
Feeding Ourselves: Strategies for a New Illinois Food System



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The roots of this report are in a meeting, *Making Connections: Creating Change*, held in December 2002, and sponsored by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, The Chicago Community Trust, Donors Forum of Chicago, Environmental Grantmakers Association, and The Joyce Foundation. Out of this meeting evolved a loose network of funders and government agencies interested in change in the Illinois and Chicago food systems.

The members of the Illinois Food and Community Funders Group include:

The Chicago Community Trust, City of Chicago-Department of Cultural Affairs, City of Chicago-Department of Environment, City of Chicago-Department of Planning and Development, Chicago Tribune Company, Donors Forum of Chicago, Environmental Grantmakers Association, Field Foundation of Illinois, Inc., Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, Kraft Foods, Liberty Prairie Foundation, Lumpkin Family Foundation, Prairie Crossing CSA, Retirement Research Foundation, Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation, Shorebank Enterprise, USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Midwest Region, and W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I. WHY THIS REPORT NOW?

The funders of this study, and the network they represent, are unified in their desire for a different farm and food system. More than 20 public and private funders “have come together to explore ways to work together to increase the demand for healthy food among all populations in Chicago and Illinois and to promote its local or regional production and widespread accessibility and affordability.”¹

The principal aim of this report is to identify key *leverage points* where positive change can be made through strategic investment by funders acting alone or in collaboration to increase their effectiveness.

II. METHODOLOGY

More than 70 in-depth interviews make up the core of the study. Over the course of this project we spoke with farmers, university employees, funders, food industry staff, activists, state and federal employees, City of Chicago staff, and nonprofit staff. For a complete list of interviewees see appendix A in the full report.

We saw the project as an unfolding investigation looking for an answer to the question “What actions will effect the most change?” It was a search for experienced opinions that we could analyze for opportunities and leverage points.

III. THE BIG PICTURE

Future Prospects of the Illinois Food System: Two Views

The comments of interviewees about the prospects of changing the Illinois food system in the direction sought by the funders of this report fall into two camps—the first, decidedly pessimistic; the second, optimistic. Both these views of the Illinois food system tell the truth.

One view: The glass is half empty

To some of those working to change the Illinois food system, the prospects seem dismal. Some say that in 25 years things will only have gotten bigger. In this vision, government commodity subsidies will continue to dominate the state’s agricultural sector. Small-scale farms of less than 100 acres will constitute the rest of the state’s farm economy. And there will be little in between.

¹ From the Illinois Food Systems Needs Assessment Request for Proposal, December 2003.

Proponents of this view report that less is happening to create a local, sustainable, and healthy food system in Illinois than in nearby states, such as Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan.

“In Wisconsin, a lot of people are doing stuff at the margins. [Here in Illinois], it’s only a very small handful.” And, “It’s hard to get [innovative agricultural grant proposals] out of Illinois. It’s a little bit disconcerting when you don’t even get *anything* out of Illinois.”

Another view: The glass is half full

At the same time, many voices offer small success stories that paint a more hopeful picture of the future. **Again and again, we heard about the growing demand for high quality, differentiated, locally grown food products**—both conventional and organic—in high volume places such as supermarkets, restaurants, schools, and hospitals. Consumers are ready. Here are two voices:

“I’d buy a lot more locally [for my store] if I could get it, particularly organic. It has the best flavor, not like those cardboard tomatoes.” And, “There are sizable markets in health care and food service that are looking for highly differentiated food products, not only differentiated on the basis of quality factors, but also in terms of food stories . . . where did it come from, who are the farmers. The food service industry is extremely concerned about the loss of *mid-size* farms. It’s an enormous opportunity.”

Who Will Feed Illinois?

To what degree, then, will the people of Illinois, say 25 years down the road, be fed by mega-farms? Small, diversified farms? Medium-sized farms? Urban farms and gardens? Asian and Latin American farms?

Food for all. There’s more to the question, “Who will feed Illinois?” than the type, size, and location of farms. There’s the question of whether *everyone* in Illinois will have the same access, the same right, to healthy and affordable food.

Other factors will influence whether everyone in Illinois has access to a healthy diet, such as having affordable stores in lower income neighborhoods and public transportation systems.

We return to food production. U.S. agriculture is increasingly bipolar. The 70% of the farms in the middle—575,000 small to medium-sized farms—are the most at risk.²

Small is beautiful. Small-scale diversified direct marketers (CSAs, farmers’ markets, et al.) are trailblazers. They play a critical strategic role by introducing tens of thousands of people to high-quality farm fresh foods.

However, small-scale diversified direct marketers won’t feed Illinois, and they won’t feed Chicago. One limitation of small-scale diversified direct marketers is that they won’t

² Willard Cochrane, A Food and Agricultural Policy for the 21st Century, unpublished paper, 1999.

reach average American shoppers in large numbers. In a similar fashion, urban agriculture won't stock too many shelves. Nor will they produce high numbers of paying jobs. But their contribution will be invaluable for neighborhood development and stability, education, production of ethnic and specialty crops, and for generating new recruits, especially youth.

Mega-farms raising monocultures of corn and soybeans won't feed the people of Illinois either. The crops they raise are destined for export markets, animal feed, or industrial uses. The commodity system is not as stable or monolithic as some believe. Stan Schutte, Triple S Farms, says, "Deep down, this system is unhealthy. It's going to fall apart."

In the hopeful view of the future, medium-sized farms will undergo the greatest change. Through crop diversification, through the creation of new partnerships and marketing infrastructure, and through a transformation of mental attitude—with financial and operational support from the land grant system, public policy, and the private sector—these medium-sized farms will become increasingly able to supply the wholesale markets that feed the majority of people in Illinois.

The Missing Infrastructure

Before moving to the heart of this report readers must understand the barriers that keep medium-sized family farms from directly feeding the people of Illinois. We are calling these barriers **the missing infrastructure**.

1. **Physical infrastructure:** There is a need for processing facilities for livestock, storage facilities where perishable product can be refrigerated and loads consolidated, processing facilities for dairy and fresh produce, and transportation, distribution, and marketing in new ways.
2. **Attitude:** This is the absence of a strong positive mental model that medium-sized diversified Illinois farms are viable, and that farmers can benefit by transitioning to new crops and to wholesale marketing. This is also about the lifestyle transition conventional corn and soybean farmers would have to make were they to transition to diversified crops or livestock.
3. **Knowledge:** The particular deep knowledge it takes to raise any and all crops and animals is eroded every time a diversified farmer goes out of business; entire production categories, from vegetables to fruits to types of livestock, are at risk. The knowledge of how to transport and market diversified crops is also part of the missing infrastructure.
4. **Training:** When knowledge and experience are missing, the onus is on training—the need to train new farmers and farmers in transition. This includes training in marketing and distribution and issues unique to the urban grower.
5. **Labor:** Planting, weeding, harvesting, grading and packing, pruning trees, and care of livestock will all need an expanded and trained labor force if the Illinois farm economy is to shift toward diversified crops.

6. **Land:** Farmers report there is little farmland available, at least at affordable prices. Suburbs and sprawl are taking prime farmland permanently out of production. The City of Chicago has 60,000 to 70,000 vacant lots, but they are often too expensive, too small, or simply unavailable. Ann Sorensen of American Farmland Trust says, “The problem we have here in Illinois is local land use planning...to do a good job with any food systems work, you need regional planning.”
7. **Financing:** Even when a farmer owns the land, conventional financing for unconventional crops can be hard to find and arrange.
8. **Political will and savvy:** Lack of political will among decision makers and politicians and lack of political savvy at the grassroots and organizational levels are barriers to success.

At the Crossroad

We stand at a crossroad. Without concerted investment and action now or in the near future, the opportunity will slip away for Illinois producers to be the ones delivering diversified and specialty products to the Illinois food marketplace. The growing demand for high quality, diversified farm products, both organic and conventional, will be filled increasingly by large-scale commodity suppliers out-of-state, out-of-region, and out-of-country.

IV. WHAT IS LEVERAGE?

Leverage is the idea that “small, well-focused actions can sometimes produce significant, enduring improvements.”³ For a system as large and complex as the Illinois farm and food economy, there’s probably no single leverage point that could turn the system around. Change will occur from the synergy of a number of actions and investments made simultaneously.

V. LEVERAGE POINTS: HOW TO TAKE ACTION

We have identified seven key leverage points that funders should work on immediately and simultaneously. For each leverage point we make recommendations for specific actions to consider executing or funding.

To fund or to do? When we recommend an action, in almost every case (unless it is very clearly specified otherwise) we are ***not*** distinguishing between actions that funders would facilitate through an investment or grant or actions they would execute themselves.

³ Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (Currency, 1994), 64.

Leverage Point 1: Be the Glue

What was missing suddenly became clear at one of the all-project-team meetings we held to analyze the Illinois food system: glue.

Illinois has hundreds of groups, thousands of people, actively working on food system reform. What it doesn't have is a well-developed consciousness that all these stakeholders are part of a single local food system movement. And it doesn't have the leadership to hold them all together.

Take the leadership role

Be the glue that holds these stakeholders together in common purpose. Stimulate deeper conversations. Redefine a more positive picture of the future.

Funders may not need to play this role indefinitely. They may be able to pass the baton. But we believe leadership that will hold together a common movement must be in place before anything else can work, and the funders are well positioned to fill that need.

Funders can expand the volume of conversations by convening meetings and conferences. They can request proposals for specific activities. They can speak with credibility to the media and shape public opinion. They can draw in political and other influential leaders. They can identify and attract additional financial resources.

Define the common purpose

No single entity can orchestrate a transformation of this magnitude. It takes hundreds of organizations and tens of thousands of individuals doing their own thing, their own way, *with support* from major institutions. The leverage is in herding this mass of self-managed activity in a common general direction.

An important first step is to define that direction. A purpose statement could be as short and simple as: *A more diverse agriculture for Illinois—feeding us healthier food, providing tomorrow's best business opportunities.*

Bring in new players; attract new resources

A more diverse network is a stronger network. From the agricultural sector, seek diversity in production—crops, animals, scale, location, ways of marketing, integrated pest management (IPM) as well as organic. From the food security sector, seek demographic diversity and innovative projects that make locally grown food affordable to low income people. Recruit hard inside the food industry—the voice of business is seriously underrepresented. Allies from the land grant system and the State Department of Agriculture are critical. Include the Illinois Farm Bureau. This will make it easier to attract new resources. The effort will be taken more seriously by prospective funders and participants.

Include faith-based communities as critical partners

Reach out to both rural and urban people through their religious communities. Faith-based communities are both trusted vehicles of communication and cost-effective ways to reach large numbers.

Tear down the walls: Unite Illinois behind food system reform

The “profound cultural polarization between Chicago and downstate Illinois” is a major impediment to change. But unlike the impenetrable commodity support system, these cultural walls can be torn down *or eroded* through sheer intention and practice.

Move beyond the Food Summits

The Food Summits sponsored by The Chicago Community Trust were successful. They got people talking, thinking, and interacting.

Now we recommend that the funders, in partnership with other sponsors, such as the University of Illinois and the City of Chicago, take the Food Summits to the next level: *convene the one conference every year that no one can afford to miss.*

Leverage Point 2: Shape Public Opinion

The change funders envision will, in large part, be market driven. There is leverage in shaping what ordinary citizens believe about food, farming, and their own health.

Change the common story told about Illinois agriculture

The story needs to change from the one about the domination of corn, corn, corn, (and soybeans), to a story about the early stages of transformation from an export-oriented monoculture to a more diversified farm state learning to feed itself once again.

A majority of the interviewees offered some version of the prevailing mental model: Illinois farms raise exports; Illinois families eat mostly imports; and things won’t change as long as government subsidies persist. Changing the prevailing mental model is everyone’s responsibility and challenge.

Turn up the volume—fund communications work

The public and media’s love of new stories presents an opportunity to turn up the volume and be heard by millions of people at once. Fund communications projects staffed by media professionals.

Leverage Point 3: Build the Markets of the Middle

We recommend that funders take on the arduous task of building the wholesale infrastructure that will enable Illinois farms to supply the food outlets—the grocery stores, institutions, and restaurants—that feed most Illinois people every day.

Markets of the Middle are the portion of the conventional food distribution system that can be recaptured and resupplied by small and medium-sized farms as part of a reformed regional and national food distribution system. This includes all manner of *wholesaling*. For example:

- One farm delivering to a number of restaurants three times a week;

- Many farms in a region reaching stores and/or restaurants indirectly by delivering regularly to a produce distributor or a specialty foods distributor; and
- Ten farms consolidating their mix of products under a single brand name in order to gain efficiencies in processing, trucking, and marketing.

We are either in the early and most difficult stages of a long, slow transition to a food system driven by a desire for healthful, safe, high quality foods, and for connection to and knowledge about the sources of food. Or, we are, as the skeptics contend, playing around with permanent small niche markets that will never grow into something significant enough to support tens of thousands of small and medium-sized farms in the U. S. The authors of this report believe the die has not yet been cast. Without intervention, the system will progress toward a confirmation of the skeptics' view of tomorrow. *There is an opportunity to intervene.*

Farmers are among the most resourceful people in the world. With adequate market incentives and evidence of hope and support, farmers will find a way to surmount barrier after barrier to deliver the goods.

Identify successful ventures and tell their stories

There are *lots* of farm-to-market activities in Illinois and in neighboring states whose untold stories would be instructive, if not inspirational.

For example, the Amish are among the most talented growers of regional organic produce and their stories range across Iowa, Indiana, and Ontario, Canada.

This is, indeed, a regional effort, and state borders should not confine the marketing and communications work. To keep success stories fresh, they'll have to come from Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, and Iowa, as well as from Illinois.

The search for stories will lead to the creation of a list or database of ready-to-go farmers. Make such a database widely available to the public; include an inventory of the products and volumes the farmers can supply. This sets the stage for immediate expanded wholesale marketing activity.

Amplify the level of local trade activity—support matchmaking and marketing

Funders should invest in, support, train, and/or make alliances with individuals and organizations that can bridge the gap between farmers and buyers. While some farmers are skillful marketers, more and more farmers concede that marketing has become the weak link in their survival chain.

Established brokers, cooperatives, or distributors will have the know-how to arrange and coordinate deals. Skillful intermediaries will do even more. They will locate new markets for unsold high quality product. They will inform growers about new opportunities.

Number one on the matchmaking *to-do* list is connecting the ready-to-go farmers and the ready-to-go buyers.

Support farmers in transition

The transition from commodity agriculture to raising specialty crops or livestock is loaded with risk. So is the transition from conventional farming to organic.

If there is to be a significant Marketplace of the Middle in Illinois in 25 years, then there must be a significant number of farmers who undergo one or both transitions.

Formal support and training will be necessary to reduce and manage the risks of transition. Growers will benefit from a combination of advice and training on finance and accounting, business management, technical farm production issues, marketing, and labor management.

Cultivate partnerships within the food industry

Engage the food industry. The voice of the food industry is essential to this effort. Not only do they own and manage the businesses that provide the majority of food consumed in Illinois, but their detailed knowledge and experience are also essential ingredients in planning for distribution strategies that will adequately serve these markets.

There are organizations, businesses, and individuals who are already building the Markets of the Middle in their own way, on their own turf. Several are specifically looking for partners in Illinois. See the full report for examples.

Engage the land grant and the state as partners

We heard criticism of the University of Illinois and the Illinois Department of Agriculture for their lack of leadership and commitment to sustainable and organic agriculture. We also encountered individuals inside those institutions who were hard at work to prove the critics wrong.

The short-term battle is to support, strengthen, and grow the existing programs inside the land grant system and inside the Department of Agriculture so they become increasingly effective advocates for change. The long-term battle is to engage these two powerful institutions as full partners and major funders of local and organic market development and food system reform.

Support mission-driven business activity

At this early and experimental stage in the transformation of the Illinois food system, strong ideas and strong entrepreneurs may not find sufficient capital for their start-up activities in the usual places.

To the degree their own legal structures and internal guidelines permit, funders should seriously consider all kinds of mission-driven food business proposals, including the most far-reaching of ideas and activities. Scrutinize the entrepreneur as closely as the idea and the plan itself. Does she or he have adequate skills? Recognize the leaders and the risk-

takers who will successfully build the Markets of the Middle and step up to support the growth of their enterprises, especially in the early stages, in both ordinary and new ways.

Leverage Point 4: Support Chicago Organic and Other Urban Initiatives

Urban dwellers in the United States don't associate their health with agriculture. It's a gap that keeps rural and urban people from working together. **Community food security is a way to unify farm and food concerns.** It brings food distribution, food production, nutrition, and feeding the poor into one analysis and process.

We have the public's ear. The current national media focus on obesity and public health is an excellent opportunity to connect what the nation eats, what the nation weighs, and how the nation farms.

We have the greenest mayor. Mayor Richard M. Daley's ambition to *make Chicago the greenest city in the United States* is a golden opportunity for developing a sustainable and secure food system. Chicago Organic is an example of the kind of unified thinking and planning that is needed. This effort by Mayor Daley will plan, organize, and drive the city's environmental initiatives.

