# Direct Marketing Sustainable Meat to CSAs and Buying Clubs:

# Exploring the financial and logistical practicality in central Iowa

Supporting Direct Meat Marketing in Iowa M17-2004: Strategy Three
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## Summary

The goal of *Supporting Direct Meat Marketing in Iowa* was to further the creation of new markets, sales and distribution infrastructure for farmers direct marketing sustainably raised meats. To further this goal, data was gathered from interviews and surveys with consumers and coordinators in buying clubs and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms. This data was combined with economic and logistical data gathered from two experienced direct marketing, sustainable meat producers in Iowa. The result was a determination that CSAs or buying clubs similar to those in this study fulfill many of the requirements for a viable market for sustainable direct market meat producers.

Financial support from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture and generous access to, and support by, participants of central Iowa CSAs and buying clubs and Practical Farmers of Iowa farmers made possible this study.

## Background

CSA

CSA farms have gained sustained popularity in the United States since their introduction in the 1980s. Iowa has a large number of CSAs per capita when compared to other states. The national database of CSA farms managed by the Robyn Van En Center for CSA Resources lists 40 unique Iowa CSAs, while the *2003 Statewide List of Iowa CSA Farms, Producers and Organizers* prepared by Iowa State University Sustainable Agriculture Extension Program lists 49 such farms.

CSA farms have as their philosophical basis a community of people who support a farm so that they somehow become connected to the farming operation and receive from it fresh, healthful food products. In return, the farmer has economic security and support to carry out community benefiting agricultural practices. In general, members, or shareholders, of the CSA receive regular deliveries of fresh farm products, often vegetables. Usually these deliveries occur once each week throughout the growing season. Members pay for these deliveries in advance of the growing season and share the production risks with the farmer. CSA farms have been more likely than the average farm to be free of synthetic chemicals and often use organic production techniques. This is also true of Iowa CSAs.

Buying Clubs

In the context of this project, ‘buying clubs’ refers to organized groups of people that join together for the purpose of ordering natural or organic foods. Beginning in the 1970s, it was relatively easy in Iowa to form such clubs to order natural and organic foods by becoming a member in Blooming Prairie Cooperative Warehouse. Blooming Prairie, a regional distributor of natural products founded in 1974, both serviced and was partially owned by Iowa buying clubs until its purchase by United Natural Foods in 2002. United

has continued to supply those buying clubs originally organized under Blooming Prairie. At the time of United Food's purchase, there were approximately 225 Blooming Prairie buying clubs in Iowa. A fair estimate of the size of a typical Iowa buying club is about 20 households.

The reasons people organize themselves into buying clubs are varied, but include a desire to eat food devoid of chemical residues, have access to more nutritionally valuable food, have access to bulk quantities of food, have access to bulk food pricing and support ecologically sound farming practices. Food is generally ordered in regular intervals, such as every four weeks through a catalog or its electronic equivalent. A truck then delivers the food to the home of one of the buying club members or a local community institution, such as a church.

## Strategies and Methodology

The impetus for this study was an observation by the researcher that both CSAs and buying clubs might be benefited by closer relationships with direct market meat farmers, and vice versa. Based on observation, it was assumed CSAs and buying clubs were not being utilized for significant meat purchases and members of these organizations had a demand for the type of meat available from local, sustainable meat producers.

Buying Clubs

Consumers from three buying clubs were interviewed and surveyed. They were given an in-depth survey on their purchasing preferences for meat products, such as amounts and types of meat purchased, perceived value of access to local meats, attributes they consider important when purchasing meat, the monetary value of the attributes in question, their likelihood of purchasing meat through their buying club, amount of premium they might pay for attributed local meat, their preferred level of personal contact with the farmer raising the meat, and the frequency and preferred times they would buy such meat. Most surveys were conducted during a regularly scheduled buying club food delivery to allow for a richer examination of the respondents answers.

