

Routt County Local Food Dialogue

Executive Summary

October 17, 2013

The citizens of Routt County have a passion for local foods and local agriculture. This desire is rooted in the knowledge that northwestern Colorado has a rich history of raising livestock and growing crops. From lamb and beef to strawberries and potatoes, the Yampa Valley has provided food for the region for decades. Times have changed, however, and Routt County has lost a lot of its traditional food production.

Rebuilding our local food economy is now a priority for several organizations, non-profits, governmental agencies and individuals in the county. Recent community surveys and assessments have shown an intense interest in both producing and consuming local foods. There is some variety when people are asked to describe the term “local food.” For some, it means food grown within Routt County, for others it means food grown within 100-mile radius, the Western Slope or even food grown within Colorado.

To address the growing interest in local food, a community dialogue about Routt County’s local food economy was held on October 17, 2013 in Steamboat Springs. The Colorado State University Extension office in Routt County hosted the meeting with their partners, Northwest Colorado Food Coalition, Community Agriculture Alliance and the Center for Public Deliberation at CSU.

Leading up to the event, an online survey was developed and administered to gather ideas and responses regarding the local food economy. The 88 responses to that survey were used to develop background material for participants to react to during the event.

The Local Food Dialogue attendees were a mixture of ranchers, educators, business owners, non-profit and government representatives (see question 1 on page 3 of this report for details). Fifty individuals participated, working in five small group discussions. After two hours of facilitated conversation and deliberation, the attendees generated a list of ideas, questions and concerns that will inform our future local food efforts.

The data presented in this executive summary identifies some overall key themes from the event. The full report includes all the data collected, including results from wireless keypad questions, notes from the individual tables, and answers provided by participants to a worksheet completed during the event.

Themes from the Discussion

Participants spent time in their small groups discussing each of the three approaches to a local food economy. At the end of each 20 minute session, participants were asked to identify in writing the most compelling argument for that approach, and one question or concern that was raised. Below are themes that were identified from the worksheet data:

Focus on educating the community concerning the benefits of a local food economy.

- Work through schools, children (5)
- Best approach to create cultural change and long term impact (4)
- Need to educate regarding how to use/prepare local foods (4)
- Need to promote local foods to distinct, hard to reach audiences (low income, transient) (3)
- Need to educate on costs/benefits of local food – economic (3)
- Need to educate about local food (what is available, where to access) (2)
- Need to educate on costs/benefits of local food – nutrition (4)
- Put a face on the farmer, develop relationships (2)

Focus on helping local producers start and build their capacity for safe, high quality local food

- Improve local infrastructure- processing, develop equipment co-ops (9)
- Improve networks between producers and retailers/restaurants (6)
- Need to improve producer networks, sharing of ideas (5)
- Develop micro-loan program (3)
- Provide assistance with marketing, distribution, processing, sales (2)
- Improve local farmer's markets (less tourist focused, easier & lower cost for small producers) (2)
- Demand is there, need consistent supply (2)

Focus on local government removing unnecessary regulations and working to incentivize local food

- Need to streamline/reduce/ease regulatory burden for smaller producers (11)
- Develop one-stop shop, regulatory roadmap to help producers navigate (4)
- Develop local USDA approved processing plant (3)
- Secure grant funding opportunities (3)
- Need to explore the idea of food sovereignty (3)
- Need improved communication between government and producers (2)
- Learn from other counties that have been successful expanding local foods (2)

Questions/Concerns that were raised

- Regulatory burden is too high (10)
- Local food will remain more expensive (9)
- Who leads the effort? Provides funding (8)
- Habits hard to change, especially if people are ok with the status quo (7)
- How do we reach the tough audiences (7)
- Educational efforts are slow and have questionable effect (7)
- Who will make the investment for infrastructure? (5)
- Growing season not long enough to support many local foods(5)
- Regulations take time to adjust, difficult process (3)
- Difficult to address the unique aspects of our resort/transient population (3)

At the completion of the event attendees were asked for specific actions they would support for individuals, organizations, and local governments to support a local food economy. Similar themes emerged at the event and on the previous survey:

<p>Individual actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate themselves (7) • Use word of mouth to educate/impact others (4) • Buy local (15) • Learn to grow your own food (4) • Question your food (3) • Support/advocate for farmers (4) 	<p>Organizational actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate the community (6) • Coordinate actions, build a network (3) • Invest in local infrastructure (3) • Promote local food (2) • Promote healthy eating (2) 	<p>Local government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ease/simplify regulations (9) • Listen (4) • Communicate with producers/consumers (2) • Improve internal communication/coordination
--	---	---

Evaluation of Local Food Dialogue event:

<p>I was satisfied with today's small group discussion</p> <p>Strongly agree: 16 Agree: 20 No opinion: 1 Disagree: 0 Strongly disagree: 0</p>	<p>The facilitator was helpful</p> <p>Strongly agree: 12 Agree: 23 No opinion: 2 Disagree: 0 Strongly disagree: 0</p>	<p>I would attend a follow up session to today's event</p> <p>Strongly agree: 19 Agree: 18 No opinion: 0 Disagree: 0 Strongly disagree: 0</p>
--	--	--

Extension programs are available to all without discrimination- Colorado State University Extension, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Colorado counties cooperating.