Strike while the iron's hot

There is no time to be lost in rallying behind Chicago Organic.

Support pilot projects in which local farmers supply city institutions, such as public schools

Food procurement is an obvious place to strike first. Getting local farm products into the City of Chicago food-procurement system is an area in which immediate progress can be made and showcased. Success will depend on a variety of factors (see the full report for a list).

Support urban agriculture

Urban agriculture is another area in which to strike right away. It's more accurate to say, "Keep on striking," because there's already so much going on.

A local group, The Advocates for Urban Agriculture, states, "With a strong, integrated plan for urban agriculture, the City of Chicago could reap the broadest community, economic, nutritional and environmental benefits."⁴ We agree.

⁴ Advocates for Urban Agriculture, Draft Plan for Sustainable Urban Agriculture in Chicago, February 24, 2004

Push supermarkets to introduce stores in underserved neighborhoods

We recommend that funders use their influence to get large well- run food stores in underserved neighborhoods. No single event would increase more access to healthy and affordable food.

Help establish food policy councils

A food policy council is one of the main arenas in which diverse parties can discuss and debate the issues, explore common ground, and figure out how to collaborate and move forward. A new generation of Chicago and state-level food policy councils could help integrate policies across city/state departments, private-sector organizations, and different regions. The Chicago Organic committee is well positioned to start—or evolve into—such a council for the city.

Support matchmakers and marketers who can successfully link growers to low-income consumers

Efforts to connect growers, both urban and rural, to low income consumers are among the most challenging to execute successfully, especially setting a price that is mutually acceptable to growers and buyers. Two current examples are the work of the Chicago Anti-Hunger Federation, which buys from local farmers, and Seven Generations Ahead, which is linking farms and buyers as one of its programs. Other approaches include funding farmers' markets in lower-income neighborhoods, subsidizing community supported agriculture (CSA) shares for lower-income families, or directing more “seconds” and aesthetically-off-grade produce to food banks.

Leverage Point 5: Fortify and Facilitate; Invest in Leadership

It sounds trite, but ultimately, it's people who make things happen. Leaders.

Invest in leadership. Effective leaders need mentorship, technical skills, emotional support, and/or greater resources at their disposal. This is an area where interviewees spoke in unison.

Leverage Point 6: Fortify and Facilitate; Invest in Policy Reform

The most leverage from additional resources applied by funders in the area of policy work will come by funding efforts for policy change at the state, county, and local levels directly in support of other recommendations in this report.

The skills and know-how to move an in-state policy campaign forward are in short supply. Funders should support:

- Initiatives of organizations and leaders with proven track records.

- Policy work whose intention is to generate state level resources and University of Illinois resources.
- Matching grants to encourage emerging policies in the City of Chicago that promote healthy eating and farm-to-city business connections.
- Efforts that make healthy and affordable food for all a central feature of public policy.
- Initiatives that remove or modify policies that now serve as obstacles to diversified farm production and as obstacles to the processing, transportation and marketing of diversified farm products, such as meat and poultry.
- Efforts at land use planning and policy creation that make land available for new or diversified farm production, both urban and rural.

Leverage Point 7: Synergy

Behind every recommendation above is an assumption that, if executed successfully, it will make it easier to realize success in one of the other areas.

For example, if we can change the common story told about Illinois agriculture and reach millions of people, then buyers and chefs and food industry managers will be willing to take more risk and buy more locally grown foods.

A self-fulfilling cycle is set in motion. In the synergy that develops from these changes lies the hope for enduring change.

VI. TALK, STRATEGIZE, COORDINATE

Members of the Illinois Food and Community Funders Group are anxious to move toward the action phase. Our advice—talk to each other, strategize, discuss your next steps, and how to coordinate your actions.

KATHY DICKHUT,
DEPUTY COMMISSIONER
OF THE CHICAGO
DEPARTMENT OF
PLANNING AND
DEVELOPMENT

“...if all the funders, including the city, got behind the same set of food system initiatives, it could have a major impact. They could be funding the same quilt, but different patches.”

FOREWORD: IT STARTED WITH A VISION

“Create a more diverse agriculture for Illinois that supports local and regional food production, improves access and affordability to healthier food, conserves farmland, and expands business opportunities for urban and rural communities.”

—Vision Statement: Illinois Food and Community Funders Group—July 2003

We began our work with a bold and ambitious vision—to create a new food system for Illinois that is based on local and regional food production. We imagine a future when all citizens have equal access to healthy food—regardless of income, age, or race. We see an agriculture system that preserves our state’s timeless rural landscape while plowing new ground for high-tech urban agriculture.

This report, “Feeding Ourselves: Strategies for a New Illinois Food System,” embodies one of many steps Chicago, Illinois, and national public and private funders have taken over the past two years to try to realize our bold vision. Our history as a collaborative effort provides the context for this report. It has been a journey grounded in commitment, partnership, and a belief that there is a different and better future for agriculture in Illinois—one based on sustainability, equity, and opportunity.

Our work together began in the summer of 2002 when a small group of private and public funders met to discuss ways to engage our colleagues in food systems change. We chose Chicago and Illinois as our focus for several reasons:

First, funders were already deeply committed to and convening around conservation and stewardship, health, nutrition, and hunger issues.

Second, local and national media attention on food, diet, and health concerns had become widespread. Mayor Daley’s interest in environmental sustainability, including urban agriculture, spurred much of this media coverage.

Third, The Chicago Community Trust had taken a leadership role in sponsoring the Illinois Food Summit—a gathering of hundreds of farmers, activists, and entrepreneurs to discuss statewide food systems change.

In the end, we all agreed, “What better place to plot wholesale reform of the food system than Chicago?” It is a world class food city with sophisticated chefs actively engaged in building a culinary movement based on local, fresh, and organic food.

After months of planning, on December 10, 2002, The Chicago Community Trust, Donors Forum of Chicago, Environmental Grantmakers Association, Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, and W.K. Kellogg Foundation kicked off discussion around food and community at a remarkable conference at the Gleacher Center of the University of Chicago in Chicago. The *Making Connections, Creating Change* conference brought together representatives from foundations, non-governmental organizations, cutting-edge restaurants, and farmers to discuss funding

opportunities, national best practices, and current Chicago projects—all under the rubric of sustainable food systems.

Alice Waters, owner of Chez Panisse and founder of the Edible School Yard Project, presented the keynote address. An impassioned advocate, Waters' remarks were inspiring and set the tone for the day. Other speakers throughout the day discussed national and local best practices to strengthen community through local agriculture.

In keeping with the theme for the day, we dined on a fabulous lunch coordinated by Abby Mandel of Chicago's Green City Market and prepared by several of Chicago's finest chefs—Michael Altenberg, Rick Bayless, Bruce Sherman, and Sarah Stegner; each of whom introduced his or her farmer partners.

Energized by the December meeting, the McCormick Tribune Foundation sponsored a meeting of colleagues to map out current programs in the areas of hunger, health, community development, sustainable agriculture, and conservation, and to define a process for continuing to work together. We continued meeting throughout the spring and summer. To expand our collective learning, we decided to issue a request for a proposal (RFP) for a feasibility study to help us understand leverage points and opportunities for action. Headwaters Group Philanthropic Services helped frame the RFP, solicit proposals, and coordinate our administrative needs.

In October 2003, we sent the RFP to numerous consultants around the country, and after an extensive review process, we selected Red Tomato of Canton, Massachusetts in February 2004. Red Tomato's assignment was to identify leverage points in Illinois and Chicago around farm and food systems where strategic investment by funders acting alone or collaboratively could result in significant change. The study was funded by the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, Kraft Foods, the Lumpkin Family Foundation, the City of Chicago-Department of Planning and Development, The Chicago Community Trust, and the Liberty Prairie Foundation.

In July 2004, Red Tomato presented its report to the Illinois Food and Community Funders Group. It is our hope that the report will be instructive, useful, and provocative for all of its readers. More importantly, we believe that it will serve as a critical roadmap for public and private decision makers and advocates interested in food and community reform. The report can be accessed and downloaded at The Chicago Community Trust website: www.cct.org.

Amina Dickerson, Kraft Foods
Kathy Dickhut, City of Chicago
Ada Mary Gugenheim, The Chicago Community Trust
Bruce Karmazin, Lumpkin Family Foundation
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Judith Stockdale, Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation

I. WHY THIS REPORT NOW?

The funders of this study, and the network they represent, are unified in their desire for a different farm and food system: one that places a priority on healthy eating for everyone, a healthy environment, and profitable connections between farms and nearby food sellers. More than 20 public and private funders “have come together to explore ways to work together to increase the demand for healthy food among all populations in Chicago and Illinois and to promote its local or regional production and widespread accessibility and affordability.”⁵ A subgroup of these funders—Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation; Lumpkin Family Foundation; Liberty Prairie Foundation; the City of Chicago-Department of Planning and Development; Kraft Foods; and The Chicago Community Trust—worked in collaboration and took a bold step forward to commission this report, an assessment of the opportunities in the food system for strategic philanthropy and investment. All the members of the Illinois Food and Community Funders Group are listed in the acknowledgements page in the front of this report.

The principal aim of this report is to identify key *leverage points* where positive change can be made through strategic investment by funders acting alone or by funders collaborating to increase their effectiveness.

This report is written for the leadership in this funders’ network. We anticipate that funders will use this report to do the following:

- Consider new or different kinds of investment or grant making;
- Analyze current projects and future prospects;
- Affirm or challenge previous decisions and directions;
- Collaborate with other funders on future projects;
- Undergo strategic planning; and
- Communicate with coworkers, trustees, and the outside world.

Organizations outside this network and the region may also find this report of use. Although some of Illinois’ food system problems and opportunities are unique to the state or the Midwest, farmers and food system professionals elsewhere face many of them as well.

⁵ From the Illinois Food Systems Needs Assessment Request for Proposal, December 2003.

II. METHODOLOGY

In his 1985 book about Olympic rowing, *The Amateurs*, David Halberstam writes: “When most oarsmen talked about their perfect moments in a boat, they referred not so much to winning a race but to the feel of the boat, all eight oars in the water together. The boat seemed to lift right out of the water. Oarsmen called that the moment of swing.”⁶

That kind of swing was what we strived for in our project team—the sense of pulling together. That swing will also be what those charged with implementing this report must strive for.

The project team included five employees of Red Tomato, and seven advisers. The team approach helped us manage an ambitious agenda that spanned a wide range of subjects. We asked three members of the funders’ group to be advisers, to keep us in touch with the clients’ perspective. A smaller team would have been more economical and more manageable. But we chose the team approach to add deeper experience in areas where the principal investigators were weakest, and to improve the quality of analysis.

More than 70 in-depth interviews conducted over three months in 2004 make up the core of the study. Most were 60 to 90 minutes; some were shorter. Over the course of this project we spoke with farmers, university employees, funders, food industry staff, activists, state and federal employees, City of Chicago staff, and nonprofit staff. For a complete list of interviewees, see appendix A. We analyzed each interview as it was completed, constantly adjusting the interview format to focus on the missing or most perplexing parts of the puzzle at the time.

We saw the project as an unfolding investigation looking for an answer to the question, “What actions will effect the most change?” rather than a scientific research process in pursuit of objective facts or quantifiable information. It was a search for experienced opinions that we could shape into a credible story of the Illinois food system, one we could analyze for opportunities and leverage points.

The results are colored by our own experience at Red Tomato. We are brokers of family farm produce in the New England marketplace and architects of retail programs that promote locally and ecologically grown produce in supermarkets. Some members of the project team have been promoters of organically and ecologically grown farm fresh

⁶ David Halberstam, *The Amateurs: The Passionate Quest of Young men for Olympic Gold* (Ballantine, 1986).

foods for three decades. The project advisers who are not regular employees of Red Tomato add layers of experience in fair trade, farm and food policy, ecology, and community food security.

For a complete step-by-step description of our research process, see Appendix B.

III. THE BIG PICTURE

We begin with a current snapshot of the Illinois farm and food system, done in the spirit of the monthly index in *Harper's Magazine*. Of course, the most interesting stories are hiding behind these statistics. But here are some numbers to whet your appetite:

- Total number of Illinois farms in 2002: 73,027
- Percent of state's land area in farms: 76.8%⁷
- Acres of certified Organic vegetables in Illinois in 2001: 374⁸
- Percent of 2002 Illinois agricultural cash receipts from corn and soy together: 71.6%
- Percent from vegetable crops: 0.8%⁹
- Percent of 1997 Illinois farm sales from "agricultural products sold directly to individuals for human consumption": 0.144% (value of \$12 million)¹⁰
- Rank of Illinois among states for value of agricultural product exports in 2002: 2 (value of \$3.31 billion)
- Percent of Illinois farms with 2002 gross annual sales over \$500,000: 3.9%
- Percent of total farm sales from farms in the above category: 37.6%¹¹
- Number farms with more than 1000 acres in 1997: 6775
- Number farms with more than 1000 acres 2002: 7655
- Number farms with fewer than 1000 acres in 1997: 72,337
- Number farms with fewer than 1000 acres 2002: 65,372¹²
- Percentage growth from 1996 to 2000 in the number of food stamp recipients in Illinois: 25%¹³
- The Illinois Department of Agriculture lists 137 farmers' markets in Illinois: 108 are downstate, 29 are in Chicago

⁷ U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2002 Census of Agriculture. <http://www.nass.usda.gov/census>.

⁸ United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. Data: Organic Production. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Data/Organic>.

⁹ Illinois Annual Summary 2003.

¹⁰ USDA Census of Agriculture 1997 (this category deleted in 2002 census).

¹¹ USDA Census of Agriculture 2002.

¹² USDA Census of Agriculture 2002.

¹³ From the website of the Chicago Anti-Hunger Federation (www.antihunger.org).

- A web search brings up 11 Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farming operations that serve Illinois; one is located in Wisconsin.
- Percentage of boys and girls ages 3 to 7 attending Chicago public schools that are overweight: 23%.¹⁴
- Percentage of Illinois households who don't always know where their next meal will come from: 8.2%.¹⁵
- Illinois' rank among states in the nation for the number of schools participating in the School Lunch program that also offers School Breakfast: 45th.¹⁶

Future Prospects of the Illinois Food System: Two Views

The comments of interviewees about the prospects of changing the Illinois food system in the direction sought by the funders of this report fall into two camps—the first, decidedly pessimistic; the second, optimistic based on recent happenings and early stage successes.

Both these views of the Illinois food system tell the truth. In more than one case, in fact, we found the same voice telling both sides of this story. Here are some of those voices.

One view: The glass is half empty

To some of those working to change the Illinois food system, the prospects seem dismal. Some say that in 25 years things won't have changed much; they'll only have gotten bigger. Much bigger. Farms will be 30,000-plus acres, still run by one or two farm managers and a small crew, using robotic equipment that would dwarf today's massive machinery. In this vision, government commodity subsidies will continue to determine the nature of 95%¹⁷ of the state's agricultural sector. Small-scale farms of less than 100 acres will constitute the rest of the state's farm economy. They'll market directly to consumers, their total revenues amounting to a small fraction of total farm income. And there will be little in between.

Proponents of this view report that less is happening to create a local, sustainable, and healthy food system in Illinois than in nearby states, such as Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan:

¹⁴ From the website of the Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children (www.clocc.net).

¹⁵ From the website of the Chicago Anti-Hunger Federation (www.antihunger.org).

¹⁶ From the website of the Food Research and Action Center (www.frac.org).

¹⁷ Illinois Annual Summary 2003; cash crop receipts 2002 are 93% corn, soy, and wheat.

“[Illinois] is a place where people don’t play well together. I’ve never seen a state where it’s so difficult for people to work together and give each other credit. It’s largely an issue of disconnection—it’s partly geographic, and it’s partly due to the widely varying efforts that are going on in agriculture—big agriculture and little agriculture are very separated.”- *Juli Brussell, Rainy Creek Farm, Casey, Illinois and Illinois Stewardship Alliance, a nonprofit promoting socially just and ecologically sustainable agriculture, Rochester, Illinois.*

“In Wisconsin, a lot of people are doing stuff at the margins... [Here in Illinois], guys like us, it’s only a handful of people, a very small handful.” - *David Cleverdon of Kinnikinnick Farm in Caledonia, a grower of lettuce and other specialty greens who recently saw a neighbor who was raising beets, cabbage, and making pickles go out of business.*

“There aren’t a lot of producers in Illinois [among our 300-farmer regional co-op]...virtually all of the meat and poultry comes from Wisconsin.... There’s a big gap in the training for farmers, and the cost of land is too high, particularly as you get close to Chicago.” - *Will Allen, Growing Power, a Milwaukee and Chicago based nonprofit focusing on urban agriculture.*

American Farmland Trust (AFT) administers an Environmental Protection Act (EPA) small-grants program to help implement the Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA) by reducing reliance on targeted pesticides. Ann Sorensen, assistant vice president for research for AFT and director of AFT’s Center for Agriculture in the Environment, notes that most of the activity is in Michigan and most of the grant proposals come from there. “It’s hard to get [grant proposals] out of Illinois. Illinois is much more conventional, in part because of the University of Illinois. It’s a little bit disconcerting when you don’t even get *anything* out of Illinois.”

