

HEALTH LEADERSHIP NETWORK
CDFA STEERING COMMITTEE
1/22/10 MEETING NOTES

In attendance: Steve Hajik, Lake County Ag Commissioner; Debra Sommerfield, Lake County Marketing and Economic Development; Sky Hoyt, Farmer; Susan Jen and Jackie Armstrong, Health Leadership Network.

MARKETING PROPOSAL: Susan reported that she and Terre Logsdon, Lake County Marketing Analyst, had reviewed proposals submitted in response to the RFP for Marketing Services and selected Shelly Mascari as the contractor. In addition to Shelly's marketing skills and experience, Susan added that Shelly's contacts with schools through her work with the Lake County Office of Education would be helpful. Proceeding with a contract for Shelly to provide marketing services for the CDFA grant was approved.

ONLINE ORDERING SYSTEM: Susan reviewed the CDFA grant provisions to establish an online ordering system. The grant budget includes \$5,000 for software and \$12,500 per year during the first two years of the grant for a part time person to manage the system and facilitate its use by local farmers. The online system is supposed to become self-sustaining during the third year.

In response to Steve's concerns about delivery, Susan said that the system would not include delivery. Online customers would need to pick up their orders at the farms or in some other appropriate manner .

Sky expressed the following apprehensions about the proposed online ordering system:

- Adequate engagement of growers in an online ordering system
- Sustainability of the system
- Having access to purchasing information that could create comparisons and undercut pricing
- Personal relationships between customers and farmers may be lost.

In response to Sky's concerns, Susan said that the purpose of the online ordering system was to increase markets, not take them away from farmers. She said that not knowing what foods might be available was identified by buyers who responded to the Food Assessment survey as the primary barrier to buying local foods. Susan added that she is an advocate for local farmers for two main reasons; to support the local economy and because specialty crops are part of nature's pharmacy and therefore afford health protection for all ages.

With regard to providing access to purchasing information and the threat of farmers undercutting one another's pricing, Susan suggested that a food system which included agreements between growers and buyers could stabilize, rather than threaten, those relationships. While she could not guarantee how people would perform within such a system, she believed that it would increase transparency and improve access for institutional buyers.

Sky indicated that we do have some level of local food system in existence and that our language should reflect that we are building on an existing system, rather than putting in a system from scratch. Susan offered to adjust her language to “build upon” the local system.

Discussion also ensued regarding the drawbacks to utilizing the Community Co-op as the implementer of the online ordering system. Drawbacks mostly centered on the perception of the Co-op as promoting organic produce only. Susan explained that the online system would be operated through Create, the Co-Op’s nonprofit organization that does not distinguish between organic and conventional products adding, however, that a drop-down menu would allow buyers the option of selecting organic produce.

In response to Sky’s similar objections to the transportation element of the grant, Susan explained that both the transportation element and online ordering system were components of the proposal funded by CDFA, and as these elements were part of the approved scope of work, it necessitated that these goals be pursued until it became apparent that they wouldn’t work and that some alternative approach would be more viable.

Sky suggested that Coleen Rentsch would be the best local option to develop a distribution system. He had mentioned this at a past Farm-School meeting, but Colleen had not seemed responsive at the time. Debra thought that Jim Bengard might be another valuable resource to pursue.

Sky also indicated that development of a local drier at the Mariani yard on Bell Hill Road would create jobs and protect specialty crop acreage by providing another outlet for locally grown fruit. Currently there do not seem to be resources available for this purpose.

The meeting was adjourned about 1:15 p.m.