the local farmer; and the vegetables they may sell at the farmers’ market. If you asked a farmer what the definition of the local food system is, he or she would tell you that they are not the only players in the chain of activities your food passes through from field to fork. The local food system also includes butchers, millers, truck drivers, local grocers, and the community that supports them in all their efforts (Larsen).

A food system is defined as the chain of activities connecting food production, processing, distribution, marketing, access, consumption, and waste management. It includes the diverse agriculture system that produces our food, our natural resource base and our people who live and work in the region. The food system is a diverse and complex system that everyone of us participates in. As a eater do you consider every other piece of the food system: the farmer in the production sector, the person who slaughters the pig for your ham sandwich or the garbage collector who collects your trash each week? Our food system is deeply integrated into our daily lives and the activities of the communities where we live.

This local food system plan is a result of multiple organizations and partners in Linn and Johnson counties who created a Task Force to identify issues in the local food system and develop a strategic food system plan to address them. The Linn-Johnson Local Food Task Force’s mission was to develop strategic partnerships to revitalize a local food system within the Corridor. Their vision describes the Corridor as a place that embraces local foods in a diversified and environmentally conscious agricultural community; serving as a hub for a revitalized regional food system.



The diverse group of organizations, agencies, and community members that developed the Task Force identified the need to revitalize the Corridor as the hub of the region’s food system. The Corridor is the 2nd fastest growing region in Iowa that is occupied by a diverse number of communities including the cities of Iowa City and Cedar Rapids. As the Task Force developed the strategic plan they realized though that in order to achieve their vision as a hub for the regional food system they needed to develop a regional coalition across counties.

This coalition has recently been named the Iowa Corridor Food and Agriculture Coalition when it was established as a Iowa Regional Food Systems Working Group by the ISU Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. This coalition reaches to every arable acre and community within our region. At the core of the region is Linn and Johnson Counties, surrounded by the foundation of the region; Iowa, Benton, Tama, Poweshiek, Washington, Cedar, and Jones counties.

*Larsen, Steph. “It takes a community to sustain a small farm.” Jan. 2010. Grist 7 Jan. 2010. <http://www.grist.org/article/2010-01-05-it-takes-a-community-to-sustain-a-small-farm>.*

## the issues

In 2007, the Task Force began researching and identified the following issues in the local food system. This list of issues is by no means a complete list nor is it a static list. This list will need to be annually reviewed and adjusted based on the current issues that face the local food system in the Corridor Region.

- There are not enough local food producers.
- The industrialization of food production has destroyed the formerly vibrant food networking and processing facilities as well as the social and cultural heritage of producing local food in the region.
- Environmental concerns, such as urban sprawl and Iowa's strong emphasis on bio fuel production, are growing pressures which negatively impact local food producers, and local governmental entities.
- Food insecurity has risen throughout the state and in the region, particularly among the poor, the elderly and children,.
- Food safety is an issue of concern to all residents.
- There are growing health concerns in the region, particularly in regard to obesity (60.2% of Linn County adults are now classified as obese).
- There is limited, to no, meat processing, fruit and vegetable processing or dairy processing in the region.
- Residents surveyed supported an expanded local food system, particularly a winter farmer's market, a more diverse selection of local food products, and an emphasis on organic production.
- There is a need for more food producers, for mentoring young producers, and for providing producers with financial and governmental support, including efforts to improve the availability of labor.
- There is an education component regarding the various benefits of local food production lacking.

# the problems

A local food system can be defined as the chain of activities connecting food production, processing, distribution, marketing, access, consumption, and waste management, and includes the diverse agricultural system that produces our food; the region's natural resource base; and the people that live and work in the region.

In the last five years there have been numerous positive changes in the Linn-Johnson local food system. From surveys of consumers it has been determined that there is an enormous demand for a diverse selection of locally grown foods year around, including milk, cheese, grains, legumes, and much more. The rise of chronic diseases and many health concerns, including obesity, have placed more pressure on meeting the demand for healthy locally grown food products.