It was intended that twenty-five members (five members each of five clubs) would be interviewed for this study. Several club organizers that had initially agreed to help administer the interviews lost interest in facilitating the process when efforts were made to begin them. Two of the original and one additional club were receptive to the interviews and additionally filled out a survey instrument. This resulted in the collection of information from a total of 23 buying club members out of a potential membership of about 45 (~51%). To compensate for the small loss of data, the buying club surveys were administered in person followed by a question and answer session with the participants. The result was much richer information. When survey data from these groups was not robust as expected (due to skipped/blank questions, etc…), the results were not reported or given strong emphasis. The researcher also suspected that the personal contact with these groups may have caused a more positive (farmer favorable) response than those

from the CSAs. This in itself might be an important lesson for direct marketers of sustainable meat products.

Similarly, the coordinator of each club was interviewed to determine number of members, number of active members, how members order, how often, how they pick their orders up, how communication is accomplished, the estimated time and cost to add a local farm as a distributor and other club logistics.

CSA Farms

At the time this study was initiated, the central Iowa corridor between Des Moines and Ames contained five CSA's managed by PFI members. Total membership was about 250. Before collection of information from these farms began, only four of these farms were in operation. The three largest CSAs were chosen to participate in this study. Only one of these CSA's had a specific meat option for its members.

Initially, five members of each CSA were to be given an in-depth interview on their purchasing preferences for meat products analogous to the interviews for the buying club members. It became possible, however, to conduct a more thorough survey of the membership of these farms through the cooperation of the CSA organizers/farmers. This resulted in the collection of information from a total of 110 CSA members out of a potential membership of about 200 (~55%).

Shareholders from the two CSAs without a specific meat purchasing option were surveyed seeking similar information as from buying club members. The in-depth survey on their purchasing preferences for meat products asked such questions as the amounts and types of meat they normally purchased, the perceived value of access to local meats, attributes they consider important when purchasing meat, the monetary value of the attributes in question, their likelihood of purchasing meat through their buying club, amount of premium they might pay for local meat with sustainable attributes, their preferred level of personal contact with the farmer raising the meat, and the frequency and preferred times they would buy such meat.

The members of the CSA that had a specific meat purchase option were asked additional questions. For those members that had purchased meat through the buying club, they were asked whether they would be willing to continue such purchases outside of the regular 20 – 25 week CSA delivery period, how many times they ordered meat through the CSA, what types of meat they had purchased and in what amounts. The coordinator of each CSA was interviewed to gain baseline data about the CSA membership and organization.

Farmers

Two PFI farmers with extensive experience direct marketing meat were interviewed for this study. The survey tools were developed after initial conversations with these farmers and incorporated questions they thought most useful in determining the value of these

markets for direct meat producers. Survey questions became focused on the economic and logistical feasibility of potential local farmers partnering with CSAs and buying clubs. The current ordering and delivering protocols of these farmers were assessed to estimate the ease in which they could be incorporated into the existing structures of the CSAs and buying clubs under study.

## Results and discussion

Household Meat Consumption

Although perceived as groups that might have high memberships of vegetarians, CSA and buying club respondents who ate and purchased no meat accounted for less than 4% and 5% of total respondents, respectively. It was attempted to estimate the potential market for sustainable local meat sales for the two CSAs that did not have a regular meat share and buying club members. To begin, the average amount of meat purchased per week was established for pork, beef, poultry and eggs (Table 1). Buying club members purchased more poultry and eggs, and less beef and pork than CSA members.

Table 1. Average meat purchase by CSA and buying club households.

| | CSA | Buying Club |
|---|---|---|
| Pork lbs | 2.64 | 1.52 |
| Beef lbs | 2.19 | 2.15 |
| Poultry lbs | 2.54 | 3.00 |
| Eggs n | 8.56 | 15.47 |

Of the meat buying households, many were already buying meat from local farmers. It was common for a household to purchase meat with a particular sustainable attribute, such as organic or free-range, from local stores (especially health food stores). These were considered a ‘conventional’ purchase for recording purposes. Many of these buyers indicated the source of the grocery meat was local and would willingly substitute the grocery purchase for that of a direct purchase. Table 2 shows how much of the meat purchased by CSA households was direct from farmers. Beef was most likely to be purchased exclusively from local sources (33%). This is probably because a popular local farmer had success marketing quarter, half and whole animals within the communities where many of the CSA households resided. There is substantial room for direct meat marketers to increase the market share of meat purchased by these CSA households (Table 2). Between 67 and 82 percent of CSA respondents that purchased pork, beef, poultry or eggs sourced at least a portion of their meat from conventional sources. Those

purchasing some meat from conventional sources did so in a significant way - between 84 and 86 percent of the time. Having less data from buying clubs, less analysis was possible. However, it is clear that there is substantial room for market share increases by local meat producers in buying clubs also (Table 2D). The greatest amount of any category of 'meat' being purchased by buying club members from local sources was eggs at 38% of total purchases.

