

## **CASE STUDY**

### **Iowa**

#### **Movers and Shakers**

The three major organizers of the Iowa Farm to School project are Merl Steines, Michael Nash, and Joan Lubke. Mr. Steines and Mr. Nash are farmers with the GROWN Locally cooperative. Ms. Lubke, is a Dietary Manager, Food Service Director at the Decorah Community School District in Northeast Iowa, and she and her husband are farmers who produce organic soybeans, corn, oats, and raise organic cattle.

Ms. Lubke, Mr. Steines and Mr. Nash have known each other for several years, but became better acquainted at a Farm to School forum in Ames, sponsored by the USDA and organized by the Practical Farmers of Iowa.

#### **Project Description**

Through the Iowa Farm to School Project, Ms. Lubke uses locally grown products for a salad bar and as a la carte items. She works with four schools, two elementary, one middle school and one high school, and the farm-fresh items are particularly popular with students in the middle school and high school.

#### **Other Components**

Horticulture classes are offered through the local Future Farmers of America (FFA), and information about agriculture, farming and nutrition are provided as well in classes focusing on the environment and culinary arts. GROWN Locally is also preparing printed materials and will organize farm tours in the spring.

#### **Funding**

The program has not received special funding to buy directly from the GROWN Locally cooperative. With additional funding, we would be able to purchase a greater amount of local products.

#### **Labor**

The GROWN Locally cooperative provides much of the produce already washed to help reduce labor costs. However, some food preparation is needed to cut and chop the produce. The price of labor is the prohibiting factor in expanding this program. GROWN Locally is planning to purchase processing equipment to help reduce these costs for the school district.

#### **Farmers/Crops**

There are 11 members in the GROWN Locally cooperative, and they coordinate both the production of the crops as well as the distribution to schools and other institutions. One invoice is presented from the cooperative to the school, so that there is no need for the school to pay each individual farmer. Individual farm payments are then distributed by GROWN Locally. The crops that have been the most popular with the students are apples, cucumbers, lettuces, carrots, broccoli and cauliflower.

**Product Delivery**

Deliveries are made to the school by the cooperative once per week. With the exception of the apples, this is the first year that GROWN Locally has sold to the school district. It is expected that the program will expand with additional products in the coming year.

**Price**

The members of the cooperative check wholesale prices for their products, and set their prices competitively with these standards. At this time, 20% of the money received from the sales goes back into running the cooperative.

Even with prices set to be competitive with major distributors, the cost is still somewhat high for the school district. These prices are to a degree offset by the use of commodity items. School food services acknowledges that price is an issue, but is willing to pay for a quality product in order to provide great tasting meals for the children.

**School Food Service Support**

As the school food service staff was instrumental in organizing farm sales to schools, they are very supportive of the project. The farmers in GROWN Locally have done some marketing around their direct sales, and it has generated good public relations for the school. There is also good support from school board members.

**Kitchen Facilities**

The kitchen facilities are up-to-date with an adequate amount of space for food preparation and storage. GROWN locally is planning to build a small processing center to provide their products in forms that are more accessible to school food service personnel and to extend the times when products are available.

**Sustainability**

Since this project has not require additional funding, it is sustainable. However, it is also limited in any possible expansion by labor costs. With additional funding for the labor required for food preparation, the farm to school project would be able to grow beyond its present operation.

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