It is best to describe the problems and issues that are present today in the local food system in seven problem statements that correlate with the seven sectors of the food system.

## **Problem Statement 1:**

The strength of the production link of the food system has a significant effect on the other links in the chain of activities. The lack of local food producers limits the ability to fulfill the enormous demand for locally grown food. The lack of producers is partially because there is a limited amount of social and cultural heritage of growing food today in our communities. This heritage is missing because of a lack of mentoring and support for beginning farmers and networking amongst the existing farmers. Continual education and training is not easily accessible in schools or from other venues. The loss of farmland because of urban sprawl, and the high cost of land prices place an enormous constraint on beginning farmers. Concern over food safety and limited processing infrastructure reduces the feasibility of many local food production enterprises.

## **Problem Statement 2:**

The processing link of the food system is mostly impacted by the lack of processing infrastructure. There is limited meat, fruit and vegetable and dairy processing capacity within the regional food system. Concerns over food safety and the complex food safety regulations limit the ability for small scale local food enterprises to be feasible and profitable. The lack of knowledge of food preparation and preservation has limited the idea of a local culture that includes a diet of locally produced food.

## **Problem Statement 3:**

The strength of the distribution link of the food system is highly interrelated with the demand, production capacity, and price structures of locally produced food. In the purchasing and distribution industries of the food system budgeting processes and profit margins tremendously impact the distribution of locally produced food in the local food system. Lastly food safety concerns, warehousing and quantity play a role in the distribution of locally produced food.

## **Problem Statement 4:**

The marketing link of the food system is impacted by the enormous demand for locally-produced foods. The minor amount of marketing of locally grown food has reduced the ability of eaters to identify locally grown food and to be self-empowered to search out for it in the region's

local food system. It is very important that both food insecure and food secure consumers are educated about what is locally grown food, where to purchase it, how to access it and how to prepare and preserve it. It has been difficult to market locally grown food without focusing on the intrinsic differences in taste and quality compared to conventional sourced food products.

**Problem Statement 5:**

The access link of the food system is impacted by the growing issue of food insecurity among the poor, elderly and children. The USDA defines food security as a household with access by all members at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food security includes the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, with an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways. One of the issues of food insecurity is the lack of knowledge about these populations to improve the accessibility of locally grown food. Since lack of access to healthy, locally grown food is a large problem, there are increasing health concerns within those populations that are food insecure.

**Problem statement 6:**

The consumption link of the food system involves the home kitchen and food eateries, and includes what type of food is consumed and how it is prepared. The consumption link of the food system has been highly impacted by the social and culturally acceptable forms of preparing and eating, that our society has developed in the last 70 years. The loss of a local food culture and its traditions has reduced the accessibility and transparency of nutrition and diet education that is available to consumers today. The inability to understand and access this knowledge has diminished the ability for most consumers to be able to actively regulate their personal nutrition and diet. The lack of knowledge of cooking and meal preparation has also been lost with our traditions and local food culture. The depressing result of this new food culture is the increasing numbers of chronic diseases and other health conditions in addition to food insecurity.

**Problem statement 7:**

The waste management link of the food system completes the entire system and creates a closed loop. This link is usually described as the three “r’s” reduce, reuse, and recycle. However, in our food system food waste is a large portion of the organic waste stream that is not being recycled, reused, or reduced. This is in part because of a lack of knowledge of how to compost food waste and its societal acceptance. A large reason why food waste is so large is a result of our culture’s inability to control meal portions. A result of this is a lot of food being wasted and thrown away. As populations continue to grow and urban sprawl continues this issue will only become larger. Much of the possible solutions of composting and recycling the nutrients back into the production link of the food system have been halted by concerns of food safety. Many municipalities and waste management companies have met low thresholds that cannot be surpassed without passing through slow permitting processes.