Table 2. Source of meat purchased by CSA households.

| | A. Percent of CSA Households Purchasing 100% Local | B. Percent of CSA Households Purchasing Some Portion Conventionally | C. Percent of Conventional Purchases by CSA Households in Column B. | D. Percent of Buying Club Meat Purchases from Local Sources |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pork lbs | 26 | 74 | 86 | 32 |
| Beef lbs | 33 | 67 | 85 | 18 |
| Poultry lbs | 18 | 82 | 84 | 16 |
| Eggs n | 26 | 74 | 86 | 38 |

Direct market farmers have unique inventory problems. Farmers predicted correctly that respondents would favor particular cuts of meat such as chops and steaks. Table 3 confirms their prediction. It lists the most popular cut of pork, beef or poultry by CSA households. Almost all respondents considered 'poultry' to mean 'chicken'. When purchasing pork, the most popular cut was chops. For beef, the most popular cut was steak. For chicken, the most popular cut was breast meat. A listing of the most popular cuts per meat is listed in Table 3 ranked by the percent they were chosen by respondents.

Table 3. Most popular cuts of meat of CSA households.

| Pork Favorite Cuts | Beef Favorite Cuts | Poultry Favorite Cuts |
|---|---|---|
| chops (39%) | steaks (42%) | breast (59%) |
| loin (20%) | ground (24%) | whole (16%) |
| roast (18%) | roasts (15%) | thigh (9%) |
| bacon (12%) | tenderloin (8%) | legs (6%) |
| tenderloin (8%) | | |
| ham (8%) | | |

Buying club members showed similar patterns for preference with chops being the highest desired pork cut and breasts the highest desired chicken cut. Instead of steak as the preferred beef choice, ground meat ranked highest.

PFI farmers have overcome inventory problems resulting from over demand for popular cuts of meat through several means. Slight inventory adjustments have been accomplished through marketing appeals to increase sales of over inventoried cuts. Yearly evaluation of product lines and removal of slow moving cuts has also proved helpful. The most effective solution, however, has been to package meat in 'bundles' that include a selection of a variety of cuts. The farmer can then bring down inventory in an even fashion. This was important to the farmers interviewed because it ensured sales of a quality, fresh product.

CSA households, both with a meat option and without, were asked whether they would consider purchasing bundles of meat, rather than particular cuts. Specifically, they were asked if they would consider buying meat from a CSA if they could only buy 20 - 40 lb packages of predetermined cuts at a time (i.e. percentage of a whole animal, like one-fifth of a hog, or whole chicken, rather than chicken legs). Seventy-four percent of respondents said they were 'somewhat likely' or 'very likely' to purchase meat in this manner (Table 4). Buying club members were similarly asked and were more open to the idea. (In reality, smaller bundles are available through the farmers interviewed and some choice is available among different types of bundles.)

Table 4. All CSA household's interest in purchasing local meats in 'bundles'.

| | Not Likely | Somewhat Likely | Very Likely |
|---|---|---|---|
| CSA | 26% | 43% | 31% |
| Buying Club | 17% | 39% | 44% |

Those CSA and buying club households answering 'not likely' and 'somewhat likely' to the survey question summarized in Table 4 were given further information why selling bundles, rather than cuts, of meat were important to farmers. They were informed that 'direct market farmers often can't supply just the most common cuts of meat without creating a huge inventory of unsold products'. Then, they were asked if they would be more likely to buy 20 – 40 lb packages of predetermined diverse cuts of meat. Forty-five percent of CSA and 70% of buying club households previously responding 'not…' and 'somewhat likely' responded positively that they would now be more likely to buy meat in bundles.