“Chicago is a cow town, period.... We want meat and potatoes and bad beer....There’s only one wholesaler of organic in Chicago. There are six in St. Paul! With only one wholesaler, I can’t shop. I’m used to shopping for what I want [for my business].” - *Greg Christian, Greg Christian Catering, Chicago.*

“Chicago is 19th among urban markets for total organic milk sold, behind smaller cities such as Seattle, Tampa, Miami, Sacramento, and even Hartford.” - *Theresa Marquez, Organic Valley, a nationwide cooperative of dairy and meat producers, LaFarge, Wisconsin.*

The slower pace of the Illinois movement toward a local, sustainable food system is due in part to the overwhelming dominance of commodity corn and soybean agriculture. Federal policy is largely responsible for that dominance, through investment in the conservative land-grant university system and through policies that encourage commodity production.

“Corn and soybeans are easy! It’s plant, spray, harvest, drink coffee, collect your government payment.” - *Jack Erisman, Goldmine Farms, Pana, Illinois. Erisman’s grandfather named the farm for its yellow clay outcroppings in the 1940’s, and the name stuck.*

“Conventional farmers are not going to change...They’ve gotten lazy. It’s like cocaine. They’re addicted to it. They don’t want to do anything different. I was that way myself...And it’s mainly because of the support programs. Until that changes, you’re not going to see a change [in Illinois agriculture]... My neighbor says: ‘I’ll go out of business before I do what you’re doing.’”
- *Stan Schutte, Triple S Farms, Stewardson, Illinois.*

Another obstacle to changing this local food system is the profound cultural polarization between Chicago and downstate Illinois.

“It’s like two completely different cultures with different ways of thinking and acting. This is true for any urban area, including cities downstate, but especially Chicago...The way our farmers do things [diversified crops and livestock grown for direct markets and restaurants] has so many variables and interconnected threads. We deal with living things, so much complexity and unpredictability.... Some folks think that producing food is like producing widgets. They view fields as factories, and farmers as line workers, and that’s about as far from reality as you can get.” - *Terra Brockman, The Land Connection, a nonprofit working to save farmland, transition farms to organic, and train new farmers, Congerville, Illinois.*

“Culture in the downstate region was originally created by big companies, but now it permeates the region. People feel that intensive chemical agriculture is good, not harmful to people and the environment. People don’t see the link between the way they farm and the reason they don’t drink their own tap water.”
- *Bruce Karmazin, The Lumpkin Family Foundation, Mattoon, Illinois.*

When asked what would be the smartest thing this group of funders could do, one interviewee replied: “Get their heads out of Chicago, look up, and see [the rest of the state!]”

DAN BLOCK,
COORDINATOR OF
NEIGHBORHOOD
ASSISTANCE CENTER,
CHICAGO STATE
UNIVERSITY, CHICAGO

“Chicago is so huge and dominant in Illinois that it’s hard to make that rural–agriculture connection, particularly with large farms not being food-based.”

These factors create one very steep and gnarly slope for anyone—farmer, farm co-op, city employee, or community activist—trying to carve out new profitable marketing footholds in any of Illinois’ metropolitan areas. Or for people trying to link local farmers to sources of affordable food.

Another view: The glass is half full

At the same time, many voices offer small success stories that paint a more hopeful picture of the future. **Again and again, we heard about the growing demand for high quality, differentiated, locally grown food products**—both conventional and organic—in high volume places that serve millions of people such as supermarkets, restaurants, schools, and even hospitals.

“I’d buy a lot more local if I could get it, particularly organic. It has the best flavor, not like those cardboard tomatoes.” - *Mark Dineen, produce manager, Co-op Markets, Chicago.*

“Goodness Greenness said they’d take all the organic vegetables that we could grow. They seem genuinely interested to build this and pay farmers a decent price.” - *Kevin Brussell, Rainy Creek Farm, Casey, Illinois, and Southeastern Illinois Sustainable Agriculture Association, a farmer organization that promotes sustainable production of crops and livestock.*

“There are sizable markets in health care and food service that are looking for highly differentiated food products, not only differentiated on the basis of quality factors but also in terms of food stories...where did it come from, who are the farmers...In the health care industry, one of the major hospital chains [Kaiser Permanente] has just announced that they are going to focus on good food with health benefits such as antibiotic-free meat. The food service industry is extremely concerned about the loss of *mid-size* farms because they know that the small-scale direct marketers will never be able to supply their growing demand, and

they know that the commodity-type large size farms can't differentiate enough to supply this increasing demand for differentiated food products. It's an enormous opportunity.”
- *Fred Kirschenmann, The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Ames, Iowa.*

An article from Crain's Chicago Business confirms this view. “Scott Lively, who has a background in supply chain management and computer software sales, is now selling organic food and looking to turn his privately held Dakota Beef LLC into a national success...Launched in October 2002, the Chicago-based company produces private-label organic beef for retailers and restaurants, including grocery store chain Whole Foods Market Inc. and upscale local dining spots such as Caliterra, Green Dolphin Street and D. Kelly...Mr. Lively's company expects to generate about \$4 million in revenue this year, roughly four times 2003 sales...Dakota Beef has contracts with 25 certified organic ranchers in Illinois, Missouri, and South Dakota...”¹⁸

“This buy local direction, it's my bread and butter. It's where we're headed. The trend is there. Consumers are ready. It's where my energy is going. People want to know their producer, and putting a farmer's name on a product makes all the difference. The consumer is two to three generations removed from the farm and they really want that connection back to the farmer. You've got a doctor or a lawyer you go to. Well, I want to be their farmer.”
- *Stan Schutte, Triple S Farms, Stewardson, Illinois.*

Greg Christian is taking his catering business organic. He's one of Chicago's premier caterers and he serves the Mayor's office on a regular basis. He's out meeting farmers, fully aware it's going to be a slow, difficult process. Christian got into it for personal reasons—he has a daughter (age 11) with serious health issues. They've been using alternative medicines and organic food, and it's been working. “I've been eating this stuff at home for a long while, but work was something else. One day I just woke up and said: I can't be doing this at home and feeding my customers something else.”

“We want to support local [farm] businesses because they are our customers. I grew up with these farmers. I am willing to pay more for local—we advertise the farm name in our ads and use handwritten signs with products. People are willing to pay top

¹⁸ Cynthia Hanson, “Exec transfers his skill to organic beef startup,” *Crain's Chicago Business*, May 10, 2004.

dollar. They pay for the experience.” - *Peter Fitzgerald, produce manager, Sunset Foods, 5-store supermarket chain, Chicago.*

ROCHELLE DAVIS,
ILLINOIS HEALTHY
SCHOOLS CAMPAIGN,
CHICAGO

“We have three school districts in central Illinois who are ready to buy seven items directly from farmers. The food directors believe if they get direct farm food, it will taste better, and the kids will be more likely to eat it.”

“These [two local] growers are very good growers for me. The quality of their product demands top dollar, and we can get it. The tomato grower, John Cerney, is farming his family’s pre-Civil War land in southern Illinois. People come to Pets Calvert looking for the Cerney tomatoes. You can’t beat their quality. I also work with the best apple grower in the region, Sunrise Orchards out of Wisconsin. I guarantee he has the best McIntosh you’ve ever eaten.” - *Michael O’Neill, Pets Calvert, produce wholesaler, Chicago International Produce Market.*

“What you’ll find here are broad and deep connections between people and the land, and between consumers and farmers. Perhaps the most astonishing thing that has happened since we formed the Land Connection three years ago is how many people, from all walks of life, have come on board in one way or another to help out with donations of time or money, or in the case of farmers, with sharing their connections, or expertise. This has been invaluable, helping me deal with the other astonishing thing: how many farmers from all over the state have called up, attended workshops, come to field days, seeking information, encouragement, some real-life show-and-tell about what is possible outside the conventional corn and soybean monolith. Almost everyone who comes to our events tells me they’ve been ‘thinking about doing something different’ for years, even decades.” - *Terra Brockman, The Land Connection, Congerville, Illinois.*

Ann Sorensen of American Farmland Trust reported that AFT recently funded [through EPA Region 5] a multi-state agro-ecology network that will develop web-based resources for organic growers. The network includes the University of Illinois, Michigan State, and Purdue University, and Sorensen notes that she’s especially excited

about this project. “You don’t often see land grants working together like this.”

Who will Feed Illinois?

Both views expressed above are valid and based on real experience. To what degree, then, will the people of Illinois, say 25 years down the road, be fed by mega-farms? Small, diversified farms? Medium-sized farms? Urban farms and gardens? Floridian, Californian and other Western farms? Latin American farms? Asian farms?

Food for all. There’s more to the question, “Who will feed Illinois?” than the type, size, and location of farms. There’s the question of whether *everyone* in Illinois will have the same access, the same right, to healthy and affordable food. The most common definition of community food security is, “a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance, social justice, and democratic decision making.”

The following factors will have as much influence over whether everyone in Illinois has access to a healthy diet in 25 years as will farm production factors:

- Having affordable stores in lower income neighborhoods that offer healthy food choices;
- Public transportation systems;
- Nutrition education in schools and neighborhoods;
- Quality of outreach for food assistance programs;
- Distribution channels that connect farms and urban gardens to stores, restaurants, and other food outlets;
- The prevalence of, philosophy, and practices of emergency food providers; and
- The existence and effectiveness of venues for local and state food system planning.

The list also includes less tangible factors, such as the level of compassion in society for the hungry and the strength of social networks and citizen participation.

The dynamic relationship between urban issues (i.e., access for everyone to healthy and affordable food) and rural issues (i.e., viable farms producing healthy food for local consumption) was among the most difficult to understand and resolve in this study.

We return to the structure of food production. U.S. agriculture is increasingly bipolar: two extremes, with a disappearing middle. At one end, there are small, innovative, diversified farms that market directly to consumers. At the other end are mega-farms that produce commodities for export markets, for manufacturing, and for livestock. These mega-farms are growing exponentially in size. The 70% of the farms in the middle—575,000 small to medium-sized farms that account for 30% of national production—are the most at risk.¹⁹

“Evidence of the disappearing middle is already accumulating. Iowa serves as a compelling example. The decade 1987 to 1997 saw an 18% sales increase in farms that are less than 100 acres in size and a 71% sales increase in farms that are more than 1,000 acres in size. Farms of 260 to 500 acres averaged a 29 percent decrease in sales. The percentage of operators and acres in all farms between 100 and 999 acres in size declined 23% and 25%, respectively.²⁰

These polarizing trends threaten to “hollow out” rural America by eliminating jobs, and by reducing local spending, social infrastructure, and the local tax base.²¹

“[Looking ahead,] I see two agricultures: the big corporate agriculture and then what I’m doing [organic and direct marketing]. I don’t see anything in the middle.” - *Stan Schutte, Triple S Farms.*

“I like to think there are going to be two parallel systems. The large operations, we’re never going to abolish them, but you’re going to see smaller operations as well. I think the real trouble spot right now is the middle-sized farms. We’re going to lose them if things don’t change.” - *Anonymous, state employee.*

Small is beautiful. Small-scale diversified direct marketers are trailblazers. Direct marketers sell at farmers markets, through CSAs,²² on home delivery routes, innovative outlets such as Growing Power’s Market Baskets,²³ and through their own farm stands and Upick

¹⁹ Willard Cochrane, A Food and Agricultural Policy for the 21st Century, unpublished paper, 1999.

²⁰ Fred Kirschenmann, Steve Stevenson, Fred Buttel, Tom Lyson, and Mike Duffy, Why Worry About the Agriculture of the Middle?: A White Paper for the Agriculture of the Middle Project, January 2004. Available at: http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs/speech/files/middle_0104.pdf

²¹ The Agriculture of the Middle concept was originally developed by the National Task Force on Renewing the Agriculture of the Middle.

²² CSAs—Community Supported Agriculture enterprises— sell subscriptions to individuals or families (usually during winter so the cash serves as a loan to the farm) who receive a set weekly amount of food, depending on what is available from the farm at that point in time.

²³ Similar to a CSA system, Market Baskets are boxes of fresh produce delivered to neighborhoods on a weekly basis by subscription.

operations. They introduce tens of thousands of people to high-quality farm fresh foods no longer available in common stores. They are a living reminder to Americans that food comes from farms, and that farms have a vital purpose in our economy and culture.

Interviewee Ann Sorensen of American Farmland Trust reported that AFT did a survey of 2000 consumers (voters) before the 2002 Farm Bill. She was amazed by how many had purchased from farm stands—over 50% of the respondents. “It shows you how important those urban-edge growers are—they’re now responsible for educating the majority of the population.”

Direct marketers also supply some of the best and most innovative chefs and restaurants, and influence the menus of food service institutions everywhere. They are a reservoir of deep knowledge and experience that was once handed down generation to generation and is now endangered. That direct connection between a consumer and a farmer is entirely unique in our world today, inspiring and educational to both parties.

“We started with twelve to fourteen growers, and now work with 35. About eighty percent are organic and twenty percent use Integrated Pest Management.²⁴ The city has all of these other markets, but it is not the same thing. They do not have the same criteria of supporting ecological and local, and most of them are not ‘farmer only’ markets.” - *Abby Mandel, founder and board president of Green City Market, Chicago.*

Small-scale diversified direct marketers, however, won’t feed Illinois, and they won’t feed Chicago. One limitation of small-scale diversified direct marketers is that they do not, and possibly never will, reach average American shoppers in large numbers.

“The most important thing is to set up programs so quality local produce is not elitist, so it is both affordable for all incomes and also pays the farmer a fair wage. This is the number one long-term priority for funders to consider.” - *Ken Dunn, The Resource Center, Chicago, a nonprofit seeking to better utilize resources to improve the quality of life in Chicago.*

What they produce costs more to raise and more to sell (and therefore more to buy) because land is expensive, and because small-scale diversified production is labor-intensive. Shoppers often don’t understand this. They think locally produced food should cost less. After all, it’s not transported half way across country!

²⁴ Integrated Pest Management is a production strategy to reduce reliance on, and the use of, pesticides.

By comparison, the true costs of the petroleum-based conventional farming system are not reflected in the prices paid in the mainstream food supply. The infrastructure that enables mainstream food production and distribution to operate at an enormous and still growing scale, in the minds of most people, works adequately. More to the point, it's seldom *in* the minds of most people—it's invisible, taken for granted. Negative byproducts of this system, such as the contamination of drinking water, or the decay of rural communities, or the exploitation of migrant farm workers, all remain unseen. Some get fixed or cleaned up through the use of tax dollars. Some remain hidden or broken.

But these mega-farms raising monocultures of corn and soybeans won't feed the people of Illinois either. The crops they raise are destined for export markets, animal feed, or industrial uses. Mega-farms are here to stay. And there seems to be no limit to their eventual size.

KEVIN BRUSSELL,
RAINY CREEK FARM AND
SOUTHEASTERN ILLINOIS
SUSTAINABLE
AGRICULTURE
ASSOCIATION

“What used to be considered large is now medium. Today it takes 5,000 to 10,000 acres to make it comfortably. The goal I’m hearing is 30,000- acre grain farms. One farm manager will be running the farm with a lot of robotic equipment and not much labor.”

“Illinois is very similar to Iowa...We can easily imagine 200,000 acre farms. In Iowa, at this scale, there would be 140 of these farms. There would also be a community of investors and land owners with a centralized management.” - *Fred Kirschenmann, The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture.*

Yet the commodity system is neither as stable nor monolithic as some believe. John Masiunas in the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences at the University of Illinois says that once you get past the large 2,000 to 3,000 acre corn and soybean farms, there is growing desperation among farmers.

“Deep down, this system is unhealthy. The farmers know it. You know you’re being supported by someone else...Their self-image is not that they’re doing fine. [Some of them] are equity-stripping. They’re eating into their assets. [The system] is going to

crack. It's going to fall apart. These high prices [i.e., current commodity prices] will accelerate things. They'll make the strong even stronger and they'll run the others out of business faster.”
- Stan Schutte, *Triple S Farms*.

“The principal factor that will determine how farming is done [in the future]...will be the cost of fossil fuels. The more fossil fuel dependent the agricultural system is, the more it will be at a competitive disadvantage...In the 1940s we used to get about 100 units of energy from petroleum for every unit expended to obtain it...Fossil fuels now give about 20 back for each unit expended...The second piece of the picture is environmental degradation. Two weeks ago they announced we have 150 dead zones instead of 50. This is becoming visible in a way that will no longer be tolerated, and that will put pressure on the food system and the way we produce it.” - Fred Kirschenmann, *The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture*.

The production of food in the city—what advocates call urban agriculture—works wonders in many ways. Urban agriculture creates active open space that can change the look and feel of a neighborhood. It connects people to the land around them. Children see food growing and learn that food originates from the earth, not from stores. Kids who get involved may become hooked on gardening and vegetables for life. Adults find a healthy leisure activity. A few will find seasonal employment. *And there's the fresh food*, which finds its way to tables all over the neighborhood, to food pantries, and to commercial stores.

