

Planning for a Northern Illinois Food Systems Network



Regional Economic Development Summit
for Northwest Illinois
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Planning for a Northern Illinois Food Systems Network

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by Northern Illinois University, Center for Governmental Studies
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Where Are We Now?

While Northern Illinois is rich in agriculture and is home to the largest consumer market in the Midwest, little of the food consumed in the region is grown in the region. This is an opportunity to grow the regional economy. How do we do it?



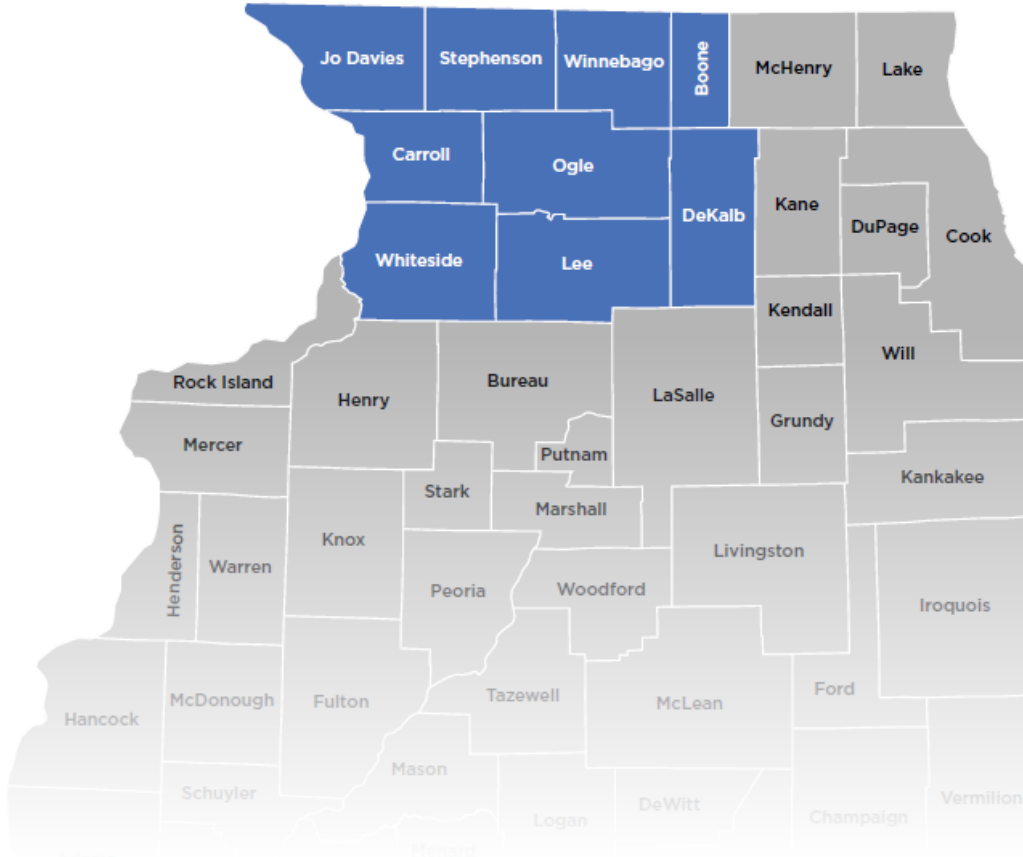
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What We Did



DeKalb County Community Gardens,
Chicago Region Food System Fund,
and Illinois Farm Bureau

9 NW Illinois Counties

Task Force, Surveys, Interviews,
Resources



What We Found



Over half of responding farmers are interested in expanding production



Insufficient production keeps farmers from supplying local restaurants and other food service providers



Few farmers use an intermediary to sell their product



Farmers need technical assistance with business aspects of farming, more land, and funding to grow



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But How?

Build on what
you have

Leadership

Funding



Next Steps



- Create smaller nodes of activity throughout the region to minimize cost and risk and ensure that local connections and roles are honored.
- There are many types of assistance available to farmers, but they need help accessing them, particularly in terms of time involved.
- Farmers markets in Chicagoland are a good place to build connections, but market managers, farmers, and buyers need educating to maximize benefits.
- Relationships are critical.
- Coordinate trucking.
- Community colleges are ready to help.
- Mentoring.



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What You Can Do

- Take charge yourself or reach out to those who can
- Meet to coordinate efforts
- Find the full report here:
<https://huskiecommons.lib.niu.edu/ctrgovernment-reports/35/>
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