Product Attributes

Local, sustainable farmers can often compete directly with conventional meat suppliers by being either better or different, but rarely less expensive. Conventional meat production is often inhumane, ecologically unsound, less healthful to the consumer and lacking in superior taste quality when compared to sustainable meat production. Sustainable meat farmers, through extra effort (and generally expense) can offer

consumers a meat product that has attributes unable to be replicated by industrialized agriculture. This study hypothesized that CSA and buying club members value more healthful, ecologically sound and flavorful meat. Table 5 lists several attributes associated with sustainable meat production. CSA and buying club members were asked if the attributes were 'not important', 'somewhat important' or 'very important' when purchasing meat. The weighted average of all respondents answering 'very important' for each attribute is also shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Attributes considered 'very important' by CSA and buying club households.

| CSAs | | | Buying Clubs | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Antibiotic Free** | **69%** | | **Hormone Free** | **80%** |
| **Hormone Free** | **66%** | | **Antibiotic Free** | **75%** |
| Locally Grown | 65% | | Locally Grown | 55% |
| Humanely raised | 53% | | Humanely raised | 50% |
| Free Range | 49% | | Free Range | 45% |
| **Grass Fed/Pastured** | **40%** | | **Price** | **40%** |
| **Price** | **28%** | | **Grass Fed/Pastured** | **32%** |

Within each CSA, the top three most important attributes of meat purchased were always 'antibiotic free', 'hormone free' and 'locally grown'. Among buying club members, 'antibiotic free' and 'hormone free' were also the attributes of most importance. Similarly, the attributes 'grass fed/pastured' and 'price' were least often considered 'very important' attributes to both CSA and buying club members.

These rankings are interesting when compared to other recent research. They suggest CSA and buying club members are particularly important markets for farmers. *Attracting Consumers with Locally Grown Products*, prepared by The North Central Initiative for Small Farm Profitability in 2001, surveyed 500 primary household grocery shoppers in Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri and Wisconsin. This population surveyed would be considered a more typical consumer. They found the attribute 'price' to be 'extremely important' by 45% of respondents, ahead of 'local' at 31%, 'all-natural' at 21% and 'organic' at 12%, essentially a reversal of the trend found among this study's respondents.

<u>Perceived Value and Interest</u>

All three CSAs could be said to help facilitate member access to sustainable local meats. This was not true for buying clubs. CSA members were asked whether having this type of meat available through their CSA made the CSA more valuable to them. Buying club members were asked if it *would* make their club more valuable. Table 6 shows that nearly 90% of both groups believed having access to meat did indeed make them more valuable.

Table 6. Value of meat availability to CSA and buying club households.

| Respondents who thought having meat available through their CSA or buying club made it more valuable to them. | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Yes | No |
| CSAs | 88% | 12% |
| Buying Clubs | 85% | 15% |

One CSA offered ‘meat shares’ and ‘egg shares’. The meat shares consisted of three different options, consisting of six monthly deliveries of a predetermined amount of meat (down to the specific cuts). Payment was required at the beginning of the season, or in two installments with the fist payment at the beginning of the season. Deliveries began during the vegetable growing season and were concurrent with a monthly vegetable CSA delivery until the regular CSA season ended. At this point the meat deliveries continued at the same location, but with the meat farmer being the only CSA representative present. The value of the meat share to the farmer averaged over every potential CSA member was about $72 per member. Egg shares were delivered during the regular weekly vegetable delivery schedule. About 18% and 25% of the vegetable shareholders also purchased a meat or egg share, respectively.

All CSAs offered information about local, sustainable meat availability. The CSA offering meat and egg shares additionally provided information about and access to other farmers offering meat and even took orders for them. One of these additional farmers had a regular customer base within the CSA (about 20% of total membership). Communication between the CSA members and the farmer occurred primarily through email and orders were delivered during regular CSA vegetable pickup hours.

