

Local Food Leader Pilot Workshops Evaluation

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

Farm, Food and Enterprise Development

The Food Systems Team within the Farm, Food and Enterprise Development Program of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach conducted seven Local Food Leader (LFL) and ten Community Food Systems (CFS) workshops in 2018-2019. This project was funded through an Agriculture Marketing Center subcontract with additional support from community partners for meals and meeting space. These workshops included a total of 231 participants in LFL and 139 participants in CFS.

Food Systems Team

The Food Systems Team offers many programs assisting communities in their place-based food system development. This includes farm to school programming, one-on-one technical assistance, and the Community Food Systems Program, which assists in the design and development of local and regional food systems through research, certifications, and a facilitated community process.

Certifications

Each certification includes an in-person workshop followed by online modules for full certification. After completing the certification, participants have the option to attend a train-the-trainer workshop, which qualifies them to host workshops on their own.

Local Food Leader

The Local Food Leader certification is an individual skill development program for beginning local food practitioners and local food supporters. Local Food Leader teaches several foundational competencies critical to successful involvement in community food systems development. The goal of the certification is to increase capacity for local food practitioners working on food systems programs around the United States. This certification consists of a one-day workshop followed by four online modules.

Community Food Systems

The Community Food Systems certification is intended for intermediate levels of food system practitioners. It is a process-based certification that increases capacity for food system practitioners to work within community and develop food systems. This certification involves visioning techniques, research and community food systems assessments, and strategic development of projects. Participants will gain new skill sets for decision-making, facilitation, and team-building techniques, and will learn to bring projects from visioning to implementation for reaching systems-based goals. This certification consists of a two-day workshop followed by seven online modules.

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Local Food Leader

This report details the impact, successes, and challenges of the Local Food Leader pilot workshops hosted nationally for community food systems capacity development.

Learning objectives

- Understand global, local, and community food systems.
- Organize coalitions that work towards collective community goals and assist in the development of mission, vision, and core values.
- Manage and facilitate conversations effectively between dynamic groups of people.
- Bring an equity lens to food systems development.
- Understand community processes that include facilitation, project management, partnership, and building successful teams.
- Provide partners with tools and resources for developing various food systems sectors: production, transformation, distribution, consumption, and resource management (grants, best practices, research, etc.)
- Engage and empower community partners to work collectively towards a vibrant, healthy community food system that meets the needs of the participants and community members.
- Know about tools that exist to create food systems reports.
- Develop successful teams for successful project implementation.
- Construct plans of work, project scope, and budgets.
- Understand the use and types of logic models to create evaluation tools that showcase project outcomes.

Evolution of Workshops

At the beginning of certification development, partner organizations, or hosts, were identified to offer each workshop and publicize locally. Workshops were offered first in person, and participation in online modules were optional based on desire to receive full certification. Hosts supported by providing space for the workshop and confirming the location for in-person workshops, confirming the agenda, and providing place-based materials and presentations if desired.

Reflections and observations were shared between teachers after each workshop to improve program content. Initially, a pre-then-post evaluation was conducted; however, due to a low response rate for the pre-evaluation, this transitioned to a post-then-pre evaluation for participants to record both knowledge levels at the same time.

The pilot allowed for confirmation on the most effective schedule and agendas for workshops; confirming design of accessible documents (printed slide decks, page numbers, and section tabs); appropriate fees for program sustainability; levels of certification including train-the-trainer; online module content; and needed program materials, such as partnership agreements with hosts.

The agenda and activities for the workshop were adjusted based on feedback from participant evaluations. More group activities were added to each workshop section and sections of the agenda were moved to

allow the sections to build off each other. Additionally, the team realized more time was needed for deeper discussions in both the Working in Food Systems and Equity sections of the workshop. The Evaluation section was moved earlier on the agenda for a lunch evaluation activity. This allowed for participants to actively evaluate a topic rather than choosing a hypothetical project to evaluate on their own.

Evaluation

The following report details findings and feedback from the workshops over the course of these updates, including analysis of quantitative and qualitative results collected through paper surveys completed by participants anonymously on the day of the workshop. The survey consisted of sections on usefulness and statements of agreement. The quantitative results were collected by rank of one to five, from strongly disagree to strongly agree. These results are displayed as the aggregated total, representing the total number of respondents that selected a five (strongly agree) or a four (agree) for either the individual state or the combined average of all state results. The quantitative data were analyzed using Qualtrics and Microsoft Excel. The qualitative results were collected through open-ended questions and analyzed using NVivo. Common themes were identified based on responses to the following questions:

- What was the most helpful component of the workshop?
- What is one thing you will change in your work after participating in the workshop?

Findings shared in this report represent the most-discussed themes.

The Food Systems Team hosted seven LFL workshops in 2018-2019 with a total of 183 participants, and a 69% response rate for evaluations.

Table 1: LFL Participant counts by state.