But don't expect urban agriculture to feed the masses in Chicago, or in any U.S. city for that matter.

The hopeful view on the Illinois food system above—the glass is half full discussion—leads to a vision of diversified farms feeding Illinois through a diverse mix of market channels. The small-scale diversified direct-marketing farms may contribute a small portion of the total Illinois food bill, statistically speaking. But they will play a critical strategic role as trailblazers and educators. Urban growers, in similar fashion, won't stock too many shelves. Nor will they produce high numbers of paying jobs. But their contribution will be invaluable for neighborhood development and stability, education, production of ethnic and specialty crops, and for generating new recruits, especially youth. Both kinds of growers are vital to the evolution of a new food system in Illinois.

In the hopeful view of the future, medium-sized farms undergo the greatest change. Through crop diversification, through the creation of

new partnerships and marketing infrastructure, and through a transformation of mental attitude—with financial and operational support from the land grant system, public policy, and the private sector—these medium-sized farms become increasingly able to supply the wholesale markets that feed the majority of people in Illinois.

Before moving to the heart of this report—the key leverage points and the recommendations for action—readers must understand in greater detail the barriers that keep medium-sized family farms from directly feeding the people of Illinois. We are calling these barriers **the missing infrastructure**.

The Missing Infrastructure

Interviewees were eloquent in describing these barriers to success, which we've organized into eight parts:

1. **Physical infrastructure** (for processing, post-harvest handling, transportation, and marketing in new ways...)
2. **Attitude**
3. **Knowledge** for specific crops, labor management, post-harvest handling
4. **Training** of new farmers and farmers in transition
5. **Labor** for harvesting, grading, pruning, planting, weeding
6. **Land** for affordable farmland
7. **Financing** for specialty crops that aren't subsidized commodities
8. **Political will and savvy** to make things/policy happen and to provide financial support

1. The piece of **physical infrastructure** mentioned most often and most emphatically as missing was processing facilities for livestock. Terra Brockman of the Land Connection reported that small town meat lockers are going out of business every day. Most are so antiquated that upgrading them would likely cost more than building a new one from scratch. There is no waterfowl processor in the state, and there is only one downstate chicken processor—Central Illinois Poultry Processing in Arthur. It's a fine facility, but takes out an entire day for farmers, who must pack their 100 or so chickens, drive two to three hours, wait four hours for processing and chilling, and then drive back.

“The main impediment [to launching a successful organic livestock business] is the processing. There are more and more who are certifying their cattle and hogs organic. If we could get the processing infrastructure, then we could figure out the transportation and marketing piece of it.” - *Kevin Brussell, Rainy Creek Farm and Southeastern Illinois Sustainable Agriculture Association.*

Juli Brussell of Rainy Creek Farm and the Illinois Stewardship Alliance attributes the loss of small meat processing plants primarily to Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) regulations, which came into effect for small plants in 2001.²⁵ “I would say we lost about 20 percent of the remaining plants as a result of that requirement.” In most cases these plants could meet the inspection requirements, but not the requirements for HACCP documentation—“Many told me ‘We can’t afford to pay an employee for 4 hours a day to check off boxes on a sheet of paper.’” She would like to sell meat from her own farm at a farmers’ market in St. Louis, Missouri and a food co-op in Clayton, Indiana, but she can’t because the processing plant she uses in Illinois is not USDA inspected, and therefore the meat can’t cross state lines. “There’s a demand for community meat processors, a place where you can get your meat slaughtered, cut, and wrapped in a professional manner—and there’s a need for training for employees in those plants.”

The missing physical infrastructure also includes storage facilities where perishable product can be refrigerated and loads consolidated, processing facilities for dairy and fresh produce, and transportation.

Homegrown Wisconsin distributes three to six pallets of diversified organic vegetables to restaurants in Chicago twice a week. Rink DaVee of Shooting Star Farm, former general manager of Homegrown Wisconsin and still a participating farmer, describes several transportation hurdles the group encountered. First, it’s most efficient to use a full-size tractor trailer to bring produce into the city. But once in Chicago, a smaller truck was needed to get through city streets and alleys (a service currently provided by the Institute for Community Resource Development). They found a place to transfer product from the large truck to the small one, but sometimes product had to sit out of refrigeration on the dock for several hours. In addition, they are delivering three to six pallets two times a week, while semis can hold 40 pallets. “Truckers tell us, ‘We’ve got a big gorilla to fill, and you’re just a little ant!’ It has been hard for us to

²⁵ HACCP—Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points; a procedure for identifying, monitoring, and controlling the points in a manufacturing or production process where biological, chemical, or weather/heat-related contamination can occur

find a scale-appropriate situation for bringing our product to Chicago restaurants.”

Thinking out loud about the need for distribution satellites, Jim Slama of Sustain, a nonprofit with a focus on creating local food systems, said: “Some kind of distribution infrastructure—drop-off sites, post-harvest handling sites, cooling, meat-processing facilities, a slaughterhouse, and a distribution center—could be done for under five million dollars. This would be rocking. Four or five of these outlying satellites combined with a central Chicago hub. We need supply chain management and marketing...the trade show [Sustain’s new family farmer organic trade show, launched in March 2004] can help with a lot of the marketing.”

2. Attitude. This is, in part, about the absence of a strong positive mental model that medium-sized diversified Illinois farms are viable, and that farmers can benefit by transitioning to new crops and to wholesale marketing (*mental model* is defined on page 36). This mental model is in short supply among farmers, extension agents, and even among sustainable agriculture practitioners. Wanted: success stories about farm enterprises that are making money by wholesaling diversified products to nearby markets (we get into this more below in Leverage Point 3). A fresh and constant stream of well-publicized success stories would begin to paint the picture of a different future.

This is also about the lifestyle transition conventional corn and soybean farmers would have to make were they to transition to diversified crops or livestock. It’s about resistance to change. Dairy farming, for example, and fruit and vegetable farming, are more labor intensive than grain farming, and they rely on a sufficient number of hired hands during critical times (as opposed to large farm machinery). In the case of produce, prices change almost daily, and a farmer has to be a marketer as well as a grower. Raising livestock is a year round proposition, whereas grains are seasonal, with heaviest demand on the grower around spring planting and fall harvest. The resistance to changes in attitude is also about missing knowledge of the particular requirements for raising and marketing specialty crops.

“Growers in Illinois are not as familiar with marketing structures for vegetables. There’s a lot of uncertainty in this system, such as fluctuating prices and demand that growers in other regions are used to and have been dealing with all their lives. It’s normal for them. But this is very different from knowing the basic payments for corn and soybeans, and knowing that you can take them to the elevator and sell them all at once.” - *Juli Brussell, Rainy Creek Farm and Illinois Stewardship Alliance.*

3. Knowledge. The particular deep knowledge it takes to raise any and all crops and animals is eroded every time a diversified farmer goes out of business. In Illinois, where most of the farmers raise corn and/or soybeans, entire production categories, from vegetables to fruits to types of livestock, are at risk of losing the local base of knowledge and experience passed on from one generation of farmers to the next.

Kevin Brussell reports that “there are regions in Illinois where people still have the knowledge of how to grow specialty crops.” For example, Hoopston, north and east of Champaign/Urbana, was known as a center of sweet corn production. There was a major processing plant there that eventually shut down. Lawrenceville, on the Knox River near Vincennes, Indiana, is another region where there is still fruit and vegetable production knowledge. And there’s another, around the town of Havana in west central Illinois, a sandy region with lots of irrigation.

The knowledge of how to transport and market diversified crops is also part of the missing infrastructure. In a global economy focused on container-sized (i.e., full-truck-sized) loads of food commodities, it is increasingly difficult to find trucks, brokers, and distributors for smaller loads and untraditional products.

4. Training. When knowledge and experience are missing, the onus falls on training.

The need to train new farmers, as well as farmers in transition—from one crop to another, from conventional to organic, from crops to livestock—was identified by interviewees as an area of critical need.

Gary Cuneen of Seven Generation Ahead, a nonprofit working to develop new markets for farmers, asks, “Where is the next generation of farmers going to come from? Distribution is needed, but it will be crafted from local market development. The issue of where farmers and land will come from is just as important.”

Farmers and other interviewees said that trainers need to be experienced farmers who know the local growing conditions and market opportunities.

Tom Spaulding, Executive Director of the CSA Learning Center at Angelic Organics and an active supporter of the Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training (CRAFT), supported this idea, noting that “It’s gotta be farmer to farmer—that’s critical. Farmers will tell you that the best resource out there is another farmer.” But he also emphasized that “it takes a lot to train people...a farmer’s time is

valuable and we need to pay them [experienced farmers] to carve out some of their time to train the next generation of farmers.”

Farmers and others also emphasized that trainees should be prescreened for appropriate skills, experience, and the ability to stick with a difficult task. David Cleverdon of Kinnikinnick Farm in Caledonia, Illinois put it another way, “You need a lot of people because 95% of them aren’t going to make it.” David Jackson, one of the organic vegetable wholesalers in the Red Tomato network, says, “More guys make it in the N.B.A. than in farming.”

Will Allen of Growing Power added that experienced farmers should be trained to work with diverse groups. New farmers need to be taught that farming is “*really, really* hard work.” He also says successful farmers “need to be innovative [regarding marketing] and have a lot of passion.”

JIM SLAMA,
SUSTAIN, CHICAGO

“Farmer development and training is just as important as the distribution piece.”

Training applies to the areas of marketing and distribution, and to the urban environment as well as to the training of new rural farmers. Urban agriculture is a school unto itself with a host of problems unique to growing in cities, for example, irrigation, fencing and security, contamination of city lots, and the marketing of small quantities.

Rodger Cooley of Heifer International, referring to urban agriculture in Cook County, spoke of a “huge need” for training and technical assistance to develop capacity in production and business management. He called for more support from Cook County Cooperative Extension in this area, noting that “they’re exploring this, and it’s exciting that they’re working on it, but they need to do more—it’s not being backed up with enough resources yet, and Chicago needs more technical capacity on the ground from all the organizations working on urban agriculture—better trainers who are listening to the needs of urban growers.”

Tom Spaulding of the CSA Learning Center at Angelic Organics also argues for a regional approach to training, which CRAFT already utilizes, bringing together farmers from northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin. “If you think of it as a state thing, you’re cutting off your nose to spite your face. We want to think in terms of food systems, not state boundaries. We would like the universities, governors, and Departments of Agriculture to talk to each other across state lines.”

5. Labor. Labor for planting, weeding, harvesting, grading and packing, pruning trees, and care of livestock, could be a significant part of what's missing if the Illinois farm economy were to shift toward diversified crops.

“[Steve Pincus and Richard DeWilde of Wisconsin] are not only good growers. They're also very good managers of labor. That becomes a real challenge. My sense is that labor management will be a limiting factor in determining how much some of the other organic vegetable growers [in Wisconsin] will be able to grow.” - *Steve Stevenson, Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems, University of Wisconsin, Madison.*

Organic farmer Steve Pincus describes his own difficulties with labor on his farm, Tipi Produce near Evansville, Wisconsin. “We generally draw our labor from Madison—we have 10 to 11 regular people who work five days a week. It worked out okay, but if I needed five extra people, it was hard to round them up. We end up having to use high school students who have no experience. In California, they have the infrastructure and the labor pool—they can pick up the telephone and get 30 people to work.” He adds that in rural areas labor is more of a problem—“local folks—kids who have grown up here—have not worked out. They consider it very low status work.”

Harry Rhodes of Growing Home reports there is a lack of trained farmers and farm workers available for hire. This is partly a wage issue. The people they train in their urban farming program at Growing Home more readily accept landscaping jobs than farm internships because they learn that landscaping pays better than farming.

“It's really difficult to get reliable labor where we live. We have a hard time finding reliable workers to help get three hay crops in during the summer...There are few young people who want to work on farms and other labor pools, like immigrant farmers such as the Hmong in Wisconsin, are hard to find. Or, it would be uneconomical. I asked a few organic farmers, including David Cleverdon of Kinnikinnick, what size a [diversified vegetable] farm needed to be to support one farming family. And not one answered in terms of volume of production or in terms of dollars produced per year. One said you have to be able to support eight seasonal employees to have a farm that's big enough to provide for one farm family. Eight employees was the critical factor.” - *Juli Brussell, Rainy Creek Farm and Illinois Stewardship Alliance.*

6. Land. More than one interviewee asked: Where is the land for new farming going to come from?

New farmers need land, and farmers report there is little farmland available, at least at affordable prices. Terra Brockman of The Land Connection says that new farmers need land and capital before they can even begin to consider all the production challenges. Farmland that *does* go on the market often sells to developers or investors at inflated prices. Suburbs and sprawl are taking prime farmland permanently out of production. Openlands, a strong supporter of planned land use, reports that Illinois farmland is being lost at a rate of 135 acres a day.

Ann Sorensen of American Farmland Trust says, “The problem we have here in Illinois is local land use planning. Really, to do a good job with any food systems work, you need regional planning.”

The City of Chicago has 60,000 to 70,000 vacant lots, but they are often too expensive, too small, or simply unavailable for conversion to food production. Urban farmers Ken Dunn of the Resource Center and Harry Rhodes of Growing Home both speak of having more ready markets than they do available land with which to satisfy those markets.

There is some farmland available. What’s needed is a central listing or database to link farmers to land. For instance, David Cleverdon of Kinnikinnick Farm, who has extra acreage on his farm, says if he could find a way to rent land to other small or beginning farmers, “I would jump on it.” Mike Sands of the Liberty Prairie Foundation says there are approximately 2,500 acres of land in multiple parcels in Lake County, some of which could be used for organic agriculture.

Also, federal funding may be available for specific parcels. One such example is the Natural Resources Conservation Service Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, which provides matching funds to help purchase development rights to keep productive farmland in agricultural use.

7. Financing. Even when a farmer owns the land, conventional financing for unconventional crops can be hard to find and arrange.

“It doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand why so little Illinois farmland is used to grow food for people. It's a huge systemic problem. Farmers can't even get bank loans to get their fields planted in the spring unless they bring along their farm plan that shows how much nitrogen they're using, how much herbicide, etc. to 'guarantee' a certain corn and soybean yield, which will then guarantee them the subsidy check, which will repay the bank

loan, which will pay the chemical companies...and so the status quo continues.” - *Terra Brockman, The Land Connection*.

Currently, some financing for alternative production is coming from Heifer International. Rodger Cooley, Midwest program manager for Heifer in Chicago, reports that they are funding The Land Connection to help farmers develop small-scale livestock operations. Their support will help farmers obtain training, infrastructure such as fencing, and the animals themselves.

8. Political will and savvy. Lack of political will among decision makers and politicians, and political savvy at the grassroots and organizational levels are barriers to success according to interviewees.

Asked if he felt the State Department of Agriculture supported efforts at diversification and sustainable agriculture, this veteran of the farm industry said, “I would like to lie to you and say ‘yeah,’ but to be honest, I don’t believe that is the case. ‘There is some curiosity’ may be the best way to describe it. It [sustainable or diversified agriculture] is not a priority yet.” - *Anonymous, state employee*.

Political support from state government is less than encouraging.

Shannon Allen of the Macon County Soil and Water Conservation District said that the Illinois Department of Agriculture was in “such a state of flux” due to the Governor’s recent proposal to restructure it. This proposal was narrowly defeated, but Allen noted an imbalance in representation between Chicago and downstate that often works against the interest of agricultural areas. He said Chicago has enough senators and representatives to swing almost any vote—approximately 64% of votes in both the Illinois House and the Senate are from Chicago.²⁶ “We have hardly any representation downstate.” And as for the governor, “He’s never been in the state [meaning downstate] except to campaign that I know of—he thinks Chicago is its own state!...I think that if we could get to him and explain about small farmers, he would eat it up. You could sell him on the small urban stuff and then once you get him into that, he will see the bigger picture. But you can’t get to him—because he’s in Chicago!”

²⁶ According to the Illinois Farm Bureau, 38 out of 59 state senators and 76 out of 188 state representatives are from the greater Chicago area.

At the Crossroad

We stand at a crossroad.

Without concerted investment and action now or in the near future, the opportunity will slip further and further away for Illinois producers to be the ones delivering diversified and specialty products to the Illinois food marketplace. The growing demand for high quality, diversified farm products, both organic and conventional, will be filled increasingly by large-scale commodity suppliers out-of-state, out-of-region, and out-of-country. There is already a year-round supply of organic fruits and vegetables available in Chicago and most major U.S. cities, supplied and controlled, in large part, by the same companies that provide conventional produce from all over the globe.

“Time is running out...Some highly entrepreneurial farmers have been able to develop direct markets...but the number of those opportunities is relatively limited...The majority of the farmers that I talk to are absolutely in survival mode now. The only options they can see...are generating more off-farm income or adding more units [more acreage] to generate more on-farm income, and that’s the treadmill most of them are on...I think a different approach is absolutely necessary or we are going to see a tremendous attrition.” - *Fred Kirschenmann, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture.*²⁷

²⁷ Dan Sullivan, “A consortium of partners seeks to stem the flow of the ‘disappearing middle’ from family farming,” *New Farm*, February 13, 2004. Available at: <http://www.newfarm.org/features/0204/middle.shtml>.