The other two CSAs without formal meat shares did pass along information about local meat farmers. This mostly occurred through member newsletters and was based on relationships CSA managers had with other local farmers raising animals. Meat availability within these CSAs occurred because of interest and request of the members. In one case, a member with a connection to a fisherman in Alaska and support of the CSA farmer, spearheaded an organized delivery of salmon through the combined purchasing power of the CSA of about 1300 lbs. Although this wasn’t a ‘local’ purchase, it represents how effective relationships, common values and organization within CSA can combine to create significant commerce.

Market Potential

The CSA members not having a specific meat ordering option were asked if they would order meat from a sustainable, local farmer through a CSA if it had those attributes they considered important *and were similarly priced to conventional meat*. Table 7 shows that a significant majority (99%) of respondents would order meat meeting these criteria through their CSA. Buying club respondents also indicated they would be interested in buying meat from sustainable, local farmers (91%). Interestingly, for the CSA members who had a specific meat and egg share option, and access to other regular site deliveries of meat, only 50% of the respondents said they actually ordered meat.

Table 7. Interest in ordering meat priced comparably to conventional meat through CSAs and buying clubs.

| | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| CSA respondents that would order meat if available. | 99% | 1% |
| Buying club respondents that would order meat if available. | 91% | 9% |
| Respondents that did order meat through their CSA when available. | 50% | 50% |

This latter group's actual purchases deviates largely from those CSA members estimating purchases of meat given the opportunity. The 50% of the 'meat share' CSA respondents who did not order meat gave three main reasons (in order of importance): 1) prices were too high, 2) they did not have enough storage space, and 3) they had alternate access to local meat purchases. Conversely, when asked what changes could be made to induce them to purchase meat through the CSA, the two most important responses were to 1) reduce quantities offered, and 2) lower prices. These figures add some reality to the market potential for sustainable local meats within these venues. Although price is probably less important to the CSA and buying club member than the average consumer, there is a limit to what they are willing to pay. It should be noted that the meat available via the 'meat share' was an extremely high quality, niche meat commanding prices much higher than conventional substitutes.

When asked whether they would still purchase meat through their CSAs or buying clubs if the price of such meat *was higher than conventional prices*, 97% of CSA and 89% of buying club respondents still answered positively (Table 8). The prospect of higher prices did little to diminish enthusiasm for buying meat in this manner. These respondents received a follow-up question asking how much they were willing to pay over their conventional suppliers (Table 8). On average, the CSA respondents were willing to pay up to 34% more, with 31% of the respondents willing to pay 50% or more. Buying club respondents were willing to pay up to 42% more, but only 24% were willing to pay 50% or more. There were several buying club members who were willing to pay 100 percent

or more over conventional prices. These are substantial figures above that expected from the general population. A consumer study conducted by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture in 2003, *Ecolabel Value Assessment Phase II: Consumer Perceptions of Local Foods*, found only about 15% of Iowans were willing to pay 30% or more for local, sustainable food products.

Table 8. CSA and buying club member willingness to pay above conventional meat prices.

| | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| CSA respondents that would order meat if available and above conventional prices. | 97% | 3% |
| Buying club respondents that would order meat if available and above conventional prices. | 89% | 11% |
| Amount above conventional CSA respondents would be willing to pay. | 31% | |
| Amount above conventional buying club respondents would be willing to pay. | 42% | |

Respondents in the CSAs (not having a specific meat option) and buying clubs that answered positively they would like to purchase local, sustainable meat through their respective organizations were asked how much of their meat they would buy in this manner. The percent of total household weekly meat purchases they would secure at their CSA or buying club was high. For the CSA respondents the percent of their total meat purchases from the CSA was estimated to be 81%, for buying club respondents, 84% (Table 9).

Table 9. Proportion of weekly meat purchases CSA and buying club member would buy through their CSA or buying clubs.

| | |
|---|---|
| Total household weekly meat purchase CSA respondents would buy through their CSA. | 81% |
| Total household weekly meat purchase buying club respondents would buy through their buying club. | 84% |