## recommendations

Revitalizing the Region into a place that embraces local foods in a diversified and environmentally conscious agricultural community; serving as the hub for the revitalized regional food system requires the development of strategic partnerships amongst many different stakeholders. The process of creating this plan has initiated collaboration amongst different sectors of the local food system but requires the establishment of a food policy council to continue the implementation of the strategic plan.

In order to sustain the implementation of the Strategic Food System Plan the Linn-Johnson Local Food Task Force recommended the establishment of a **collaborative Regional Food Policy Council**. The Food Policy Council would be a committed and wide ranging group of community members ranging from every sector of the food system.

### What is “food policy”?

A food policy is any decision made by a government agency, business, or organization which effects how food is produced, processed, distributed, purchased, accessed, consumed, and recycled. This includes the types of foods consumers have access to, information available pertaining to place of origin, and the rules and regulations which influence many aspects of farming.

### Examples of food policies include:

- A decision by school officials whether to purchase foods raised by local farmers;
- Regulations for selling raw milk to consumers;
- The eligibility standards that allow low-income residents to participate in food assistance programs;
- The regulatory health and safety requirements for food based businesses;
- Food ingredient labeling;
- The percentage of a food ingredient which qualifies a food product as being “organic”.

### What can a Food Policy Council do that is not already being done in government?

- Food Policy Councils can address a variety of issues not normally examined or implemented from within government.
- Food Policy Councils convene individuals and government agencies which do not typically work directly with each other nor are they asked to be involved when farm and agricultural policy is discussed.
- Food Policy Councils can examine issues which often go unexamined; such as the effectiveness of food assistance programs and the causes of hunger in a society.
- Food Policy Councils can enter into a more comprehensive approach to analyzing food system issues which recognizes the inner-workings between different parts of the food system and the need for coordination and integration of actions if policy goals are to be achieved. For example, if a key objective is to increase markets for locally produced food, a Council can play a role in considering how decisions at all levels of a food system- not just farmers or governmental officials- but also food buyers, wholesalers, retailers, and consumers factor into public policy decisions.

### What purpose do Food Policy Councils serve?

Food Policy Councils can play the role of a “neutral” non-partisan forum to convene multiple

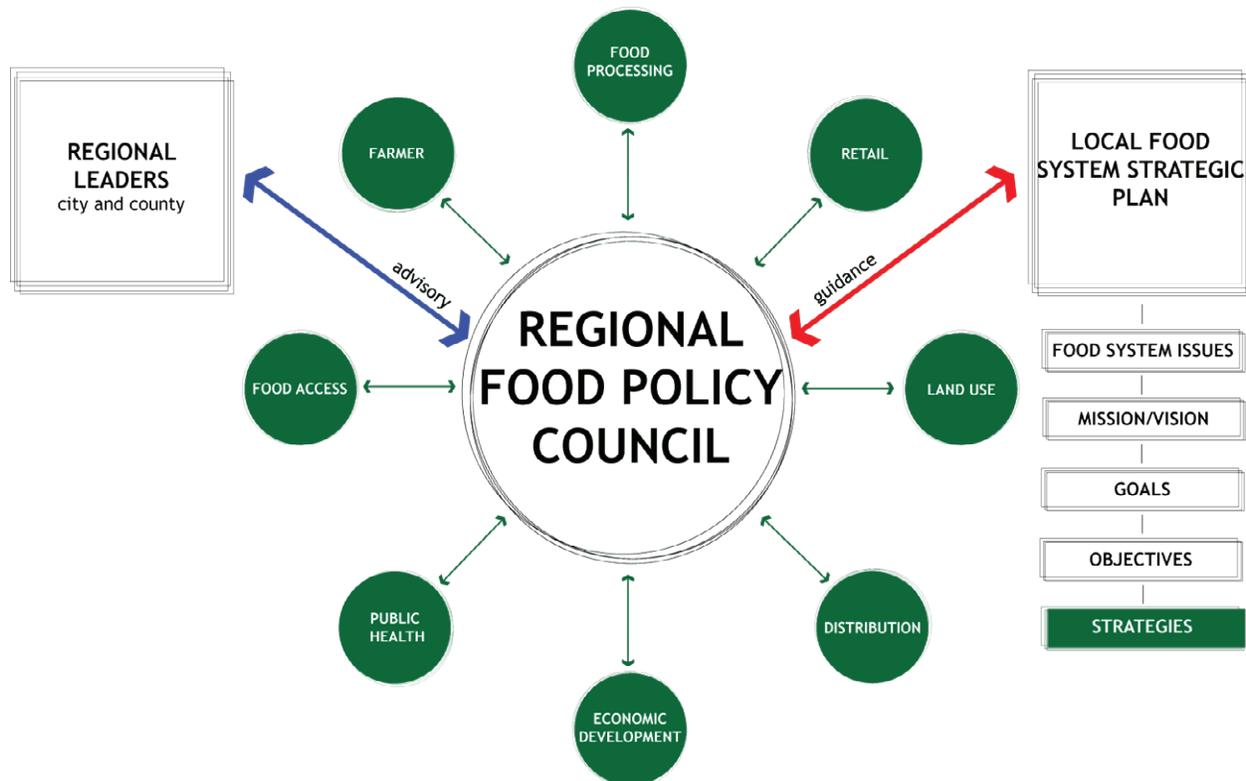
stakeholders in a food system. For this reason, many FPC's become "food system specialists" and become a valuable resource for developing an economically, environmentally and socially productive food system locally.

