

## Iowa Valley Certified Local Program

### Background:

2013 was the last year of Field to Family's Buy Fresh Buy Local program after serving as the region's local chapter since 2005. At that point, the group decided to explore a certified locally grown consumer education program that is unique to our region, similar to other programs in the United States, such as the [Appalachian Grown](#) and the [Piedmont Grown](#) programs. A working group was formed to create this new program.

Field to Family continued to maintain a listing of local farmers and the grocery stores and restaurants that purchase from local farmers on their website called [Local Food Finder](#). That listing is still present and maintained. However, the plan is to phase out this listing of local farms and transition into new certified local label.

In 2014, the [Johnson County Food Policy Council](#) (JCFPC- an advisory council to the Johnson County Board of Supervisors), requested support for the local label from the county. **Support from the Johnson County Board of Supervisors enabled the program to move forward** and in the Fall of 2015, the Council became an official client of the [Marketing Institute at the UI Tippie School of Business](#). The student team immediately went to work on what was referred to as the Grown Here/ Made Here project. *The UI Tippie School of Business allows students to get real world experience while providing marketing research to companies and organizations at a fraction of the cost.*

The student team worked to determine the need for a Johnson County "buy local" branding campaign that easily identifies locally grown foods by conducting their own research as well as citing recent national studies.

### Marketing Research Key Findings & Recommendations:

#1: These types of branding campaigns have the potential to **create strong brand recognition among communities and foster lasting**

**commitments to choosing locally-sourced foods** according to “Be A Local Hero, Buy Locally Grown” program’s marketing research.

#2 A majority of consumers in our area indicated a high level of responsiveness to a buy local campaign. Their own research showed that 90% of survey participants stated they would purchase more local foods if they were easily identified when grocery shopping.

#3 Area consumers do not resonate with corporate “buy local” initiatives. Although many grocery retailers have developed their own local campaigns, Johnson County consumers signified a high preference for a “close to home” community tailored brand.

#4: The team defined a target audience for the label, a demographic that is most likely to increase the amount of locally grown foods they purchase by establishing a successful certified local label in our region. This target market is defined as the older millennial consumers, the primary shopper in the household, between 25-34, has some college education or more, and that often shops at supermarkets. Citizens in our region believe that local is defined as 50 miles away or less, while still a majority think 75 miles away is local, at 100 miles, support drops off dramatically.

#5: They also found that standards are required in order to gain consumers trust of a “buy local” campaign.

Both retailers and producers must meet particular qualifications and in order to participate and the certification is earned by a non-biased, third-party updated annually.

#6: Farmers and retailers must be given specific incentives in order to secure their participate in a buy local campaign. Farmers are more apt to participate if there is a low participation fee, there are obvious benefits to joining and if they are given the marketing materials as part of the membership. Retailers require that it is easy to implement, with all materials being provided. In addition, the program is led by a single entity and that entity would facilitate communication with farmers in order to source more local food.

#7: Consumer education is imperative. Consumers must be educated on the value of purchasing local foods in order to stimulate sales. Their own research found that price is the number one reason consumers are discouraged from buying local. Because locally-grown food is marketed as fresher and higher quality, perception is that it costs more. This isn't always true.

Also, consumers are not always able to identify local foods and will not spend extra time to figure it out.

#8 Consumers stressed the importance of identifiable branding and local food education in grocery retailers. The label must be visible, easy to understand and authentic.

#9 Consumers prefer a clean and authentic branding insignia. It must have a recognizable shape/theme that resonates with local lowans. It must be clean and simple, while maintaining an authentic look. It must be versatile and easily adjusted to fit a variety of packaging/ promotional materials.

#10: Measurement tactics must be employed in order to gauge the success of the local label. Replicating the work of the UI Marketing Institute on an annual basis was recommended. Also, requiring retailers to use a specific SKU for certified local products was recommended.

Other findings:

Consumers are interested in local foods. National Consumer survey in 2014 found that 53% of US adulates specifically seek out locally grown foods. Motives of the 53%: 60% Freshness, 52% support local economy, 44% taste/ quality.

Frequency of local food purchases nationally: 22% don't consciously purchase, 13% more than once a week, 20% once a week, 25% a few times a month, 9% once a month, 13% less than once a month.

50% of Iowa consumers indicated they are willing to pay 10-30% more for locally identified products.

Compared to organic, the local food market has shown stronger growth. Increase from 2008-2011 for organic 10%, local 13%

Consumers are eager to learn about their food sources. 70% want to know the source of their food and drink.

Consumers are willing to spend more if they can identify local foods. 41% IF retailers educate customers about the origin of their food. 39% IF products were prominently displayed.

Consumers primarily purchase local food through retail outlets. 83% Retailers, 9% farmers market and 2% other direct channels.

### Moving Forward:

**Proposed Program Name:** Iowa Valley Local. "IVL Certified"

**Proposed Organization of IVL Certified:** Working Group leads and provides overall direction of IVL Certified. Individual working group members have specific leadership roles. Housed at Field to Family.

Current Working Group:

Michelle Kenyon, Field to Family

Shanti Sellz, Johnson County Local Foods & Planning Specialist

Jason Grimm, Iowa Valley RC&D

Jessica Burtt –Fogarty, Iowa Valley Food Co-op

Kate Moreland, Iowa City Area Development (ICAD) Group

Rod Sullivan, Johnson County Board of Supervisors

Nate Kaeding, Iowa City Downtown District

*Friends: Mark Nolte from ICAD, Tom Banta from ICAD. Josh Busard, Director, Planning, Development and Sustainability, Johnson County, Kevin Mellon, Creative Mellon. Les Beck, Linn County*

**Certifiers:** Work with/contract organic certifiers/third party certifiers.

**Certification Process:** There will be a certification fee – maybe very nominal to start. Recertification happens every year (or every other year similar to Blue Zones). Include an option to certify naturally grown for farmers.

**Locally Grown:** Region TBD; 50 to 75 miles past region borders. Will consider separate parameters for crops that grow outside region, if not grown in region, such as peaches, cherries, etc. More research required in this area.

**Local Purveyor:** Percentage local TBD. Will consider a tier system. Example: Gold certified = 60% local, Silver = 40%, etc. Seasonality could be considered- certain percentage local all year, more during the growing season. More research required in this area.

**Locally Made:** TBD, research required to determine minimal percentage. Will also consider an additional label for Iowa Valley Made Certified to incorporate food products made by local businesses.

**Consumer Members:** Membership level for consumers to help promote the campaign; IVL tote bags, bumper stickers;

**Multi-County Initiative:** Goal is to partner with Linn and contiguous counties, cities within those counties, as well as economic development organizations within this region.

**Timeline and Funding:** Seek funding for fy '17 to start planning program for implementation by the end of the first quarter of 2018. Will seek funding from counties, cities within counties, members (farmers, purveyors, consumers, etc.) Seek additional funding to provide support for farmers and other local food based businesses.