IV. WHAT IS LEVERAGE?

The principal aim of this report, restated from section II above, is to identify *leverage points* where positive change can be made through strategic investment by funders acting alone or by funders collaborating to increase their effectiveness.

Leverage is the idea that “small, well-focused actions can sometimes produce significant, enduring improvements.”²⁸ Inventor and architect Buckminster Fuller offered this clever illustration:

If you saw a large tanker plowing through the ocean, where would you push to turn the tanker to the left? Most of us would look for a way to push the bow left. In fact, ships turn because their rear end is “sucked around.” A trim tab is a small “rudder on a rudder,” but it turns a huge ship. Its function is to make the rudder turn more easily, which makes turning the ship easier. To turn the rudder left, you turn the trim tab right. The entire system—ship, rudder, trim tab—is engineered on the principle of leverage. It can be enormously effective, yet not at all obvious to those who haven’t studied hydrodynamics.²⁹

When the word *leverage* is applied to other fields, the implication is that if you discover the right “small, well-focused action,” a big change will occur, almost overnight. In fact, for a system as large and complex as the Illinois farm and food economy, there’s probably no leverage point that, by itself, could turn the system around in the elegant manner of a trim tab on a ship. Change will occur from the synergy of a number of actions and investments made simultaneously.

This is a 25-year journey. It might be a 50-year journey. *Getting it right*—that is, choosing a strategy for funding and investment that succeeds in moving the Illinois food system in the desired direction—requires a steady stream of tangible short-term successes as well as long-term vision and strategy. Without the short-term wins, there’s little chance of gaining sufficient momentum to get to long-term change.

“What is the 100 year plan? Who is looking at that? The funders need to look at what’s possible in the long term.” - Ken Dunn, *The Resource Center*.

²⁸ Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (Currency, 1994), 64.

²⁹ Senge, 64.

“The political climate is conducive to change right now. The Mayor is supportive. Without him, the climate could change. There’s a movement afoot. We should strike while the iron’s hot. We need a clear idea of where we’re going for the next year, not for the next five years.” - *Kathy Dickhut, Department of Planning and Development, City of Chicago.*

SUZANNE MALEC,
DEPARTMENT OF
ENVIRONMENT, CITY OF
CHICAGO

“There’s a need to fund some short-term wins as well as more intermediate and long-term endeavors.”

In a presentation to farmers and the general community in Effingham, Illinois, March 16, 2004, called *Building Local Economies...Building Local Food Systems*, Dr. Kamyar Enshayan of the University of Northern Iowa, shared a case study about building a local food system in Cedar Falls, Iowa. He stressed that re-educating producers and consumers about producing and selling food locally is a slow process that requires a long-term commitment to actualize change.³⁰

³⁰ Dr. Kamyar Enshayan, University of Northern Iowa, *Building Local Economies...Building Local Food Systems*, a presentation in Effingham, Illinois, March 16, 2004.

V. LEVERAGE POINTS: HOW TO TAKE ACTION

We have identified seven key leverage points that funders should work on immediately and simultaneously. For each leverage point we make recommendations for specific actions to consider executing or funding. We can't predict how many dollars or how much time it will take to succeed on any particular endeavor. That depends on context: exactly how a project is defined, and how success is to be measured. Funders will have to wrestle with these details each in their own way, and then consider whether actions will be more effectively undertaken alone or in collaboration with others.

To fund or to do? When we recommend an action, in almost every case (unless it is very clearly specified otherwise) we are ***not*** distinguishing between actions that funders would facilitate through an investment or grant or actions they would execute themselves.

In no place in this report do we recommend that funders support any particular group, project, or individual, other than the work of the City of Chicago's Chicago Organic committee (commonly referred to as "Chicago Organic"). Our focus is on strategic actions rather than particular organizations. To put a finer point on it: there are sections in which we follow a statement such as, "Fund this particular activity," with live examples of the activity. These are not recommendations to fund the examples.

Leverage Point 1: Be the Glue

What was missing suddenly became clear at one of the all-project-team meetings we held to analyze the Illinois food system: glue.

Illinois has hundreds of groups, thousands of people, actively working on food system reform (through farmers' markets, farmers' co-ops, CSAs, food banks, extension services, research and education projects, urban agriculture, land use and conservation, etc.). What it doesn't have is a well-developed consciousness that all these stakeholders are part of a single local food system movement. And it doesn't have the leadership to hold them all together.

Take the leadership role

Be the glue that holds these stakeholders together in common purpose. We recommend that funders actively stimulate deeper conversations among all those who stand to benefit from changing the food system in Illinois. Redefine a more positive picture of the future.

Funders may not need to play this role indefinitely. They may be able to pass the baton to leaders who emerge and develop over the next few years. But we believe leadership that will hold together a common movement must be in place before anything else can work, and the funders are well positioned to fill that need.

Why funders? Aren't they supposed to be neutral? Funders are uniquely positioned to fill the leadership gap precisely *because* of their neutrality. They have credibility because they have no stake in a financial return and no single philosophical stance and because they do have a resource base. Funders can expand the volume of conversations by convening meetings and conferences. They can request proposals for specific activities. They can shape the direction and tone of conversation. They can speak with credibility to the media and shape public opinion. They can draw in political and other influential leaders. They can identify and attract additional financial resources. Funders can choose to play this role in a visible public manner or more quietly from behind the scenes—whichever will be most effective in each situation. They can play this role, actively, themselves, or by funding a trusted person or organization(s) in this pivotal role.

Ada Mary Gugenheim of The Chicago Community Trust asserts that, “the movement cuts across so many fields [i.e., environment, health, economic development, anti-poverty and anti-hunger, agriculture, etc.] that it will take a considerable strategic plan for change and real leadership.”

Mike Sands of Liberty Prairie Foundation used to think the biggest barriers to change were structural, for example, finding an efficient way of marketing from 40 to 50 miles outside the city or gaining access to land. Today, he thinks the biggest barrier to change is a lack of innovative and strategic thinking. Getting people to work together *well* toward a common goal and thinking in new ways will have the impact he is looking for.

Define the common purpose

No single entity can orchestrate a transformation of this magnitude, not even the state government or the land grant system. It takes hundreds of organizations and tens of thousands of individuals doing their own thing, their own way, *with support* from major institutions. The leverage is in herding this mass of self-managed activity in a common general direction.

An important first step is to define that direction precisely enough, yet broadly enough, so that the widest array of people who share basic common values can gain power in numbers, power through

networking and partnerships, and power through common purpose. It has to play in Peoria—as well as in Effingham and Chicago.

A purpose statement could be as short and simple as: *A more diverse agriculture for Illinois—feeding us healthier food, providing tomorrow’s best business opportunities.*

A successful statement must be:

- Focused on what matters most and no more;
- Simple and easily understood;
- Easily remembered, both inside the movement and outside it; and
- Widely inclusive in its tone and content.

A longer companion statement would provide deeper meaning, detail, and additional common values for those who want more information. We caution against statements that would necessitate an elaborate group process or ones that would draw divisive lines, such as the standards for some kind of certification.

The choice of words is important.

Organic is too restrictive as an umbrella concept, although it is an absolutely vital part of food-system change. *Community food security* is bulky language—hard to say and hard to explain—though the concept is profound. *Sustainable*, though comprehensive and widely used, will raise more hackles among prospective partners than the word *diverse*. ‘Diverse’ has special relevance for Illinois because it paints a positive picture that directly challenges monoculture, which is the dominant paradigm in Illinois agriculture.

Health is foremost on the national agenda. The connections between diet and health, and, therefore, between agriculture and health, are increasingly accepted, and even taught in medical schools. The media focus on obesity is another key factor.

Changes in the Illinois food system will largely be market driven. The promise of *new business opportunities*—a place to sell, a new product source, a job, an investment opportunity, or a startup venture—can be a magnet for ideas and people that this endeavor badly needs.

Bring in new players; attract new resources

A more diverse network is a stronger network. From the agricultural sector, seek diversity in production—crops, animals, scale, location, ways of marketing, IPM as well as organic. From the food security sector, seek demographic diversity and innovative projects that make

locally grown food affordable to low income people. Recruit hard inside the food industry—the voice of business is seriously underrepresented. Allies from the land grant system and the State Department of Agriculture are critical. This is a partial list.

A more diverse network will make it easier to attract new resources. The effort will be taken more seriously by prospective funders and participants. And those funders with narrowly defined constituents, for example, under-resourced farmers or lower-income consumers or funders of business activity, will be more likely to feel at home inside the growing network.

Expanding the network will also lead to more and deeper learning, and it will lead to more and new business transactions.

One example is to explore a partnership with the Illinois Farm Bureau. Its membership of 85,000 farming, and voting, members (it actually has more than 360,000 members counting affiliates and insurance policyholders) makes it one of the most powerful voices of agriculture in the state. No one would accuse the Farm Bureau of leading the way toward diversified and organic agriculture. However, Kevin Rund, senior director of local government for the Illinois Farm Bureau, says, “I would hope they [the funders] would invite us to be part of the conversation...I say that emphatically. A part of our membership is definitely interested. Now, it won’t work for everyone. It’s specialty production. And if too many were to move in that direction, well, then it wouldn’t be specialty production anymore...Niche markets are small; they fill up quickly.”

Include faith-based communities as critical partners

Reach out to both rural and urban people through their religious community. Many of the mainline denominations have written impassioned policy statements on food and agriculture. Here’s one example:

“As Catholic bishops, pastors, and teachers, we seek to address agriculture through the lens of our faith because so much is at stake in moral and human terms,” the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has written. “Food sustains life. It is not just another product...Agricultural subsidies often go to a few large producers, while small family farms struggle to survive. Rather than simply rewarding production, which can lead to surpluses and falling prices, government resources should reward environmentally sound and sustainable farming practices... Government resources

are also needed to help new farmers and ranchers enter the field of agriculture.”³¹

Similar statements can be found by the Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Quaker denominations and by ecumenical organizations. These policy endorsements are an invitation to organize inside religious communities and to work with their national leadership.

Equal Exchange (EE) is an employee-owned fair trade coffee business based in Canton, Massachusetts. In 2003, EE reached \$13 million in sales, purchasing over three million pounds of coffee from small farm cooperatives at fair trade prices which paid peasant farmers over \$2 million in above-market premiums. In 1996, EE launched an Interfaith Program which has grown to account for 20% of total sales, or \$2.6 million. Growth of 62% to \$4.2 million is projected for this year. The Interfaith Program provides fair trade coffee to 9,700 congregations in the United States, 80% of which are members of the following denominations: Lutheran, Quaker, Presbyterian, Unitarian Universalist, Methodist, Church of the Brethren, Mennonite, Catholic, and United Church of Christ.

Erbin Crowell, founder and director of EE’s Interfaith Program says, “Congregations make a very quick connection between fair trade and the farmers in their own communities. People will mention the co-op that their parents were in. They mention the farmer down the road. They even ask if we’ve considered buying coffee from American farmers. I think there’s a huge potential to build on this inside communities of faith. It’s one of the few available counterweights to the prevailing consumer culture.”

Faith-based communities are both trusted vehicles of communication and cost-effective ways to reach large numbers.

“This is a distribution issue. The faith-based communities are already one of the main established channels of communication in the United States. They’re very effective at a local level, although they don’t work as well at a national level as they used to.” - *Joy Anderson, Criterion, a consulting firm that works largely with faith-based institutions on organizational development, Haddam, Connecticut.*

³¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *For I Was Hungry & You Gave Me Food: Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers, and Farmworkers*, November 12, 2003. Available at: <http://www.usccb.org/bishops/agricultural.htm>.

“Faith communities are the *only* communities in downstate Illinois.” - *Sandra Steingraber, ecologist and author.*

The Land Connection and Seven Generations Ahead are already making these connections in their “Food and Faith” initiative which includes many denominations. This new campaign is helping congregations, including Protestant, Catholic, and Muslim groups, buy from local farms.

Tear down the walls: Unite Illinois behind food system reform

The “profound cultural polarization between Chicago and downstate Illinois” is a major impediment to change. But unlike the impenetrable commodity support system, these cultural walls can be torn down *or eroded* through sheer intention and practice.

Producers who wish to serve regional markets have much to learn by direct association with consumers or with food industry people who sell to the public. Likewise, consumers who want connections to farms, access to the freshest local food, or to live in a region with its own cuisine and food traditions, have much to gain by learning about agriculture. Inner city consumers deprived of fresh produce or particular ethnic foods can find solutions in links to inventive local food producers. The possibilities are endless.

Move beyond the Food Summits

The Food Summits sponsored by The Chicago Community Trust were successful. They were among the forces that led to this study.

We heard criticism as well: “They started with a bang, then fizzled out.” “They lacked leadership; needed more direction and facilitation.” But we applaud The Chicago Community Trust and event organizers for stepping out on a limb and taking leadership. The Food Summits got people talking, thinking, and interacting.

Now we recommend that the funders, in partnership with other sponsors, such as the University of Illinois and the City of Chicago, take the Food Summits to the next level: *convene the one conference every year that no one can afford to miss*. Such a conference will first require a common purpose statement like the one above. It will need a strong identity, agenda, and speaker list that will attract participants from business, government, and nonprofits. It must be centrally located or else in rotation between Chicago and downstate.

The conference itself will serve as a meeting place—where new entrants and students can learn the basics; where trailblazers can meet other trailblazers; where deep, specific content knowledge can be both

acquired and passed along; where people meet people entirely unlike themselves; where poster children and best practices are showcased; where heavy hitters deliver keynote speeches that draw in significant numbers; where politicians go to learn new ideas and be seen; and where farmers and food businesspeople can easily sit down together and talk about what is possible.

GARY CUNEEN,
SEVEN GENERATIONS
AHEAD, CHICAGO

“There needs to be more coordination around communication. Collaboration needs to be facilitated on a big scale. A big picture strategy is very much needed.”

“Farmer and grocer connections are what is most needed. Grocers have been left out of this conversation so far and need to be involved ASAP. Someone needs to represent both farmer and grocer needs. Bring the supermarkets directly to the table.” - *Dan Block, Coordinator of Neighborhood Assistance Center, Chicago State University, Chicago.*

“To get a sense of direction you have to get people out of their own world of daily concerns to create a common vision. It’s too hard for them to do it alone; you have to help them do that.”
- *Geeta Pradhan, New Economy Initiative, Boston, Massachusetts.*

Leverage Point 2: Shape Public Opinion

Throughout this report we say, in various ways, that the change funders envision will, in large part, be market driven. There is leverage in shaping what ordinary citizens believe about food, farming, and their own health. Citizens will express those beliefs by voting, by shopping, and by influencing the opinions of others.

Change the common story told about Illinois agriculture

The story should shift from the one about the domination of corn, corn, corn, (and soybeans), to a story about the early stages of transformation from an export-oriented monoculture to a more diversified farm state learning to feed itself once again.

Mental models. Before we continue, allow us to introduce another concept. *Mental models* are deeply held assumptions or pictures a person has about how the world works. Everyone has them, although usually at an unconscious level.

Here's an example from the business world, albeit a costly one: For decades, the Big Three car makers believed that people bought automobiles for status and style, not on the basis of quality. That was their mental model, and their own surveys proved it. Over time, however, German and Japanese automakers educated U.S. consumers to the benefits of quality and fuel economy, and they increased their share of the U.S. market from near zero to 38% percent by 1986.

The reason mental models are so powerful (and potentially dangerous) is because they strongly influence our behavior, even when we're completely unaware they exist or what they are.³²

A majority of the interviewees offered some version of this mental model: Illinois farms raise exports; Illinois families eat mostly imports; and things won't change as long as government subsidies persist. If there's any hope for change, the mental model will have to shift to something like this: Diversifying Illinois agriculture today, one farm at a time, is among the smartest of ways to improve food quality, add food security, protect the environment, and work toward an alternative to a subsidized commodity farm system.

The prevailing mental model about the Illinois farm and food economy can and must be changed. This is everyone's responsibility and challenge. It can happen slowly over time as millions and millions of messages from hundreds, if not thousands, of sources are disseminated through organizational pamphlets, workshops, news stories, sermons, ads, billboards, school curricula, point-of-sale signs, and via word-of-mouth. They all carry a unifying theme, the story about the transformation of the corn and soybean state to a more diversified farm state learning to feed itself once again.

Turn up the volume—fund communications work
It can happen in a more focused intentional manner as well.

The public and media's love of new stories presents an opportunity to turn up the volume and be heard by millions of people at once. There are stories to be told about foods produced in Illinois for the first time, and where they can be found: about chefs who design menus entirely around what's available from local farms that deliver directly to them;

³² Senge, 176.

about urban neighborhoods where people raise their own food, teach kids where food comes from, and stock the corner grocery store with ethnic vegetables; about the growing demand for all things local and organic; and about a school system that replaced canned foods with locally grown fresh ones that kids are actually eating.

Fund communications projects staffed by media professionals.