### How would the Food Policy Council be established?

It is recommended that the Food Policy Council to be established by resolution in each county. The graphic below would represent the Food Policy Council's organizational structure. By establishing a FPC it would formalize the implementation of the Strategic Food System Plan. The FPC would be established as an advisory council to the leaders in each county and other supporting stakeholders. The FPC would be coordinated by a full time coordinator. This full time coordinator would provide the leadership for the FPC while working to achieve the tasks set before them.

### Some of the tasks of the FPC would include:

- Developing strategic partnerships to ensure the achievement of the six goals of the plan;
- Providing a public forum to discuss food related topics of concern to the region;
- Advising city and county departments, agencies, businesses and organizations on food system concerns;
- Identifying additional financial support to ensure the implementation of the long term plan;
- Evaluating and updating the list of top 10 issues in the local food system every two years; and
- Conducting the hiring of additional staff of the FPC



# the local food system plan

**goal 1:** Ensure the viability of existing and beginning farmers and local food entrepreneurs that market products in the local food system

**objective 1.1:** Encourage and support the expansion of the local food system

**strategy 1.11:** Establish a low interest small business loan program **winter 2011**

**strategy 1.12:** Establish financial incentives to encourage new local food enterprises **fall 2011**

**objective 1.2:** Establish training and education programs for beginning and existing farmers

**strategy 1.21:** Establish a Education & Training Grant Program **winter 2010**

**strategy 1.22:** Develop a resource guide of services offered by organizations for new and existing producers **summer 2010**

**strategy 1.23:** Develop a series of workshops for both existing and beginning producers **fall 2010**

**strategy 1.24:** Establish training and education centers **fall 2011**

**objective 1.3:** Establish new labor and volunteer pools for local food production

**strategy 1.31:** Establish a farm jobs program with the Iowa Workforce Center to match up farm workers with local producers **winter 2010**

**strategy 1.32:** Establish a local WWOOF Network *World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms* **winter 2010**

