Opportunities and Challenges
The Iowa/Nebraska Local Food System

Chuck Francis – University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Rebecca Bloom – Bloomsorganics
Shannon Moncure – Nebraska Food Cooperative
Mark Gustafson – University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Chuck Francis
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
What Makes My Operation Unique?

• **Certified Organic** for six of my ten years farming DBA bloomsorganic

• **Family**
  
  • Youngest son Eli, 22, is studying Horticulture/Entomology at UNL. Eli has helped on the farm for the past five years.
  
  • Alex our eldest son, 24, is the executive baker at the **Grey Plume**—the first Sustainabuild Restaurant in the area (we will be selling to the G.Plume in 2011)
  
  • Husband Brent is an attorney and Yoga teacher at the Omaha Public Schools and University of Nebraska at Omaha. We all like to cook, preserve and eat the wide variety of crops I’m growing.

• I am self-taught but have farming/gardening in my genetic make-up
What Makes My Operation Unique?

- Season begins with plant sales (wholesale, retail and school fundraisers)
- Widely diverse selection: culinary herbs, flowers, common garden vegetables
- Raspberries, asparagus and other perennial/orchard crops in development stage—think Permaculture
- Have tried many different marketing methods: CSA, restaurants, farmers market

**Infrastructure**

- 2.5 acres in production including one standard commercial greenhouse with heat and one 20x72’ high tunnel (new fall 2010).
- Passive solar home (2009) where we use the radiant heat floor to start seeds; the large capacity sinks to wash produce, and space for curing and cold storage.
Opportunities

- Niche marketing of specialty crops such as heirloom tomatoes, Asian cucumbers, Hakuri turnips and other baby root crops, grey shallots, etc. I will attempt to grow unusual crops if requested to do so (such as crones).

- Since we live in a cold climate, I promote canning, drying and freezing produce for year-long local food. I need a short break from food production in the winter, but I’m looking into micro green production under lights.

- Promote home and community gardening by donation of plants and produce, giving advice (think *Edible Landscaping*) and sharing organic sweet potato slips from Kansas State.

- Lucky to be located near metropolitan areas to minimize delivery time and mileage costs

- Try to keep up with Local Food Scene and the New Green Consciousness
Challenges

- Organic/small scale production has its downside: cost of hand labor intensive work, organic seeds and other inputs (soil mix components, allowed herbicides/pesticides, row cover and mulch materials) are more expensive than in conventional agriculture. I do not own an acreage tractor and wish that an equipment share situation were available.

- Diversified Crops are a plus, but weather conditions and juggling many cultural plant needs and conditions always a challenge.

- The National Organic Program has offered 70% cost-share for application/inspection fees for organic certification, but other government subsidies are non-existent.
Challenges

- Conservation minded but still struggling with recycling everything, for instance there is no place to take greenhouse plastic.
- Would like to have an unpaid intern who would trade labor for housing/food/my experience/knowledge. Most young folks need some income to justify their commitment to your farm. My age and physical ability are not what they were ten years ago.
- Owning a small business is no small task monetarily. I use savings to make improvements to my system. I have been fortunate not to carry loans or be in debt. I am the grower, buyer, sales rep. delivery person, clean-up crew—you name it! The income from farm sales has primarily offset the costs of ownership.
Conclusions

• I see the need for new ways of selling my product. What about using a Food Broker to help make larger volume sales to schools/institutions? I would be willing to join an association where growers combine similar produce items to fulfill a larger order/need. The Pottawattamie County, Iowa Local Food Council is working on this idea.

• Lots of folks are enamored with Organic and Local Foods & even though there is more competition in the marketplace, there seems to be just as many new places to sell what you grow!

• In Omaha we have immigrant populations—the Karen people from Burma and Sudanese from Africa who want to grow some of their own food. I’ve been written into a USDA grant to help the Karen peoples with greenhousing needs and they could potentially be employees on my farm.

• The possibilities are endless—everyone eats!

• By modeling a healthful self sustaining lifestyle, we create more planetary wellness and on a local level we nurture our communities/local economies.
Shannon Moncure
Nebraska Food Cooperative
Our Mission: To foster a local food community and promote a culture of stewardship by cultivating farmer-consumer relationships, promoting the enjoyment of healthful food, increasing food security through diversity, and enhancing overall rural sustainability.