For example, Sustain has been telling these stories for years. Sustain is a Chicago-based multi-media advocacy organization “using communication tools...to inspire the public, media, and policymakers to take action to create a sustainable planet.” They’ve launched The Local Organic Initiative to support the growth of a regional food system for Illinois and its neighboring states. They’ve also created a trade show and website campaign in conjunction with Whole Foods Markets called familyfarms.org.

The Michigan Land Use Institute takes a different approach. Founder and deputy director Keith Schneider says, “We use unpaid media: journalism, news stories. We’re an activist newsroom.” Schneider knew that the inability of the American media to handle complexity in their news coverage was also an opportunity to influence public debate. He observed how conservative groups like the Heritage Foundation and the Competitive Enterprise Institute effectively developed their own media machinery. He put two and two together and came up with the formula for the Land Use Institute: community groups must have better data, stronger ideas, and a more capable public information and communications strategy than their opponents.

In the area of agriculture, Schneider points to their work on CAFOs (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations). Patty Cantrell, a journalist and senior staff person at the Land Use Institute, broke the story in Michigan with a string of investigative pieces in the late 1990s. “We made CAFOs a major issue in this state.”

Leverage Point 3: Build the Markets of the Middle

We recommend that funders take on the arduous task of building the wholesale infrastructure that will enable Illinois farms to supply the food outlets—the grocery stores, institutions, and restaurants—that feed most Illinois people every day.

What are Markets of the Middle? Markets of the Middle are the portion of the conventional food distribution system that can be recaptured and resupplied by small and medium-sized farms as part of a reformed regional and national food distribution system. It’s not the

food that originates on the largest multi-thousand-acre commodity farms which is processed or fed to animals before it reaches people. It's not the farm fresh produce people buy directly from farmstands, CSAs, or at farmer' markets.

The Markets of the Middle are a segment of what's sold through **retail food stores**, from supermarkets to ethnic corner stores; through **restaurants**, from white-table-cloth to family restaurants to fast-food joints; and through **food service institutions**, such as schools, prisons, and hospitals. It is defined by the nature of the supply chain. The defining characteristics include: (a) raised on a small or medium-sized farm; and (b) differentiated in some way—by variety, taste, farm location, how it's grown, harvested, processed, packaged, or promoted—as to be decommodified, that is, no longer interchangeable with any similar commodity grown anywhere in the world. These products may get to market direct from the farm or through a distributor.

This segment includes all manner of *wholesaling*, defined as selling to customers who then sell to other customers or other wholesalers. For example:

- One farm delivering to a number of grocery stores three times a week, all within 100 miles of the farm;
- One farm delivering to a number of restaurants three times a week;
- Many farms in a region reaching stores and/or restaurants indirectly by delivering regularly to a produce distributor or a specialty foods distributor;
- Ten farms consolidating their mix of products under a single brand name in order to gain efficiencies in trucking and marketing; and
- One livestock processing facility that handles small to medium-size lots, producing an end product that individual farmers can market on their own, or producing a house brand that they market and distribute themselves.

Markets of the Middle offer a future to the small and medium-sized farmers most threatened by future consolidation of the farm commodity system. They are less likely to emerge spontaneously the way innovative direct-marketing farms do today, driven by the entrepreneurial spirit of a single individual. They require more capital up front. And, in many cases, farmers will have to pool their volume and resources for purposes of marketing and/or transportation.

There are skeptics amongst us, respected leaders in the field who believe it's too late. They believe the die has already been cast, that the majority of mid-sized family farmers are destined to be absorbed by the largest farms or simply go out of production. The processors, distributors, retailers, and food service companies that would be their customers are too big, too consolidated, and too much at each other's throats to do business in a manner that could sustain small to medium-sized family farms.

We are either in the early and most difficult stages of a long, slow transition to a food system driven principally by peoples' desire for healthful and safe high quality foods and by their desire for connection to and knowledge about the source of their food.

Or, we are, as the skeptics contend, playing around with permanent small niche markets that will never grow into something significant enough to support tens of thousands of small and medium-sized farms in the United States. In the skeptics' scenario, the large majority of U.S.-grown foods will be treated as commodities; remaining small-scale farms will be "hobby farms" or tourist destinations or direct marketers, and Americans in 25 to 50 years will be eating what comes at the lowest price from China, Mexico, Latin America, other Asian countries, and from what is left of agriculture in California, Florida, etc.

No dice. No money-back guarantee. Plenty of leverage. The authors of this report believe the die has not yet been cast. *Without intervention*, the system will progress toward a confirmation of the skeptics' view of tomorrow. But there is an opportunity to intervene. There is an opportunity to fund activities that will lead to successful examples of farmers wholesaling diversified crops. These examples, well publicized, are leverage. They will slowly erode the prevailing mental model and break ground for the creation of a new one. These examples will motivate others of their kind. And the others will motivate still others, creating a self-fulfilling cycle. An unintended and underestimated byproduct of this self-fulfilling cycle will be increased *hope*, a renewable energy source that is necessary for this work to continue and succeed.

There is no guarantee that the sum of successful projects will eventually lead to a market large enough to sustain thousands of small and medium-sized family farmers in Illinois. That will depend primarily on the nature and intensity of demand, on what consumers believe and want.

At Red Tomato, building these markets is our daily work. There are certainly days on the job when the glass seems half empty. And, after

six years, our efforts at building Markets of the Middle are not yet self-sustaining. We are partially reliant on grant support. *Yet*, we can wholeheartedly recommend that funders take a leadership role in building Markets of the Middle in Illinois *because of the strategic importance of this work*.

When it works, the results are gratifying. By differentiating New England peaches, we have been able to pay orchard growers above the commodity price paid for New Jersey and Pennsylvania peaches. By carefully orchestrating all the logistics, we have been able to sell highly perishable native strawberries in supermarkets, while going head to head against California berries half their price. By preserving the identity of the product until it reaches the consumer and by promoting the name and photos of local farmers, we have generated excitement among store produce managers and shoppers. They get even more attached to the flavor and freshness of local products when they feel connected to the farms.

Farmers are among the most resourceful of people in the world. We've learned this time and again through our own trading work both here and overseas. With adequate market incentives and evidence of hope and support, farmers will find a way to surmount barrier after barrier to deliver the goods.

Identify successful ventures and tell their stories

There are *lots* of farm to market activities in Illinois and in neighboring states whose stories, presently untold in the funders' greater network, would be instructive, if not inspirational. Any number of reasons might explain why these stories would be unfamiliar to funders: the farmers are conventional (i.e., not organic) and they rub shoulders with a different crowd or network; they've been doing what they do for a long time and have no sense of being different or innovative; and Illinois is a large state—nobody knows the whole story.

Bob Scammon, president of Goodness Greenness, says that the Amish are among the most talented growers of regional organic produce. His organic produce company is supplied during the summer by Amish farmers in Iowa, Indiana, and Ontario, Canada and by Organic Valley, an organic farmers' cooperative in Wisconsin. "We've been working with them [Organic Valley] forever."

This is, indeed, a regional effort. Neither our imaginations nor our practical work building new markets should be confined by state borders. To keep success stories fresh, they'll have to come from Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, Iowa, as well as from Illinois. The same success stories (i.e., the same poster children) repeated once too

often raise doubt about the replicability of the idea. “Isn’t there anybody else succeeding at this?” Success stories need to be diverse and abundant if they are to motivate large numbers of new recruits.

The search for success stories can also be a search for ready-to-go farmers able to supply wholesale customers today. The resultant list or database should include an inventory of the products and volumes they can supply. These statistics from Mohammad Babadoost, fruit pathologist at the University of Illinois, hint at the potential of such an inventory:

- Illinois ranks first in the nation for processing pumpkins and jack o’ lanterns;
- Rosenoulos Farm in Plainfield has the largest leafy vegetable operation in the Midwest;
- Van Drunen Farms in Kankakee is the largest freeze-drier of herbs in the nation; and
- Western Greenhouses in Decatur is the largest hydroponic pepper producer in the United States.

A comparable list of ready-to-go buyers sets the stage for immediate expanded wholesale marketing activity. See Appendix C for a start.

Amplify the level of local trade activity—support matchmaking and marketing

It was Ishmael in *Moby Dick* who observed that the harpooners were often exhausted from strenuous rowing at the very moment they were called to leap from their seat, ascend to the harpooners’ platform, and dart their spears at a fast-moving whale. “Harpooners of this world should dart from indolence.” The solution was obvious to Ishmael: a division of labor that let rowers row and harpooners harpoon.

While some farmers are skillful marketers, a larger number would be comfortable with the following division of labor: let farmers focus on the production of high quality goods; leave the marketing function to marketers. More and more farmers concede that marketing has become the weak link in their survival chain. The point is that while some farmers are ready and able to solve complex marketing challenges, many will need help. Or, they’ll need marketers to do it for them.

Funders should invest in, support, train, and/or make alliance with individuals and organizations that can bridge the gap between farmers and buyers. Some at the grassroots level might literally play the role of a matchmaker, putting one party in contact with the other, and then stepping aside.

It will be more typical that a broker, cooperative, or distributor will have the know-how to arrange and coordinate deals. Skillful intermediaries will do even more. They will locate new markets for unsold high quality product. They will inform growers about opportunities—new crops for which there is growing demand, a new store or restaurant opening, a packaging option, a variety that is performing well somewhere else. They will be a source of valuable market information.

One example: Abby Mandel, Green City Market, is currently looking for funding to hire a person to work as a liaison between farms and the Green City Market, as well as other marketing channels. They would like to hire a person who would drive around the Midwest states reaching small farmers and letting them know about the Chicago market potential.

Number one on the matchmaking *to-do* list is connecting the ready-to-go farmers and the ready-to-go buyers.

Many of the qualified prospects for this work will be for-profit businesses. They won't be looking for grants. But they very well may need special coaching and orientation to the role and "rules" of brokering farm products for Markets of the Middle.

Support farmers in transition

The transition from commodity agriculture to raising specialty crops or livestock is loaded with risk. So is the transition from conventional farming to organic.

If there is to be a significant Marketplace of the Middle in Illinois in 25 years, then there must be a significant number of farmers who undergo one or both transitions.

These growers will benefit from a combination of advice and training on finance and accounting, business management, technical farm production issues, marketing, and labor management. In an ideal world, farmers will provide this to one another through informal channels. But formal support and training will also be necessary to reduce and manage the risks of transition.

Cultivate partnerships within the food industry

People in the food business have unique experience, connections, and resources to offer. They also have a pace and practical style of problem solving that some nonprofit and public agency practitioners might find refreshing. We're speaking of the food industry in the broadest sense, from individual entrepreneurs running their own business to large publicly owned corporations that employ thousands

and from food processors to distributors to retailers to restaurateurs to hospital cafeterias.

The voice of the food industry is essential to this effort. Not only do they own and manage the businesses that provide the majority of food consumed in Illinois. But their detailed knowledge and experience are essential ingredients in planning for distribution strategies that will adequately serve these markets.

There are organizations, businesses, and individuals who are already building the Markets of the Middle in their own way, on their own turf. Several are specifically looking for partners in Illinois. Others are open to and able to work in Illinois. They are not all for-profit businesses themselves. Some are nonprofits that connect farms to food manufacturers, distributors, retailers, and food service outlets. They will facilitate partnerships with food businesses. Here's a short list of four for the sake of example. There are plenty of others.

- Goodness Greenness
- Organic Valley
- The Food Alliance Midwest
- The National Task Force on Renewing the Agriculture of the Middle

Goodness Greenness (GG) is the largest distributor of organic produce in the Chicago marketplace. They also serve customers in Milwaukee and Detroit, more than three hundred all told, including natural food stores, food co-ops, independent grocers, specialty retailers, and chain supermarkets. Goodness Greenness wants more produce from local organic farmers. "Post-harvest handling is the biggest challenge; that, and growing at a large enough scale," says GG's President Bob Scammon. "What I enjoy most about this business is developing new markets, breaking into a retailer that isn't yet a strong supporter [of organic], putting together a program we think will work for them, and then watching it grow over time."

Organic Valley (OV) is a marketing cooperative based in LaFarge, Wisconsin, made up of 636 organic family farms across the country. Their website reports, "Our company's philosophy and decisions are based on the health and welfare of people, animals, and the earth." Their product line includes organic milk, cheese, butter, eggs, meat, juices, and produce. The co-op has experienced explosive growth over 16 years. Right now it is experiencing heavy demand for organic meat, partially as a result of consumer fear over mad cow disease. OV is recruiting producers of organic meat, eggs, and milk in various locations, including Illinois. It's a five-year transition to organic meat

production, three years for the land followed by two for the animals. OV requires pastured feeding. It has an in-house vet to monitor members' herd health.

The **Food Alliance Midwest** (FAM) is a nonprofit program whose mission is to “promote sustainable agriculture by recognizing and rewarding farmers who produce food in environmentally and socially responsible ways.” Food Alliance (the parent organization in Portland, Oregon) certifies a wide range of products—fruits, vegetables, beef, poultry, pork, and some processed foods—as ecologically produced. Currently, 50 retail stores and 11 college campuses across the Midwest offer Food Alliance certified products from 60 participating farms in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the Dakotas. FAM has interest in working in Illinois. As demand for their services increases, they find themselves in discussion with some very large potential customers who cover this state.

The National Task Force on Renewing the Agriculture of the Middle (NTFRAM) is a national level project planning an ambitious three-part work agenda. Members of the Task Force have developed the analysis and the name behind this growing effort. Part one of their effort is creating new food value chains that connect small and medium-sized family farmers to customers specifically wanting high quality, differentiated products. Discussions are underway with Sysco, Starbucks, and an innovative family-owned supermarket chain. Part two is focused on changing public policy at the national and state levels to stimulate more funding for rural economic development. Part three is a research and education effort to support both market development and policy change. NTFRAM is planning to have some kind of organizational structure before the end of the year. The task force will begin its work in one or more pilot locations. Illinois could be one of them.

Engage the land grant and the state as partners

We heard repeated criticism of the University of Illinois and the Illinois Department of Agriculture for their lack of leadership and commitment to sustainable and organic agriculture. We also heard of and encountered individuals inside those institutions who were hard at work to prove the critics wrong.

The short-term battle is to support, strengthen, and grow the existing programs inside the land grant system and inside the Department of Agriculture so they become increasingly effective advocates for change. The long-term battle is to engage these two powerful institutions as full partners and major funders of local and organic market development and food system reform.

Robert Easter, who was appointed Dean of the University of Illinois College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences in July 2002, is increasing the land grant's commitment to local, sustainable, and organic farming and marketing. As this report is concluding (July 2004), Easter is hosting an annual meeting of 12 agricultural deans of the North Central states in Chicago. The theme of the meeting is "accessing urban markets."

Support mission-driven business activity

Philanthropists are sometimes uncomfortable funding business activity because they see it as the domain of banks or venture capitalists. They may see the "hard" ingredients of a business plan—a truck, a refrigeration unit, or a packing line—as too far afield from the activities they normally support.

"The funders are used to funding things that look like social service. Food access is more about economic development, jobs, and capacity. They need to see profit-making enterprises as achieving the same social goals." - *LaDonna Redmond, Institute for Community Resource Development, Chicago.*

To the degree their own legal structure and internal guidelines permit, funders should seriously consider all kinds of mission-driven food business proposals, including the most far-reaching of ideas and activities.

At this early and experimental stage in the transformation of the Illinois food system, strong ideas and strong entrepreneurs may not find sufficient capital for their start-up activities in the usual places. Social entrepreneurs, in particular, holding social and environmental goals foremost as they launch and grow their business, may need additional and unconventional support to get off the ground.

Funders should scrutinize the entrepreneur as closely or more closely than the idea and the plan itself. Will this person be sleepless at night, forever in search of improvements, until the project succeeds? Will she or he have the patience of Job and the persistence of the Energizer Bunny, in it for the long haul? Does she or he have adequate background in business and in the technical aspects of the work? A balance of vision and ability to implement?

Funders must learn how to recognize the leaders and the risk-takers who will successfully build the Markets of the Middle, and step up to support the growth of their enterprises, especially in the early stages, in both ordinary and new ways.

Leverage Point 4: Support Chicago Organic and Other Urban Initiatives

Urban dwellers in the United States don't associate their health with agriculture. Most don't even associate their food with agriculture. Illinois is no exception.

In a similar fashion, most Illinois farmers aren't thinking about Chicago or any group of Illinois consumers when they sell their farm produce. The gap between farm and table is longer than the hundreds of miles that separate Chicago and downstate. It's a gap that keeps rural and urban people from working together to solve what are truly common problems. Farm problems become food problems, and food problems become health problems that affect everyone.

Focus on community food security as a way to unify farm and food concerns. It brings food distribution, food production, nutrition, and feeding the poor into one analysis and process. These connections can lead to the solving of multiple problems at once—for example, hunger *and* poor nutrition. These connections can keep more dollars in the Illinois economy. *Access for everyone to healthy and affordable food*, in the language of the community food security movement, is one way to express such a unified goal.

Chicago Organic is an example of this kind of unified thinking and planning. It's a new effort by Mayor Daley that will plan, organize, and drive the city's environmental initiatives. It is comprised of seven subcommittees: land use, marketing and distribution, food policy, training and education, procurement, schools, and entrepreneurship. More than seventy people—from city agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector—are actively working on it right now.

