



Prairie Research Institute
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



Illinois Extension
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Illinois Farm to Food Bank Feasibility Study Newsletter, October & November 2021

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 seven new organizations to introduce the Farm to Food Bank Project and solicit feedback. Organizations included The Farmlink Project, Seven Generations Ahead – Farm to School Program, Agri-Food Alliance, IL Stewardship Alliance, Go Green Winnetka, Farm-Fed Cooperative, and What Chefs Want.
- ▶ ISTC and University of Illinois Extension met with the IL Food Procurement Cohort (comprised of one member from each food bank) to provide an update and open the floor for questions.
- ▶ Met virtually with Rendleman Orchards, Tri-State Food Bank, and St. Louis Area Foodbank to recap the Rendleman’s pilot and capture learnings. We discussed successes, challenges, and opportunities moving forward.
- ▶ Continued planning the Gibbs Family Farm pilot. The Gibbs family has started a fundraising event to help offset the costs of converting two acres of row crop into specialty crops for Feeding IL food banks. Prairie State Tractor has donated a \$10,000 John Deere Z740RA as a raffle prize to help support the Gibbs’ project. A Local Food Systems & Small Farms Illinois Extension Educator has been brought in to develop a plan to maximize the two acres.
- ▶ Visited three robust food pantries involved with farmers markets and/or community gardens to introduce the Farm to Food Bank Project and discuss their efforts to expand their offering of fresh foods. Pantries included Loaves & Fishes (Aurora), Marie Wilkinson (Aurora), and Food for Greater Elgin.
- ▶ Completed an initial review of the Farmer Survey, allowing the F2FB project team to better understand potential barriers and opportunities as we plan for 2022.
- ▶ In an effort to support the Farm to Food Bank Program, Feeding IL applied for the [Specialty Crop Multi-State Grant through the USDA](#). If awarded, this funding will allow for the implementation of infrastructure to test new models of moving specialty crops from farm to food banks and pantries.
- ▶ U of I Extension SNAP-Ed Educators met with Feeding IL Board members to share plans for demand-side data collection (food pantries). Coordinated with Extension and food bank personnel to recruit participants into focus groups.
- ▶ SNAP-Ed Educators also hosted nine food pantry manager/key volunteer focus groups (increase from six planned focus groups due to high participation demand); total number of participating individuals was 49. Purpose of focus groups was to identify opportunities, challenges, demands, and capacity of food pantries to receive and distribute more fresh foods. Focus group participants also completed a web survey as part of the demand-side of data collection.

NEXT STEPS

- ▶ Continue to prepare for farmer focus groups to be held at the IL Specialty Growers Conference January 5-7th in Springfield. Depending on the number of participants at the conference, additional focus groups may be held after the conference.
- ▶ Feeding IL will host a booth as well as give a presentation at the IL Specialty Growers Conference, highlighting Farm to Food Bank efforts thus far and build additional relationships.
- ▶ Continue survey analysis, analyzing themes, and following up with farmers that indicated they would like to learn more about the program.
- ▶ Illinois Extension is currently working on demand-side analysis and identification of themes. Will share findings with IL Farm to Food Bank Collaborative and other stakeholders.