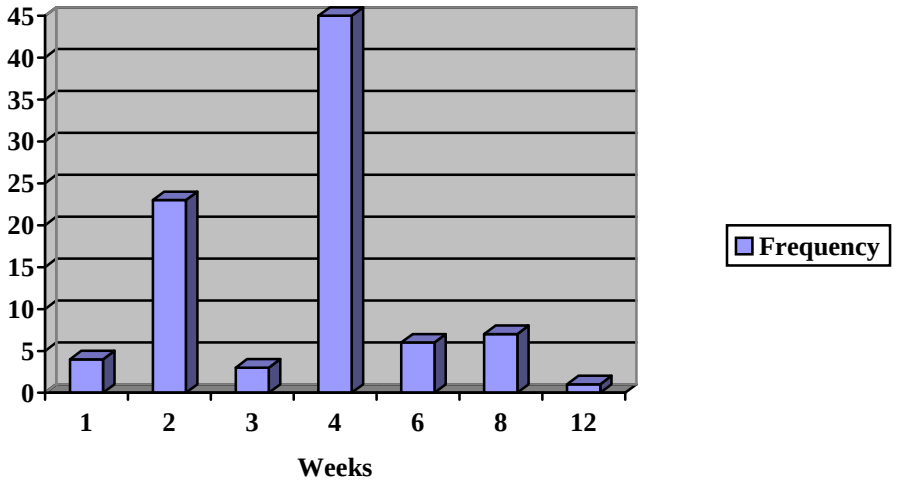
Again, investigating the idea that education might lead to different purchasing patterns with CSA and buying club members, respondents were informed that organic and other sustainable production techniques cost farmers more than conventional production. They were then asked whether they would increase the amount they previously said they were willing to pay over conventional prices. About 62% percent of the previous CSA

respondents said they would not increase the amount above conventional they had already declared, but 18% said they would. This latter group raised the amount they were willing to pay above conventional by 10%, from 19% more to 29% more. For buying club respondents, a similar sized group of about 19% raised the amount they were willing to pay above conventional from 17% more to 28% more.

Logistics

Even if farmers and consumers find common ground among types of agricultural products for sale, the logistics of ordering, delivery and storage must be overcome. One PFI farmers interviewed in this study was comfortable with a 4 – 6 week delivery route. This matched well with the CSA and buying club member's preferred ordering schedule of 4 weeks (Chart 1.).

**Chart 1. Optimum number of weeks between local meat deliveries for buying club and CSA members.**




A farmer willing to deliver every two weeks would potentially receive more business from those members most interested in deliveries on two and six week periods. However, it is likely some of those members would still order a portion of their meat if only on a four week cycle. One farmer was reluctant to deliver more frequently than four weeks because it took that much time to promote, confirm and organize orders. Another felt a six to eight week delivery cycle was most efficient for them. Too frequent deliveries encourage smaller orders. Farmers prefer larger orders to justify the expense of packaging, travel and delivery. For one farmer, a 100 lb order worked best as a minimum amount of meat deliverable to a single group at most 120 miles away. For another, the minimum delivery was described in terms of dollars – 500 dollars to a single group at most 90 miles away.

A direct meat marketer utilizing the established delivery system of a CSA or buying club may face seasonal challenges. Although buying clubs operate year round, CSAs generally do not. When CSA members were asked if they would drive to a central meeting location at designated times just to pick up meat, 90% said they would. This is surprising since two of the three CSAs offer vegetable deliveries direct to households (or neighborhood). The average distance such a member would travel was about 14 miles, the mode being 10 miles (Table 10). The most convenient times for CSA respondents to pick up a meat delivery was between 4 pm and 7 pm on weekdays and between 9 am and noon on Saturdays (Table 10).

Table 10. Distance, times and percent of CSA members that would travel to pick up meat when their CSA was not in session.

| | |
|---|---|
| Willing to drive. | 90% |
| Average distance. | 14 miles |
| Most common distance. | 10 miles |
| Most convenient times. | Weekdays 4 –7pm:<br>Saturdays 9 – 12am |

CSA respondents were asked whether they would use various email and paper order and delivery systems. Surveys were tailored to the individual CSA or buying club so one ordering method always utilized an existing system within those groups. For example, CSA members were asked if they would order from an order sheet placed within their vegetable delivery box. When ordering meat, there were no clear preferences among respondents between paper order sheets or email, although email was slightly more popular. No respondent identified themselves as not having email. Both CSA managers and meat producers agreed that email directly between the meat farmer and consumer would work best for them.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The results of this study clearly show that members and operators/managers of some CSAs and buying clubs in Iowa could build mutually beneficial relationships with direct market, sustainable local meat producers. Demand for sustainably attributed meat was high among the groups studied. Having meat offered through these venues increased their value.

