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

RECENT HIGHLIGHTS

▶ Connected with nine new organizations to introduce the Farm to Food Bank Program and discuss opportunities for collaboration. Organizations included the Office of Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton, The Lumpkin Family Foundation, Illinois Children’s Healthcare Foundation, Common Market, Partners in Produce, Peoria Grown, Southern Illinois University, Down at the Farms, and Jo Daviess Local Foods.
▶ Connected with ten farms and farmers markets across the state to gather feedback and discuss potential participation in the Farm to Food Bank Program.
▶ ISTC conducted the final focus group aimed at connecting with farmers throughout the state to learn about their experiences and perceptions of an Illinois Farm to Food Bank program on February 2nd. Five central themes emerged throughout the five focus groups: easing the burden for farmers financially, effective communication, program flexibility, legal concerns, and gaps in infrastructure.
▶ Feeding Illinois, ISTC, and the Illinois Farmers Market Association presented “Farm to Food Bank: Utilizing Farmers Markets as Aggregation” at the 2022 Live Local Conference on March 23rd in Peoria. There were 48 people in attendance, and several follow up discussions have been scheduled to discuss collaboration.
▶ Starting in February, a recurring monthly meeting was arranged to convene Feeding Illinois, ISTC, and a food sourcing team representative from each member food bank. Discussions have covered potential Farm to Food Bank opportunities in each territory.
▶ Gibbs Family Farm hosted a fundraiser to support their participation in a Farm to Food Bank pilot project, raising over $20,000 to offset their costs of transferring two acres of row crop to specialty crops.
▶ ISTC began finalizing a report to Feeding Illinois incorporating an analysis of farmer survey results, focus group findings, pilot project outcomes, and other engagement activities in order to broadly identify themes, challenges, and opportunities surrounding the implementation of an Illinois Farm to Food Bank program.

NEXT STEPS

▶ Continue planning 2022 pilot projects with Rendleman Orchards, Gibbs Family Farm, and Nayak Farms.
▶ Continue discussions with farms and farmers markets that have shown interest in a Farm to Food Bank pilot for the 2022 season. As conversations and plans progress, representatives from the appropriate food bank will be included.
▶ ISTC to complete a report detailing research and engagement during the first period of the project, January 2021 – February 2022.