**objective 1.4:** Establish a mentoring program for new beginning farmers and local food entrepreneurs

**strategy 1.41:** Develop a program with local farmers and land owners to develop mentoring farms **spring 2011**

**objective 1.5:** Increase the accessibility to inputs and resources related to food production

**strategy 1.51:** Develop a guide of resources **summer 2010**

**strategy 1.52:** Make equipment and material resources available for local small specialty producers **summer 2011**

**strategy 1.53:** Establish a land bank that can be used for local food production by beginning producers **fall 2011**

**strategy 1.54:** Establish producer equipment co-ops **spring 2012**

**objective 1.6:** Achieve local policies and regulations to support the local food system chain of activities

- strategy 1.61:** Develop a local typology of agriculture that defines each sector of agriculture **winter 2010**
  - strategy 1.62:** Identify policy & regulatory barriers and propose solutions **winter 2010**
  - strategy 1.63:** Establish new development codes that encourage and protect existing and future food and agriculture production **summer 2011**
  - strategy 1.64:** Establish food safety regulations that are scaled for small scale fruit, vegetable, grains and legumes, meat, and dairy processing **summer 2011**
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**goal 2:** Increase the availability of healthy seasonal locally grown food

**objective 2.1:** Increase urban agriculture

- strategy 2.11:** Conduct an inventory of underutilized parcels in the region **spring 2011**
- strategy 2.12:** Prioritize inventoried sites for commercial food production and community gardens based on a specified criteria **spring 2011**

**objective 2.2:** Establish education and support programs for residents who want to garden

- strategy 2.21:** Create workshops related to organic and sustainable ways of gardening **spring 2010**
- strategy 2.22:** Create new community gardens **winter 2011**
- strategy 2.23:** Establish a Community Agriculture Center in both Linn and Johnson Counties **fall 2011**

**objective 2.3:** Extend the local growing season utilizing low input indoor production techniques

- strategy 2.31:** Establish a set of workshops that provide demonstration of season extension techniques **fall 2010**
- strategy 2.32:** Establish a hoophouse, greenhouse, aquaponics and aquaculture production model locally **spring 2011**

**objective 2.4:** Increase the user friendliness of WIC coupons and other food assistance coupons at grocery stores, farmers markets, and food pantries

- strategy 2.41:** Provide local training in food assistance programs to grocers, vendors, farmers' markets, etc. **fall 2010**

<b>strategy 2.42:</b> Establish new WIC/SNAP authorized food stores	<b>summer 2011</b>
<b>strategy 2.43:</b> Advocate that food assistance programs have stronger limits on requiring healthy food choices with food assistance funds	<b>winter 2012</b>
<b>objective 2.5:</b> Establish networking programs amongst organizations, institutions, agencies, and non-profits who are invested in food insecurity	
<b>strategy 2.51:</b> Continue the growth of Hunger Free Networks in the region	<b>summer 2010</b>
<b>objective 2.6:</b> Establish programs to ensure low income families access to healthy local food.	
<b>strategy 2.61:</b> Establish programs that purchase scholarships and/or sponsorships for lower income families	<b>spring 2011</b>
<b>objective 2.7:</b> Establish local food distribution programs to ensure access to healthy local food	
<b>strategy 2.71:</b> Create a Resource Guide identifying local food buying cooperatives	<b>winter 2010</b>
<b>strategy 2.72:</b> Establish a “Local Food on Wheels” program with Meals on Wheels	<b>summer 2011</b>

**goal 3:** Increase the infrastructure that forms the foundation of the local food system

<b>objective 3.1:</b> Enable more on-farm processing	
<b>strategy 3.11:</b> Conduct a feasibility study for mobile and on farm processing units	<b>winter 2010-2011</b>
<b>objective 3.2:</b> Establish partnerships with city and county departments and local realtors to conduct an inventory of vacant and for sale real estate	
<b>strategy 3.21:</b> Conduct a feasibility study of available real estate to develop local processing incubators	<b>winter 2012</b>
<b>objective 3.3:</b> Establish community supported kitchens in schools, churches, and other community kitchens	
<b>strategy 3.31:</b> Conduct an inventory and needs analysis of all semi-public certified kitchens	<b>spring 2011</b>
<b>objective 3.4:</b> Establish an Agricultural Incubator Park	
<b>strategy 3.41:</b> Establish a partnership with Hawkeye Steel to develop a food processing line of equipment	<b>winter 2011</b>
<b>strategy 3.42:</b> Conduct a feasibility study for a agricultural incubator park in the Corridor	<b>winter 2012</b>