Further, with maturation in the Iowa local and sustainable food movement, consumers need organized and significant opportunities to comprehensively purchase their household food needs from local, sustainable sources. Iowa's local food system needs to become a genuine food system choice for the eating public.

Collected data in this report can be used as a guide to estimate potential for different marketing scenarios. For example, based on the estimates derived in this study, a local pork producer could expect monthly deliveries to a 50 person CSA, priced 31% above conventional prices, in bundles only, to be 129 lbs. This figure could similarly be derived for beef (107 lb), poultry (primarily chicken – 124 lbs) and eggs (417). These calculations could easily be done for buying clubs as well. The formula for the above pork calculation would be based on the following estimates:

50 members x 2.64 lbs/wk = 132 lb/wk

132 lb/wk x 4 wk/mo = 528 lb/mo

528 lb/mo x 97% of members willing to pay 31% more than conventional = 512 lb/mo

512 lb/mo x 84% portion of total meat purchases made through club = 414 lb/mo

414 lb/mo x 31% willing to order large bundles = **129 lbs/mo**

The 129 lb figure would be further eroded if the attributes of the meat did not match those important to the members or if the delivery system required members to drive well over 10 miles to pick up their order. Alternatively, the figure could rise through educational efforts and the supply of more popular cuts of meat. For example, supplying specific meat cuts would be highly important for chicken producers, as CSA and buying club members had high preferences for breast meat over whole chickens.

Eggs sales might be a particularly good fit with members of buying clubs, the buying club households surveyed in this study ate 15.47 eggs per week. A local egg producer could expect twice monthly deliveries to a 20 person buying club, priced 42% above conventional prices, to be about 37 dozen.

20 members x 15.47 eggs/wk = 309.4 eggs/wk

309.4 eggs/wk x 2 = 618.8 eggs/2 wk

618.8 eggs/2 wk x 89% of members willing to pay 42% more than conventional = 550.7 eggs/2 wk

550.7 eggs/2 wk x 81% portion of total meat purchases made through CSA = 446 eggs/2 wk

446 eggs/2 wk / 12 eggs/dz ~ **37 dozen eggs per 2 weeks**

Based on conversations with experienced direct meat market farmers, a modest sized CSA or buying club similar to those in this study fulfill many of the requirements for a viable market for sustainable meat producers. Stacking deliveries to more than one CSA or buying club, or other strategies to coordinate delivery schedules with similar or existing markets, would lower the minimum amount of orders the farmer would require.

In general, the buying clubs and CSAs under study had membership likely to be higher educated and earn more income than the average Iowan. All groups surveyed were from urban and suburban areas within central Iowa. Care should be made in extrapolating the results from this study to other clubs and farms.

Recommendations

For CSA and buying club members:

Take initiative if there is interest among your group to have access to sustainable meats on a regular basis. Become involved in and support sustainable agricultural organizations and marketing efforts such as the Buy Fresh/Buy Local campaign. This will put you in touch with a variety of local sustainable producers. Further, help, or take control and responsibility of the organizational process to provide efficient mechanisms of ordering and delivery acceptable to all members and farmers involved. This allows a greater understanding of the work the farmers must carry out to provide food directly to members and frees time that farmers can use toward producing the best product possible.

Consider connecting needs among suppliers and consumers that you may have overlooked. Members may already know, or be purchasing meat from, farmers who are seeking more market opportunities. For example, one buying club member purchased her household meat needs from her father-in-law. He was struggling to maintain a production system void of hormones and antibiotics because his sales goals were being unmet. At the same time, there were several other members in the room who had unmet demand for that type of meat.

For sustainable meat farmers:

Relationships are extremely important in marketing meat through CSAs. CSA farmers and members are open to incorporation of sustainable meat purchases within their existing structures, but are careful who they partner with. Access is dependent on shared values, member interest and existing relationships. Genuine interest and participation in the local, sustainable food movement will equate to gradual relationship building.

