

North Central Regional Food Business Center DRAFT Action Plan



December ____, 2023

East Central Regional Development Commission
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The East Central Regional Development Commission, as a partner in the North Central Regional Food Business Center, is committed to supporting a thriving and resilient local food system. According to the 2017 agricultural statistics available from the USDA, the 5 county region has 3780 farms, however, over 62% of those farms have a value of sales less than \$10,000.

To better understand the local food system in the region, there was an engagement process that included farmers/ranchers, local businesses and community organizations, and local government.

The purpose of this action plan is to expand and build on current efforts to support a thriving and resilient food system by establishing a strong link between producers and consumers to increase demand, increasing direct to consumer sales and creating food hubs and/or storage facilities that will allow greater and more efficient access to consumer, retail and institutional sales.

We have outlined the following goals and action steps for achieving this vision. This plan is designed to be fluid and updated annually. We will continue to look for new opportunities inspired by the development of this work.

- 1. Goal/Strategy: Expand knowledge base around the local/regional food system to better understand opportunities and challenges.**
 - a. Develop a comprehensive list of stakeholders in the value chain.
 - b. Create and distribute a local/regional food survey.
 - c. Host listening session of protein processors to assess opportunities.

- 2. Goal/Strategy: Enhance coordination and communication among existing food value chain resources and agencies.**
 - a. Host semi-annual regional stakeholder networking event.
 - b. Develop/distribute newsletter to share updates, success stories and other communication items.
 - c. Explore opportunities to share resources at existing organization events.

- 3. Goal/Strategy: Implement and support community engagement opportunities in order to increase demand for local/regional food.**
 - a. Convene a marketing steering group for regional food producers.
 - b. Create user friendly map/directory of local farmers/producers for distribution through City Center Market and other venues.
 - c. Support/host events to promote local foods.
 - d. Organize a coordinated campaign to encourage agritourism.
 - e. Identify and support grant and financing opportunities.

- 4. Goal/Strategy: Support and encourage regional aggregation/distribution opportunities to strengthen the food value chain.**
 - a. Convene a group of stakeholders to assess the viability of a REKO ring food hub.
 - b. Explore and support opportunities for shared freezer space.
 - c. Create a coalition of farmers and stakeholders interested in food hub opportunities.
 - d. Connect with mentors to learn best practices: Sprout, Good Acres, Twin Ports REKO ring, etc.
 - e. Identify and support grant and financing opportunities.

- 5. Goal/Strategy: Create and support opportunities for educational events to empower stakeholders to grow and strengthen their business.**
 - a. Encourage participation in existing organizations that work to create policy change for local food systems.
 - b. Partner/host legislative advocacy training.
 - c. Encourage mentorship programs among farmers/producers to share best practice.
 - d. Educate stakeholders about existing opportunities for funding, education, and marketing.
 - e. Co-host and encourage educational events for stakeholders.

To learn more about the North Central Regional Food Business Center visit <https://www.northcentralrfbc.org/>