



TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM COLLABORATES TO CONNECT SURPLUS FOOD WITH HUNGER RELIEF AGENCIES

The University of Illinois, Feeding Illinois, the Illinois Specialty Growers Association, and the Illinois Farm Bureau are collaborating to collect and collate information on the locations, types, and quantities of “surplus” specialty crops in Illinois, including potential acquisition costs. Through a producer survey, a series of focus groups, and implementation of pilots across the state, the team looks to uncover the optimal mix of incentives and program interventions to overcome the current barriers to efficient flows of fresh, Illinois-produced food to Illinois residents, with as little waste as possible.

STAKEHOLDERS COLLABORATE TO IMPROVE FOOD SECURITY IN ILLINOIS

Even before the pandemic began, Illinois stakeholders were considering how to expand the recovery of surplus food produced in the state. In early 2020, staff from Feeding Illinois and the Illinois Farm Bureau began discussions related to expansion of programs and opportunities for farmers to move surplus food commodities to hunger relief agencies throughout the state. Such programs are often referred to as “Farm to Foodbank” efforts. These agencies reached out to the Illinois Sustainable Technology Center (ISTC) Technical Assistance Program (TAP) to discuss the types of data and analyses needed to support those efforts. Plans began for a feasibility study, involving collaboration with the Illinois Specialty Growers Association, to expand and improve farm to foodbank commodity flows.

The overall outcomes of this project are being realized by meaningful collaboration between over two dozen organizations across Illinois. The feasibility study is being led by Feeding Illinois with support from the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign, the Illinois Farm Bureau, and the Illinois Specialty Growers Association.

STUDY COMPONENTS

In order to evaluate and devise effective strategies for expansion of farm to foodbank programs within Illinois, the study team is evaluating what has worked as part of such programs in other states. Project staff are reviewing and reaching out to similar programs nationwide to compile best practices, key challenges, pinch points where material flows may slow down or stop due to a variety of factors, performance indicators, and key stakeholders to include in strategic planning.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The feasibility study will involve collection and collation of information on the locations, types, and quantities of “surplus” specialty crops in Illinois, including potential acquisition costs. Objectives include:

- ▶ Provide producers with additional end markets for commodities
- ▶ Identify the quantity and quality of surplus food in Illinois
- ▶ Expand supply of fresh food to food banks
- ▶ Increase food security
- ▶ Reduce food loss and foster a statewide circular economy
- ▶ Establish a sustainable farm to foodbank program in Illinois

FEASIBILITY STUDY

THE STUDY WILL IDENTIFY PROGRAM APPROACHES AND EVALUATE PROGRAM EFFICACY TO CREATE A FARM TO FOODBANK PROGRAM IN ILLINOIS



Review similar programs and identify strategies



Evaluate logistical opportunities and challenges



Identify economic opportunities and challenges



Uncover locally appropriate strategies



Pilot and evaluate strategies



Create a roadmap for a statewide farm to foodbank program

Simultaneously, the project team is taking a three-pronged approach to compiling the data necessary to develop and assess the feasibility of strategies for a statewide farm to foodbank program in Illinois .

WHAT MIGHT WORK IN ILLINOIS?

LOCAL CONDITIONS, OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS



Farm to Foodbank Survey

Survey producers on current conditions, challenges, opportunities and past experiences



Focus Groups

Solicit feedback based on survey results and national review with producers, distributors, and foodbanks to identify program strategies



Pilots

Implement pilots across the state with volunteers to evaluate and refine program strategies

PARTICIPATE

Illinois producers can support these efforts by completing the survey at go.illinois.edu/farm2foodbanksurvey. The survey takes approximately 10 minutes to complete. You may alternatively request a physical version of the survey be mailed to you by contacting ISTC at 217-300-2046 or info-istc@illinois.edu.

For additional information, assistance with survey completion, or to express interest in participating in the forthcoming focus groups, please contact the ISTC Technical Assistance Program at info-istc@illinois.edu.