**goal 4:** Strengthen the local food marketing campaign and ensure access to healthy seasonal and affordable food

**objective 4.1:** Establish new marketing and sales opportunities for producers and consumers

- strategy 4.11:** Conduct a feasibility study for new buying clubs, food cooperatives, and other business models **spring 2010**
- strategy 4.12:** Implement the Iowa Valley Food Coop **fall 2010**
- strategy 4.13:** Implement CSAs into employee benefit packages or gym memberships **winter 2010**
- strategy 4.14:** Implement neighborhood buying clubs to foster community development **spring 2011**

**objective 4.2:** Establish new regional aggregation centers

- strategy 4.21:** Conduct an inventory and search for underutilized or vacant properties for regional aggregation centers **fall 2011**

**objective 4.3:** Encourage purchasing of local food (ex: retirement homes, churches, restaurants, nursing homes, hospitals, schools, grocers and other businesses)

- strategy 4.31:** Establish a producer directory **summer 2010**
- strategy 4.32:** Create a Corridor Seasonal Cookbook including recipes and tips for handling and storage **fall 2010**
- strategy 4.33:** Establish consumer education campaigns **winter 2011**
- strategy 4.34:** Create grocery lists for meals that grocers could provide to their customers **winter 2011**
- strategy 4.35:** Establish an annual Local Farm & Food Expo for producers, retailers, and distributors **winter 2011**
- strategy 4.36:** Create a Healthy Food Retailers program to incentivise the sale of healthier food choices **spring 2012**

**objective 4.4:** Establish a regional local food labeling system

- strategy 4.41:** Establish a Corridor Buy Fresh Buy Local Chapter **summer 2010**
- strategy 4.42:** Establish and purchase a statewide packaging system with Buy Fresh Buy Local to create consistent statewide packaging to identify Iowa produced products **winter 2011**
- strategy 4.43:** Establish a regional label to identify locally grown and processed food **summer 2012**
- strategy 4.44:** Establish a local food system check-off program to fund regional food marketing campaigns **summer 2012**

**objective 4.5:** Establish school and neighborhood fundraising programs with orchards and farms

**strategy 4.51:** Establish a neighborhood fundraising program with an orchard to order lugs of apples **fall 2010**

**objective 4.6:** Expand local farmers markets

**strategy 4.61:** Develop year around markets in Cedar Rapids & Iowa City **winter 2011**

**strategy 4.62:** Implement small farmers' markets in new neighborhoods **spring 2011**

**strategy 4.63:** Establish a farmers' market at a local business or within a neighborhood **spring 2011**

**objective 4.7:** Create local food purchasing incentive programs aimed at consumers

**strategy 4.71:** Create a Corridor local food coupon booklet **fall 2010**

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**goal 5:** Increase the knowledge and understanding of food purchasing, preparation and preservation amongst consumers

**objective 5.1:** Establish a comprehensive education curriculum about the various benefits of local food at various levels of education