Bringing local food to your table

The freshness and flavor of local food will make your taste buds tingle. Nebraska farmers, gardeners, and craftspeople come together through this cooperative to offer you the best of the best. Buying local helps your own community grow stronger along with your health and pocketbook.

Member Newsletter (January 2011)

For ordering and pickup schedules, please refer to the calendar below. Ordering opens and closes at midnight on the respective days. NOTE: Order cycles beyond the “next one” are projections and subject to change depending upon growing conditions and...
... and 12 Delivery Sites

Auburn
Bellevue
Eagle/Elmwood
North Lincoln
Southwest Lincoln
Gretna
Omaha
West Omaha
Aurora
Columbus/Monroe
Fullerton
Madison
Norfolk
West Point
Grand Island/Hastings
Mark Gustafson
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Rural development

- is composed of actions taken to improve the economics and living conditions of those residing in rural places.
Some critical development issues facing rural areas include:

- Consolidation of farms and businesses resulting in loss of self-employment opportunities.

- Lack of quality employment opportunities

- Outmigration of population especially the young

- Increased international competition to our traditional products – food, fiber, wood products, minerals, etc.
Some critical issues facing rural areas in developing countries include:

- Poverty and hunger (3/4 of world’s poor live in rural areas)
- Lack of jobs and income
- Poor productivity in agriculture sector
- Degradation of environment (soil erosion, water pollution, deforestation, etc.)
- Public health issues – disease, sanitation, etc.
- Lack of education
- Unequal land distribution
In the US rural development programs include initiatives focused on:

- Workforce training
- Industry attraction
- Community leadership skills
- Available housing
- Public infrastructure (water sewage, etc.)
- More recently, business creation including encouraging entrepreneurs
NOT strongly supported in rural development strategies is ADDING VALUE TO AGRICULTURE PRODUCTION.

Rural development strategies need to consider:

• the strengths and weaknesses of the region (natural resources, human capital, public infrastructure, etc.)

• The economic opportunities that exist in society

The competitive STRENGTHS of rural Nebraska have created a strong production agriculture industry. (NE ranks 7th nationally in farm sales, Agriculture creates over 25% of NE jobs)

How can we use this strength to add jobs and rural economic benefits?

We need to look for higher value agricultural opportunities!
We know:

• Communities and firms without competitive advantages will not prosper—they lapse into decline or subsistence. (*Adding value creates an advantage*)

• Nations, communities, and firms that prosper constantly invest in creating new competitive advantage rather than protecting old advantage.

• **Risk-taking entrepreneurs are one of the keys to creating new advantages.**

Karl Stauber, Ph.D.
Rural Philanthropy
January 2011
In Agriculture, the opportunities focusing on high value, niche, and value added activities will include:

- Responding to the growing demand for products perceived to be healthier, safer, and more environmentally friendly by consumers.  
  (local foods)

- Developing agri-tourism and other creative entrepreneurial activities associated with a working landscape.
Prosperous Rural Communities

- More farm employment
- More family farms
- More government farm payments
- More diverse economies (Herfindahl index)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Prosperous</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farm employment per 1,000 population</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm population per 1,000 population</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family farms per 1,000 population</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt. payments to farming per capita</td>
<td>$1,906</td>
<td>$867</td>
<td>$1,554</td>
<td>$651</td>
<td>$372</td>
<td>$607</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prof. Andrew M. Isserman
University of Illinois

April 20, 2007
isserman@uiuc.edu
Nebraska Local Foods Website

localfoods.nebraska.edu

Eat Local & Enjoy Taste!
In recent years, Americans, including Nebraskans, have become increasingly concerned about the safety and quality of the food they eat. This has led to a rapidly growing trend in local food marketing. Nationally, local food sales have quickly grown to be a 5 billion dollar industry and are expected to grow to $7 billion by 2011. This demand is creating opportunities for Nebraskans to start, expand or diversify farming operations to grow food for local markets. Some Nebraskan growers have already taken advantage of this opportunity.

Because a successful horticulture operation focused on a local market requires dramatically less land than in conventional farming, it is easier to acquire the capital needed to start an operation.

"Horticulture is currently the strongest growth market in U.S. agricultural production"

Keith Collins, Chief Economist, USDA, 2006

www.LMCALC.unl.edu