The idea of using education to inform buying club or CSA members about challenges and differences between sustainable farming operations and industrial livestock may be beneficial. For example, these groups seemed to respond by increasing the purchase of a broad range of meat products over the most popular cuts. Not having complete choice

over a purchased food product is not altogether unfamiliar to CSA members. In the many vegetable CSAs, members or shareholders receive a selection of fresh vegetables often with limited or no knowledge of what the selection is until delivered. It is not uncommon that the delivered vegetables are unfamiliar to the shareholders. This is true to varying degrees with the CSAs surveyed. Successful CSAs provide members with information about how to store and cook less popular vegetables and educate them about their nutritional and seasonal importance.

CSA managers from the non-meat option CSAs have had some experience incorporating meat into their CSAs. They have been reluctant to expand or formalize selling meat because it requires time, effort and infrastructure change (capital expenditures). They are not eager to expand their product lines to increase income, but rather become more efficient in their core vegetable business. To them meat is bulky, requires special food safety attention and specialized equipment (such as freezers). They have tried to meet their customer's demands for local meats through establishing connections between farmers and members, rather than acting as a middleman between them.

Many CSA farmers realize member's access to other local, sustainably produced products in conjunction with the CSA is of value to them. They may not be interested in making money or devoting a lot of time and effort to add-on products, however. It is in the best interest of the meat producer to suggest and implement a system of sales that do not negatively impact the operation of the CSA. If the CSA farmer's time or effort is affected significantly, they should be compensated.

For CSA farmers:

There is value to having meat and other items available through CSAs that are primarily vegetable and fruit in nature. Perceived value effects satisfaction and ultimately retention rates of members. Several examples of successful integration exist and should be studied if this is an area of interest. CSA farmers are the gatekeepers for successful relationships between members and meat producers.

## Resources

Food Clubs

Blooming Prairie Warehouse would send potential food club members contact information of existing buying clubs in their area upon request. It is unclear whether this procedure is continued by United Natural Foods. United's website is http://www.unfi.com. Below is an excerpt from their website, including contact information for potential customers:

> *Today, Blooming Prairie, along with the rest of United Natural Foods, remains focused on the same founding principles: promotion and distribution of high quality natural and organic products; providing customers with the best*

*possible service and information; and support of organic and sustainable agriculture and protection of the environment.*

| If you are interested in becoming a CUSTOMER, please contact: | |
|---|---|
| Gale Hogan | by email or call (800) 877-8898, ext.32239 |

CSAs

To locate CSAs in Iowa, the Extension publication, *2003 Statewide List of Iowa CSA Farms, Producers and Organizers*, is a good resource. This publication is available from your local county extension office or ISU Extension Distribution, 119 Printing and Publications, ISU, Ames, IA 50011-3171; (515) 294-5347; Fax (515) 294-2945; E-mail pubdist@iastate.edu.

The Robyn Van En Center for CSA resources also has a national CSA database searchable by state, http://www.csacenter.org.

Direct Market Farmers

Perhaps the best way to find sustainable farmers in your area is to become involved in Buy Fresh/Buy Local, a comprehensive marketing program for direct marketing farmers organized by Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI) in collaboration with a variety of partner organizations. As this report was being published, two very good directories existed identifying direct market farmers in northeast (http://www.practicalfarmers.org/resource/PFIResource_94.pdf) and central (http://www.practicalfarmers.org/resource/PFIResource_96.pdf) Iowa. Also, as this report was being published, a statewide Buy Fresh/Buy Local campaign was being implemented that should result in a series of directories covering more areas of the state. Soon, a centralized searchable web-based database of Iowa direct market farmers will be available through PFI's website (www.practicalfarmers.org).

Food Routes (www.foodroutes.org) is a 'national non-profit dedicated to reintroducing Americans to their food — the seeds it grows from, the farmers who produce it, and the routes that carry it from the fields to our tables.' The Food Routes 'Find Good Food' map (http://www.foodroutes.org/localfood/) can help you connect with local farmers and is searchable by product and location. A similar national searchable database can be found at Local Harvest (http://www.localharvest.org/organic-farms/).