**strategy 5.11:** Provide curriculum training for local educators **fall 2010**

**strategy 5.12:** Provide a local food system curriculum into schools **spring 2011**

**strategy 5.13:** Advocate for an agriculture curriculum to be created statewide **winter 2011**

**objective 5.2:** Increase the education about the real cost of food

**strategy 5.21:** Develop brochures, posters, pamphlets, etc. **fall 2010**

**objective 5.3:** Establish programs that promote healthy eating and exercise

**strategy 5.31:** Promote the use of ISU extension's Spend Smart/Eat Smart online system **winter 2010**

**strategy 5.32:** Develop TV ads explaining healthy eating and exercising **spring 2011**

**objective 5.4:** Establish an education campaign to empower consumers food choices

**strategy 5.41:** Establish workshops on safe processing, preserving and preparing of food **fall 2010**

**strategy 5.42:** Develop a campaign about smart food purchasing **spring 2011**

**objective 5.5:** Establish events and programs related to local food production

**strategy 5.51:** Organize and hold Local Farmer & CSA Fairs in the region **spring 2010**

**strategy 5.52:** Hold seasonal local food tours **winter 2011**

**objective 5.6:** Increase social/cultural interactions related to food production, processing and consumption

**strategy 5.61:** Publish a calendar of events **summer 2010**

**strategy 5.62:** Develop seasonal eating workshops **fall 2010**

**strategy 5.63:** Develop a series of local food events based on each agriculture season **spring 2011**

**strategy 5.64:** Hold a local food and agriculture county fair **summer 2015**

**objective 5.7:** Establish a partnership with a local news media station

**strategy 5.71:** Establish a weekly local food program **summer 2011**

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**goal 6:** Ensure the recycling, reuse and reduction of waste as nutrients in the local food system

**objective 6.1:** Establish a education curriculum about the various benefits of at home composting

**strategy 6.12:** Establish a educational booth at local farmers' markets on composting **summer 2010**

**objective 6.2:** Provide a series of home composting workshops in the Corridor

**strategy 6.21:** Establish community composting areas in parks to create education and demonstration sites for workshops **summer 2011**

**objective 6.3:** Increase urban agriculture within our communities to improve the ability to recycle and reuse nutrients

**strategy 6.31:** Establish community compost programs so that urban farmers and gardeners have access to nutrient rich compost **spring 2012**

**objective 6.4:** Develop an education campaign on food waste reduction and portion control

**strategy 6.41:** Provide signage about food waste measurements for dining centers to use

**fall 2010**

**strategy 6.42:** Create an awareness campaign about food packaging waste and better purchasing practices

**spring 2011**

**objective 6.5:** Establish new codes/permits to increase the ability to compost food waste in our communities

**strategy 6.51:** Acquire permits for municipal food waste composting

**spring 2011**

**strategy 6.52:** Implement municipal curbside composting programs

**fall 2012**

## conclusion and final comments

As the coordinator of the Task Force and a member of the local food system, as a farmer and eater, I would like to thank each member of the Task Force for their tremendous amount of support and the number of hours that you put into this plan. You each are very important to the local food system and are vital to the task we have ahead of us.

In East Central Iowa we have a deep and rich culture and there is no reason why we couldn't have the strongest community food system. As the core of the region we **NOW** have the task to revitalize a food system that makes our communities healthy and also supports the surrounding region that depends so much on our services and resources.

The most important item that should be taken away from this report is not to remember every strategy and goal but to remember that **in order to achieve the Task Force's vision it will take a collaborative effort of community members that includes: leaders, institutions, farmers, churches, schools, organizations, grocers, truckers, bakers, students, families, men and women...**

I challenge each and of everyone of you to adopt a strategy of this plan with your friends, neighbors, family, professional peers, and fellow leaders and help cultivate a path to achieving our vision of a Region that embraces local foods in a diversified and environmentally conscious agricultural community; serving as a hub for a revitalized regional food system.

Jason Grimm



**LINN/JOHNSON  
LOCAL FOOD  
TASK FORCE**



# IOWA Corridor

## Food & Agriculture Coalition

[www.iacorridor-localfood.org](http://www.iacorridor-localfood.org)

*for more information about this plan contact*

Jason Grimm - Food System Planner

Iowa Valley RC&D

920 48th Ave

Amana, IA 52203

319.622.3264

[jason@ivrccd.org](mailto:jason@ivrccd.org)