The community food security approach contrasts with some anti-hunger efforts in the country that focus mostly on federal food assistance or emergency food distribution. In those efforts, the primary indicator is the number of people who request food and the units of food distributed. Little or no attention is paid to nutrition, support of local family farms, or ecologically sound farming.

We have the public's ear. The current national media focus on obesity and public health is an excellent opportunity to connect what the nation eats, what the nation weighs, and how the nation farms. For example, concern about obesity is turning high-fructose corn syrup into a public issue. The public is beginning to grasp the links between

overproduction of government-subsidized grain commodities and low-cost fast-food calories.

Michael Pollan, author of *The Botany of Desire*, tells us:

“High-fructose corn syrup is the whiskey of our time. It’s one of the main ways we’re getting rid of all this corn we’re producing. We’re now eating 66 pounds of high-fructose corn syrup per person per year, something we weren’t eating at all before the 1980s. It’s in everything, especially soda. And supersizing sodas is driven by cheap high-fructose corn syrup. Supersizing begins in Congress...most of my urban readers think the farm bill is some parochial issue that only farmers and agribusiness need to worry about. [But because of the attention on obesity] the public is listening now... We have the public’s ear.”³³

We have the greenest mayor. Mayor Richard M. Daley’s ambition to *make Chicago the greenest city in the United States* is a golden opportunity for developing a sustainable and secure food system.

Strike while the iron’s hot

That’s the advice of Kathy Dickhut of the Chicago Department of Planning and Development, and we agree. With the public and the mayor’s attention in place now, *there is no time to be lost* in rallying behind Chicago Organic.

“If it’s left to us to figure out these distribution questions, [regarding local procurement by public schools] then we’ve got nothing. The Healthy Schools Campaign can’t figure out the distribution question—what’s needed is somebody to bring people together and focus resources on solving this problem. If it doesn’t happen soon, we’re going to lose all the momentum that we’ve built. We could also use somebody to work on the overall policies that promote a local food system.” - *Rochelle Davis, Illinois Healthy Schools Campaign.*

Support pilot projects in which local farmers supply city institutions, such as public schools

Food procurement is an obvious place to strike first. Getting local farm products into the City of Chicago food-procurement system can greatly benefit both farmers and city residents, especially schoolchildren. It’s an area in which immediate progress can be made

³³ Michael Pollan, speaking at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s 2004 Food & Society conference, Olympic Valley, California.

and showcased. However, caution is advised. These connections can be extremely hard to get right. Success will depend on:

- Picking the right product—it must be easy to handle and integrate into the menu as well as available from a local farm;
- Choosing the right test sites—they require both receptive and creative food-service leadership and a willing and able distributor;
- Supporting the effort with education and publicity;
- Setting a price that satisfies both farmer and buyer;
- Handling the produce so that quality is maintained; and
- Efficient delivery.

Seven Generations Ahead is already working in collaboration with the Land Connection, Growing Power, Sustain, the Illinois Healthy Schools Campaign, the Chicago Teacher’s Center farm-to-school initiative, as well as local faith-based groups in marketing local produce. Seven Generations Ahead director Gary Cuneen says, “More support would increase our ability to reach more retail stores and food service buyers.”

Support urban agriculture

Urban agriculture is another area in which to strike right away. It’s more accurate to say, “Keep on striking,” because there’s already so much going on.

Chicago has a long and sturdy tradition of urban greening, from the promotion of parks and open space to horticultural beautification to community gardens. There’s a growing focus on and enthusiasm for the production of food, including for commercial purposes.

Although urban agriculture won’t create jobs or produce food on a large scale, we do recommend that funders look at food production and income generation as two key measures of success. Projects that can offset their costs with multiple income sources also tend to be the most innovative and have the best chance at long-term success.

Here are two examples:

Ken Dunn runs the Resource Center, it includes a 30-year-old urban farm with 40 staff people and 20 trucks, which operates on numerous city lots throughout Chicago, about three acres in all. The Resource Center grosses \$20,000 to \$30,000 per acre by selling food to restaurants and compost to city gardeners each year. They use a mobile garden strategy, shifting production sites around the city as

lots come and go. When it's time to move, the center picks up the soil it's built up and trucks it to the next site.

Growing Home, a nonprofit organization in Chicago which grew out of the movement to assist the homeless, offers job training and the creation of employment opportunities for homeless and low income people. Trainees work on their 10-acre farm in LaSalle County and approximately one-acre urban farm in Chicago. The trainees learn all aspects of organic farming, including growing vegetables and raising livestock. They learn how to market the produce, and participate in local farmers markets. Harry Rhodes, the executive director, has been an active participant in the Advocates for Urban Agriculture, a coalition of organizations advocating for urban agriculture in the Chicago area, which has representatives on the city's Chicago Organic committee.

The Advocates for Urban Agriculture state in a policy paper, "With a strong, integrated plan for urban agriculture, the City of Chicago could reap the broadest community, economic, nutritional and environmental benefits."³⁴ We agree.

Push supermarkets to introduce stores in underserved neighborhoods

This is an area of high leverage. No single event would increase access to healthy and affordable food more than the introduction of a well-run, large grocery store in an underserved neighborhood.

"Big grocery stores are few and far between in Chicago's inner city. The reasons are complex and charged with issues of race and class. But experts agree on at least this much: The shortage is taking its toll on the already strained finances of low income city residents and damaging their health. The North Side has 50 percent more such stores [major grocery chains such as Jewel-Osco, Aldi, Cub Foods, and Dominick's] than the South Side, according to the Metropolitan Chicago Information Center research group. The result: Chicagoans with the least amount of disposable income shop at smaller neighborhood stores and pay considerably higher grocery prices than more affluent North Siders or suburbanites do."³⁵

We recommend that funders use their influence to get large food stores in underserved neighborhoods.

³⁴ Advocates for Urban Agriculture, Draft Plan for Sustainable Urban Agriculture in Chicago, February 24, 2004

³⁵ Rhasheema A. Sweeting, "Poorer Areas Hungry for Supermarkets," *Chicago Tribune*, June 6, 2004.

Chain stores would not be likely to initiate a wide range of affordable organic products or locally grown foods in these new stores. But they would offer fresh and nonperishable items at prices below those of smaller grocery stores. And they would likely respond to demand by neighborhood shoppers for particular items that were already in their system, available in other stores, such as organic or ethnic foods. Once a store is introduced to a neighborhood, funders and neighborhood groups can organize campaigns around those interests.

Another option is to support communities' efforts to introduce their own stores, such as the one that LaDonna Redmond of the Institute for Community and Resource Development is planning for her neighborhood. The store will be structured to keep profits and jobs in the neighborhood and will offer organic foods as well as vegetables from the urban farm she runs during the summer.

Help establish food policy councils

All of Illinois' cities would benefit from better coordination among food-related concerns. A Chicago food policy council could help integrate policies across city departments, private-sector organizations, and different parts of the city. It could also focus resources that may be scattered among hundreds of organizations and agencies. The Chicago Organic committee is well positioned to start—or evolve into—such a council.

The state has a checkered history as regards the formation of food policy councils. One effort, tried recently at the state level, sputtered forward for a while, and then...? It's been hard to figure out what exactly happened. One observer said, "There are growing pains right now around personalities and questions of leadership."

A food policy council is one of the main arenas in which diverse parties can discuss and debate the issues, explore common ground, and figure out how to collaborate and move forward. Past failures will shed light on how to create a more effective council in the future.

Support matchmakers and marketers who can successfully link growers to low-income consumers

Efforts to connect growers, both urban and rural, to low income consumers are among the most challenging to execute successfully, especially setting a price that is mutually acceptable to growers and buyers. Here are some creative examples from Illinois:

The Chicago Anti-Hunger Federation not only distributes donated food, it also buys fruits and vegetables—some of them organic—from regional farms including a farmers' group in Kankakee, Growing

Power Rainbow Cooperative, and Growing Home. The program is grant supported. And there have been growing pains. According to assistant executive director Art Caban, “The volumes we needed weren’t always available, and the packaging at times was inconsistent and underweight.” But the program moved ahead and continues today.

The Chicago Anti-Hunger Federation emphasizes education on the prevention of disease and obesity through healthful eating. “We have an herb garden the size of a bathroom rug,” says Beverly Decker, the Federation’s executive director, “but it’s still good for people to see what herbs look like as they grow. It promotes their culinary use.”

Gary Cuneen, director of Seven Generations Ahead, told us they are in the business of linking farms and buyers, such as schools, food banks, churches, and stores. Its network includes 50 farms, five CSA hubs serving 10 to 45 families each, 25 faith-based congregations, and 13 schools in Chicago and Oak Park, serving 30 to 60 families with weekly produce.

Other approaches include farmers’ markets in lower-income neighborhoods, subsidizing CSA shares for lower-income families, or directing more “seconds” and aesthetically-off-grade produce to food banks.

At Red Tomato, we’ve found it’s easier to ask a grower to sell part of a crop at a lower price to serve lower-income consumers when we are also marketing some of that farmer’s produce at a more favorable price. Sometimes the total volume is large enough to compensate for the reduced unit price.

Leverage Point 5: Fortify and Facilitate; Invest in Leadership

It sounds trite, but ultimately, it’s people who make things happen. Leaders.

It’s far easier to criticize or fault leaders for their style or lack of success than it is to determine which ones would achieve at a markedly higher level if only they had mentorship, technical skills, emotional support, and/or greater resources at their disposal. It’s harder yet to design the path to effective leadership training and development.

This is an area—training farmers, training organizational leaders, and the cultivation of leadership in general—where interviewees spoke in unison.

Attention must be paid!

Leverage Point 6: Fortify and Facilitate; Invest in Policy Reform

Policy is a lever, no doubt. A big lever. National farm policy, including commodity price supports, is probably the single most powerful driving force responsible for the structure of Illinois agriculture today. But the strategic question is not, ‘Which policies are having the most impact on the system?’ It’s, ‘Where can this particular group of funders and the introduction of new resources exert the most influence?’

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation and The Joyce Foundation have already made a large financial commitment to fund work on shaping the next farm bill, and other national policy initiatives. This critical and coordinated effort needs the participation and support of organizations, farmers, and politicians in Illinois.

We believe, however, the most leverage from additional resources applied by funders in the area of policy work will come by funding efforts for policy change in-state at the state, county, and local levels directly in support of other recommendations in this report.

We have learned that the skills and know-how to move an in-state policy campaign forward are in short supply. Funders should support the initiatives of organizations and leaders with a proven track record.

Kate Clancy, former director of WAGPOL, the Wallace Agricultural Policy Project of Winrock International, says there is little knowledge anywhere in the United States of how to go about changing policy at the local, county, and state levels. “One of the lessons learned by WAGPOL was that in a lot of cases, it’s not possible for people to perceive what policy changes are needed until they’re in the middle of a project. [Only in rare cases do] people have enough experience and savvy to see the necessary policy changes before the project starts.”

- 1. Fund policy work whose intention is to generate state level resources** and University of Illinois resources for crop diversification, enterprise development, market development, farmer training, nutrition programs, and other areas that directly facilitate recommendations above.

- 2. Add funds (matching grant style) to support emerging policies in Chicago** that promote healthy eating and farm-to-city business connections.

3. **Make healthy and affordable food for all a central feature of public policy.** Just as our public institutions ensure access to education, clean water, and safe streets, they should formally acknowledge and state that all their citizens have a right to healthy and affordable food. Food policy councils are a logical body to create and oversee the implementation of this kind of policy.
4. **Support initiatives that remove or modify policies** that now serve as obstacles to diversified farm production, and as obstacles to the processing, transportation and marketing of diversified farm products, such as meat and poultry.
5. **Fund efforts at land use planning and policy creation** that make land available for new or diversified farm production, both urban and rural. There is an opportunity for funders to be part of a three-step system. Step one would be making urban and rural land available for food production, step two would be identifying and training new farmers to take over a new farm enterprise, and step three would be making the match between the farmer and the right piece of land.

Leverage Point 7: Synergy

The noted biologist and essayist Lewis Thomas observed, “When you are dealing with a complex social system, such as an urban center or a hamster...you cannot just step in and set about fixing with much hope of helping. This realization is one of the sore discouragements of our century.” Hence the search for leverage, those small, well-focused actions that can, in fact, lead to significant improvements.

The Illinois food system is a complex social system. We’ve been trying to see the whole system, see the underlying structures, and understand how the parts are interrelated through cause and effect. In complex human systems, cause and effect are often not close in time and space. Hunger is an effect. The root cause of hunger is not the empty cupboard. Farm bankruptcy is an effect. The root cause of farms going under is not the absence of cash in the bank account.

Behind every recommendation above is an assumption that, if executed successfully, it will make it easier to realize success in one of the other areas.

For example, if we can change the common story told about Illinois agriculture and, by turning up the volume, reach millions of people regularly with new stories of successful farm ventures that are feeding people locally grown foods and are demonstrating a viable transition

from commodity farms to diversified farms, then, more and more people will perceive the health and flavor benefits of locally grown foods and demand those foods from stores and restaurants. As buyers and chefs and managers hear the voice of their customers, they will be willing to take more risk and buy more locally grown foods. Some will contribute their knowledge and experience and become leaders in the effort. As the volume of trade grows, the next generation of stories will be born, and it will get easier to keep the volume turned up.

A self-fulfilling cycle is set in motion.

In the synergy that develops from these changes, lies the hope for enduring change.

VI. TALK, STRATEGIZE, COORDINATE

Members of the Illinois Food and Community Funders Group are anxious to move toward the action phase. We imagine the discussions that precede action will happen in large groups, small groups, and in the hallways. Our advice—*talk to each other, strategize, coordinate your next steps*. We leave you with an incomplete collection of sketches of some of the members of the group. We also profile a few potential prospects that might be brought in.

The *Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation* was founded to further the family's philanthropic interests in the Chicago area and the lowlands of South Carolina. There are four funding areas: environment/conservation, community welfare, adolescent education, and arts/culture. It offers grants, credit guarantees, and program-related investments. The Foundation is increasingly funding groups and networks that are working on systemic change. The Foundation is already working in collaboration with a group of ten funders on land use issues and could help identify small parcels of land close to city for agriculture; it also has an interest in working with other funders of food banks to see if they can create connections with local growers.

The *Lumpkin Family Foundation* supports education, environmental protection, preventative health, and leadership opportunities in central Illinois. It does this work through: education and promotion of public awareness; capacity building; policy support and legal work; and stimulation of philanthropy. It works with food system efforts that will directly or indirectly benefit central Illinois.

The *Liberty Prairie Foundation* promotes the integration of robust ecosystems and healthy human communities. It is particularly committed to programs that result in people acting to improve the future environment. It's geographical focus starts with the Liberty Prairie Reserve and expands to Lake County, Illinois, with occasional support for Chicago regional projects. It is increasingly focusing on agriculture, particularly organic agriculture and the development of innovative strategies and projects.

The *City of Chicago* is an active participant in the Illinois Food and Community Funders Group. The newly developed Chicago Organic committee is an investment that proves the city's commitment to the environment and community food security. The committee will make its report in the fall, and the city will then play a facilitating role to implement the recommendations.

KATHY DICKHUT,
DEPUTY COMMISSIONER
OF THE CHICAGO
DEPARTMENT OF
PLANNING AND
DEVELOPMENT

“...if all the funders, including the city, got behind the same set of food system initiatives, it could have a major impact. They could be funding the same quilt, but different patches.”

Kraft Foods is a major funder on a global scale. The U.S. Hunger program works with America’s Second Harvest national network of food banks and food rescue organizations (there are also 66 field locations around the country that have smaller budgets and work locally.) Even though Kraft’s major focus is national, it appreciates how this group of funders and organizations gives equal space to everyone at the table. It does fund the Illinois state-based food banks and focuses on hunger issues in central and southern Illinois. It is interested in increasing philanthropic activity and awareness around hunger issues. Kraft is willing to work with retailers that sell its products, such as Walgreens, WalMart, Dominick’s, and Jewel to assist in promoting diverse agriculture.

The Chicago Community Trust (CCT) is the third largest community foundation in the country. Its funding areas are: (1) basic human needs (in which food security is a priority); (2) health (in which behavior and environmental change is a priority); (3) arts and culture; (4) community development (some funding of environmental projects); and (5) education. Historically, CCT has been a major funder of Chicago food programs. It is reexamining its strategic plan and the basic human needs agenda.

The purpose of the Food and Society Initiative of the *W.K. Kellogg Foundation* is to support the creation and expansion of community-based food systems that are locally owned and controlled, environmentally sound and health-promoting. Kellogg is committed to bringing other funders to the table around farm, food security, health, and environment issues. Kellogg would consider being a collaborative funder on projects that would fit within Kellogg’s goals and may continue to lend support to the funders group. It is unlikely that Kellogg would do much direct funding of individual projects. It does not want to compete with or undermine the Chicago-based funders.

Shorebank Enterprise’s mission is to invest in people and their communities to create economic equity and a healthy environment. Shorebank intends to stay part of the group. It will consider the role of lender and would look at loans for food processing or for related projects. It can be a conduit for educational messages and developing

leadership around food system issues. Shorebank's contribution to conservation is to encourage leadership and do lending that supports it.

The *McCormick Tribune Foundation* makes donations through its Communities Program, which is built on partnerships with newspapers, television and radio stations, and sports groups around the country, many of which (but not all) are owned by the Tribune Company. The Chicago Tribune Charities Fund donates to food banks in metropolitan areas. It is moving away from donations for emergency services, except in the hunger area. It does not support research or public policy and is mostly focused on children and families. It would like to stay part of the collaboration and has offered to channel information and provide leads to the right people as new efforts develop.

Prospective members

The *Prince Charitable Trusts* operates as a family foundation in Chicago, Washington D. C., and Rhode Island. Funding is made in five areas: (1) environment (open space); (2) arts and culture; (3) education; (4) health; and (5) social services. Charles Twichell, with whom we spoke, indicated interest in joining a funders collaborative on food issues, especially with a focus on Chicago. The foundation is currently part of a funders group focused on the environment.

We also spoke with John Laubenstein of the *Sara Lee Foundation* which supports four programs: (1) hunger (part of Community Initiatives Program); (2) homelessness; (3) women's progress; and (4) cultural enrichment. The Foundation concentrates its efforts in and around Chicago, and most of its product donations go to America's Second Harvest (corporate headquarters in Chicago). It is interested in collaborative activities and would welcome an inquiry from the funders group if there is a future project that seems to be a good fit.

Another possible funding source is the *Sustainable Agriculture program at the Illinois Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Land and Water Resources*. It administers the Conservation 2000 grants program to fund on-farm research, demonstrations, and university projects. Currently it funds 30 to 35 projects a year out of 40 to 70 applications.

Currently, the *American Farmland Trust's (ATF) Center for Agriculture in the Environment (CAE)*, a joint project with Northern Illinois University's Social Science Research Institute, administers an EPA program of small grants to help implement the Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA) and support "transition" efforts by growers to reduce reliance on pesticides targeted for removal under FQPA. It is

also funding a multi-state agro-ecology network—in Michigan, Illinois, and Indiana—that will develop web-based resources for organic growers.



APPENDICES

- A. List of Interviewees
 - B. Methodology
 - C. Finding Farmers: A Partial List of Lists of Diversified Farmers
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A. LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Last Name	First Name	Position	Organization
Abbenante	Perry	Center Store Buyer	Whole Foods Market
Adelmann	Jerry	Executive Director	Openlands
Allen	Will	Director	Growing Power
Allen	Shannon	Watershed Specialist	Macon County Soil and Water Conservation District
Anderson	Joy	Executive Partner	Criterion Consulting
Babadoost	Mohammad	Assistant Professor of Plant Physiology/ Extension and Research Plant Pathologist	University of Illinois / Extension/Department of Crop Sciences
Block	Daniel	Professor of Geography / Coordinator of Neighborhood Assistance Center	Chicago State University
Brockman	Terra	Executive Director	The Land Connection
Brussell	Juli	Community Food & Farming Systems Director	Illinois Stewardship Alliance
Brussell	Kevin	President	Southeastern Illinois Sustainable Agriculture Association
Caban	Art	Assistant Executive Director	Chicago Anti-Hunger Federation
Christian	Greg	Owner	Greg Christian Catering
Clancy	Kate	Former Director	Wallace Agricultural Policy Project
Cleverdon	Dave	Owner/farmer	Kinnikinnick Farm
Cooley	Roger	Midwest Director	Heifer International (Midwest)
Cuneen	Gary	Executive Director	Seven Generations Ahead
Daniel	Glenda	Director of Urban Greening	Openlands
DaVee	Rink	Manager	Shooting Star Farm (formerly Manager Homegrown Wisconsin).
Davis	Rochelle	Executive Director	Illinois Healthy Schools Campaign
Decker	Beverly	Executive Director	Chicago Anti-Hunger Federation
Dickerson	Amina	Director of Corporate Contributions	Kraft Foods
Dickhut	Kathy	Assistant Commissioner	City of Chicago-Department of Planning and Development

Last Name	First Name	Position	Organization
Dineen	Mark	Produce Manager	Co-op Markets
Dunn	Ken	Founder and Director	Resource Center
Ennis	Jim	Project Director	Food Alliance Midwest
Erisman	Jack	Farmer	Goldmine Farms
Fitzgerald	Peter	Produce Manager	Sunset Foods
Fleming	Jan	President	Strube Celery and Vegetable
Green	Tom	Director	The IPM Institute of North America, Inc.
Gugenheim	Ada Mary	Senior Program Officer	The Chicago Community Trust
Hubert	Craig	Executive Director	McHenry Conservation District
Imig	Gail	Program Director	Kellogg Foundation/Food Systems and Rural Development
Karmazin	Bruce	Executive Director	Lumpkin Family Foundation
Kirschenmann	Fred	Director	Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture/ Agriculture of the Middle Project
Kugler	Sonya	President/General Manager	Natural Needs
Laubenstein	John	Consultant, Community Initiatives Program	Sara Lee Foundation
Lehner	Sandra	Program Specialist	USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Midwest Reg. Office
Malec	Suzanne	Deputy Commissioner	City of Chicago-Department of Environment
Mandel	Abby	Founder/Chair of BOD	Chicago's Green City Market
Marquez	Theresa	Director of Marketing and Sales	Organic Valley
Mashima	Stanley	Produce Manager	Co-op Markets
Masiunas	John	Associate Professor	University of Illinois/ Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Science
McArtor	Gerry	Farmer	JonaMac Orchards
McFarland	Kent	Director	Illinois Department of Agriculture/Bureau of Marketing and Promotions
Mudge	Linda	Farmer	
O'Neill	Michael	Owner	Pets Calvert
Pefplis	Joe	Program Specialist	USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Midwest Reg. Office
Pesqueira	David	Senior Program Officer	McCormick Tribune Foundation

Last Name	First Name	Position	Organization
Pogge	Jean	Senior Vice President	Shorebank Enterprises
Pradhan	Geeta	Project Director	New Economy Initiative of the Boston Foundation
Presta	Ron	Buyer	Family Foods
Purefoy	Deirdre	Coordinator for School & Community Nutrition Programs	USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Midwest Reg. Office
Rajagopal	Raj	Professor	University of Iowa/Department of Geography
Rankin	David	Program Director	Great Lakes Protection Fund
Redmond	LaDonna and Tracey	President and CEO	Institute for Community Resource Development
Reid	Camille	School Food Policy Director	Illinois Healthy Schools Campaign
Rhodes	Harry	Executive Director	Growing Home
Rund	Kevin	Director of Local Government	Illinois Farm Bureau
Samuels	Julie	Community Outreach Coordinator	Openlands
Sands	Michael	Executive Director	Liberty Prairie Foundation
Scammon	Bob	Founder and President	Goodness Greeness
Schneider	Keith	Founder and Deputy Director	Michigan Land Use Institute
Schutte	Stan	Farmer	Triple S Farms
Slama	Jim	President	Sustain/Local Organic Initiative
Sorensen	Ann	Assistant Vice President for Research/Director	American Farmland Trust/Center for Agriculture in the Environment
Spaulding	Tom	Executive Director	Angelic Organics /CSA Learning Center
Steingraber	Sandra	Visiting Distinguished Scholar	Ithaca College
Stevenson	Steve	Associate Director	Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems/University of Wisconsin-Madison
Stockdale	Judith	Executive Director	Gaylord & Dorothy Donnelley Foundation
Twichell	Charles	Program Officer	Prince Charitable Trusts

B. METHODOLOGY

Red Tomato Report:

The step-by-step process we followed

We chose a team approach because the project objectives were so ambitious, the subject matter so diverse, and the territory (Illinois) unfamiliar. Most members of the project team are veterans of food systems work, some for thirty years. However, the effort called for knowledge and experience in science, agriculture, business—especially marketing and distribution, policy, community organizing, organizational development, writing and editing, and project management. We needed the team.

Fourteen people do not a simple process make, especially when it came to analysis and reflection.

With help from two systems thinking experts, Joel Yanowitz and Bob Williams, we designed a process that would invite in the enormous complexity of the system, while enabling us to stay true to deadlines and maintain steady progression toward the end product. The trick was keeping the discussion focused while taking full advantage of the vast information we acquired.

Over 70 interviews form the basis of this report. Before deciding who to interview, we wrote and discussed some focusing statements—three simple, in fact oversimplified, stories about the Illinois food system.

I. FARM TO MARKET

The State of Illinois has enormous agricultural capacity and production. It has a world-class agricultural infrastructure. Yet the infrastructure—which includes grain elevators, river barges, railways, anhydrous ammonia depots, national commodity subsidies, farm credit, and the “free” advice available from extension agents, is of little value to farmers raising foods for local consumption. The infrastructure serves the corn and soybean industry.

Precious little food grown on farms in Illinois is currently feeding people in Illinois. Precious little directly feeds people, period. Most of the food grown on farms in Illinois is turned into ethanol; processed into glutens, oils, and syrups; or, is fed to animals. And most is exported, in one form or another. The food dollars rung up at cash registers in stores and restaurants in Illinois, instead of multiplying inside the state economy, depart for places 2,000 miles, 10,000 miles away.

II. ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD

Hunger persists at a rate of 10.5% of U.S. households; in Illinois, 422,464 households are food insecure, and only 55% of these participate in Food Stamps. The incidence of malnutrition, diabetes, and obesity is rising, especially among children. Some of the free or affordable meals provided by food banks include highly-processed foods full of sugar and fat. All this despite decades of government and nonprofit work to reduce the incidence of hunger. And all this at a time when information about healthy eating is more abundant and more readily available than ever before.

III. LAND USE AND HUMAN HEALTH

Non-point pollution from fertilizer and pesticides from Illinois farms is increasingly linked (a) to the pollution of groundwater and water bodies in Illinois, (b) to the hypoxia zone (dead zone) in the Gulf of Mexico, as well as (c) to increases in human disease, such as cancer, in downstate Illinois communities. At the same time, the rate of fertilizer and pesticides in Illinois is in excess of what is required to maintain production levels, and the overall level is growing.

We used the stories to help us identify key variables that, if we could change them, would turn these stories around in the direction we and the funders wanted.

Key Variables We Want To Affect

1. The amount of the total food consumed in Illinois that is grown by independent family farmers in Illinois, or in nearby states and the percentage of that amount that is certified organically grown or ecologically grown.
2. The number of people in Illinois who would choose to buy locally grown foods, because they see benefits such as freshness, flavor, personal health, and/or community health.
3. The number of people in Illinois who perceive direct links between two or more of these variables: their own health, their own diet, the use and treatment of nearby land, and the environment.
4. The number of Illinois farms, and the total acreage, whose production is diversified beyond corn and soybeans.
5. The number of food sellers, agencies, and organizations in Illinois whose public endorsement of a more diversified and locally based food and farm economy is matched by appropriate resources and actions.
6. The number of people living in Illinois who have easy access to affordable, high quality, locally grown foods.
7. The amount (gross tonnage) of pesticides and synthetic fertilizer applied annually to farms in Illinois.

These variables became checkpoints in our analytical and discussion process. They helped maintain focus. Initially, they helped us identify and decide who to interview.

The interviewee list was never intended to be a scientifically chosen or representative sample. It was a list of the people, pure and simple, who offered the information and experience we needed to do our work. We wanted a variety of opinions from a diverse range of food system stakeholders. We started with references from the funders; quickly moved beyond to references from interviewees, and then went on to references from references, etc.

The project was more of an investigative search than a survey. Interviews were held right up until the day before the report was sent to funders.

The majority of interviews were 60 to 90 minutes in length. A few were under half an hour. For every subject area (i.e., farm marketing, urban agriculture, policy, the environment, etc.) we had a list of questions drawn up in advance. But the questions were not meant to be a script. Investigators used them as guideposts, leading each conversation down the road they determined would be most revealing. The results of individual interviews were condensed to a two-page report in which investigators answered these questions:

1. Provide one paragraph of background on the person and the organization.
2. What was learned? New? What was surprising?
3. Provide direct quotes to support this.
4. What opportunities did you see for the funders? What leverage?
5. Whom else should we interview?

The participants in the analytical discussions read all the two-page interview summaries in advance. Their charge was to “look for *patterns, themes, and generalities* across the lot of them; also, to note *exceptions and contradictions* to the patterns, themes, and generalities you see.”

The full team discussions and analysis centered on what the interviewees told us. We met for two full days of talk. We had a very rough sense of direction and leverage points.

The content was refined, focused, and developed throughout the writing process. During the final four weeks, drafts were sent to members of the project team. As feedback flowed in, it was incorporated (or rejected) by the writers and editors. The end product took shape.

We did not strive for a consensus on the end product by the entire project team. The final calls were made by the project director, project coordinator, and research coordinator. However, the process was highly collaborative, dynamic, at times exhausting, yet enormously challenging and, even, fun throughout.

C. FINDING FARMERS: A PARTIAL LIST OF LISTS OF DIVERSIFIED FARMERS

NOTE: These lists include farmers who are direct marketing, wholesaling, and those doing both. We suspect there may be many on these lists who would be interested in entering the “Markets of the Middle” if the right opportunities were created. We present these lists as a starting place for making those opportunities happen.

- A. **Local Farmer & Food Processor Directory.** Fruited Plain Cooperative Society is an independent, nonprofit, cooperative buying club for residents of Champaign-Urbana, Illinois and surrounding communities. Its web site includes a directory of 24 farmers and food processors in the area, listed by food category. Available at: <http://co-op.champaign.il.us/fp/localfood/directory.html>.
- B. **A Different Field: Innovative Entrepreneurs in Illinois Farming.** Written by Dan Anderson of Agroecology/Sustainable Agriculture Program at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, this book profiles 18 farmers across the state raising everything from pecans to earthworms. Available at: <http://www.aces.uiuc.edu/asap/resources/diffield.html>.
- C. **Farm-Direct: The Central Illinois Farmer to Consumer Directory.** This directory covers 23 counties in the central part of the state and was produced by collaboration between The Land Connection, Prairieland Slow Food, and the Agroecology/Sustainable Agriculture Program at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Only growers who sell at least some of their product directly to consumers, and only processors who deal with meat raised primarily within a 100-mile radius of their facility, and sell their meat and dairy products directly to consumers are included. Despite these stipulations, the directory includes over 200 entries. Available at: <http://www.aces.uiuc.edu/asap/resources/farmdirect/>.
- D. **Chicago Green City Market.** The website of this market, the only farmers’ market in Chicago that is farmer-only and requires sustainable farming practices, lists all the growers who participate. Available at: http://www.chicagorencitymarket.org/growers_public.asp.
- E. **Prairie Bounty of Illinois** is maintained by the Illinois Specialty Growers Association as a marketing directory for Illinois growers of certain specialty crops, including fruits, vegetables, herbs, and Christmas trees. The directory is organized by crop type and county. A print version is available for a \$3.00 shipping fee and the directory is also available in a searchable form online at: <http://www.specialtygrowers.org/bounty.htm>.
- F. **MarketMaker** is a collaboration between the University of Illinois Extension, the Initiative for the Development of Entrepreneurs in Agriculture, the Illinois Department of Agriculture, and the Illinois Council on Food and Agricultural Research. Based on census data, MarketMaker offers searchable lists of wholesalers, retailers, and processors in addition to producers, and it also includes

market data via interactive maps that can show income, household type, and a variety of other characteristics. While its farm lists are much less extensive and detailed than the previous examples, the growers listed may be closer to meeting the demands of Markets in the Middle. Available at:
<http://www.marketmaker.uiuc.edu/index.asp>.

Further afield:

- G. **The Farm Fresh Atlas** lists farms and food-related businesses that sell their goods directly to customers in southern Wisconsin. It's searchable by name, location, and product and lists 62 farms. The Farm Fresh Atlas is produced by the Research, Education, Action and Policy on Food Group, the Dane County Farmers' Market, the Friends of the Dane County Farmers' Market, and the UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems. Available at:
<http://www.reapfoodgroup.org/atlas/index.htm>.
- H. **Homegrown Wisconsin** is a cooperative of 25 farms in southern Wisconsin that distributes three to six pallets of diversified organic vegetables to restaurants in Madison, Milwaukee, and Chicago twice a week. Member farms are listed at:
<http://www.homegrownwisconsin.com/farms.htm>.
- I. **Marketline** is a project of the nonprofit Michigan Integrated Food and Farming Systems (MIFFS). The site's goal is to identify small to medium sized buyers and sellers of locally grown farm products and farm-based recreational opportunities. The Marketline directory currently targets both wholesale and retail establishments on and off the farm. It's searchable by "buyers" and "sellers" as well as by county and product type. Available at:
<http://www.miffsmarketline.org/>.
- J. **Indiana Farm Direct** lists 34 farms throughout the state, but mainly around Indianapolis. Some of the farmers are small and specialize in a few products, while others are larger and offer many different types of products. Available at:
<http://www.indianafarmdirect.com/default.aspx>.