States in chronological order	# of participants
Iowa	30
North Carolina	11
Texas	40
Alaska	24
Colorado	21
Pennsylvania	46
US Virgin Islands	11
Total	183

Local Food Leader Workshop Findings

Usefulness

The workshops consisted of six sections with the following objectives:

Working in Food Systems: understanding of potential collaborations; new awareness of ways food systems connects across asset areas; new understanding of what is happening locally.

Equity, A Foundation to our Work: new understanding of different perspectives; increasing ability to have inclusive conversations and be open-minded; identifying new activities to discuss challenging topics; developing ability to share and lift up others.

Leadership: understanding of personal values; identifying how values relate to leadership styles; understanding various qualities of leaders.

Evaluation: understand the difference between systems, project, and program evaluation; ability to develop an evaluation logic model.

Facilitation and Capacity-Building: identifying new facilitation strategies; increased confidence in facilitation techniques; understanding the difference between program management and facilitation.

Professional Development: identifying personal professional development needs and desires; understanding the importance of a professional development plan; understanding the different types of professional development.

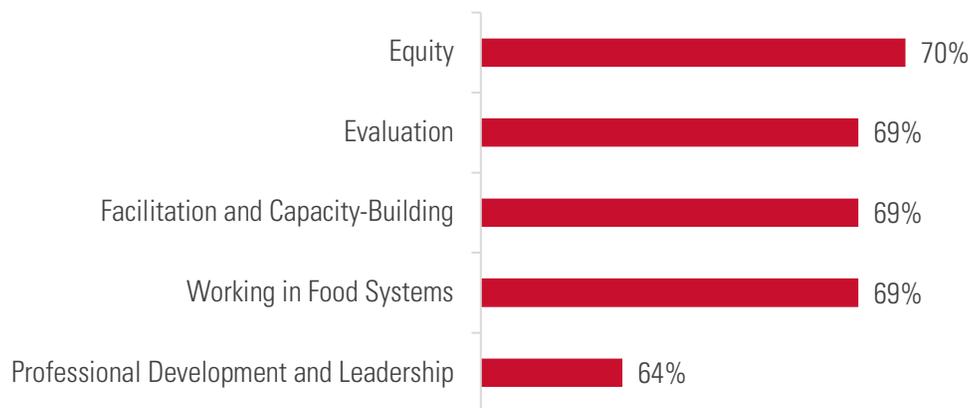


Figure 1: Overall usefulness.

Table 2: Usefulness by state.

	Total %
Iowa	
Equity	89%
Evaluation	65%
Facilitation and Capacity-Building	63%
North Carolina	
Evaluation	70%
Facilitation and Capacity-Building	70%
Equity	50%
Texas¹	
Facilitation and Capacity-Building	71%
Evaluation	58%
Equity	54%
Alaska	
Professional Development and Leadership	79%
Evaluation	79%
Facilitation and Capacity-Building	74%
Colorado	
Equity	83%
Working in Food Systems	77%
Evaluation	71%
Pennsylvania	
Working in Food Systems	93%
Professional Development and Leadership	71%
Evaluation	68%
US Virgin Islands	
Equity	88%
Working in Food Systems	88%
Facilitation and Capacity-Building	75%

The Local Food Leader workshop increases awareness, understanding, and confidence to work with individuals, organizations, and institutions to develop community food systems. This evaluation shows that equity and evaluation were consistently seen as the most useful sections of the LFL workshops. This is reflected in the overall findings for usefulness as well as the individual state findings, where four of the seven states rated both equity and evaluation in the top three sections (see Table 2). It's interesting to note that while facilitation and capacity-building was present in the top three ratings in five of the seven states and working in food systems only in three of the seven states, that both sections resulted in an aggregated total of 69%.

¹ Participant responses were fairly evenly distributed across strongly disagree to strongly agree (1 to 5). Therefore, these percentages appear relatively low in comparison to the other states' responses. This could be due to the fact that this workshop had high a participant count (40 participants) in comparison to most of the other states, excluding Pennsylvania, which had 46 participants.

Networking was the most common theme discussed in the open-ended section of the survey. Networking is a critical component of food systems work and is an underlying factor for successful projects. Many participants shared their appreciation of having multiple opportunities to connect with others both through workshop activities and built-in networking breaks. One participant stated, “networking connections through the food systems activity” was a useful component, while another respondent shared, “having feedback from others in the group-learning [settings]” was helpful. “Meeting a diverse group of leaders that can help drive this conversation further after today” was also shared.

Participants were able to learn about organizations, programs, and projects occurring in their community and region through networking breaks. “It was useful to have so many different voices and communities heard in the room . . . [and] hear perspectives and programs,” one participant shared. Another respondent discussed they felt it was beneficial to “learn from others in the group about what’s happening with our local and regional food system.” Some participants provided feedback that contained aspects of networking such as, “seeing beyond myself and in the institution where I work to connect with others who are actively working to improve the local food system.”

Other common skills that emerged included: “the food systems diagram” and “developing common language,” which provides context for working with partners and allowed participants to begin thinking about their role in the food system. Other participants described personal growth through understanding “self-work and working in food systems” as the most helpful pieces of the LFL workshop.

Statements of Agreement



Figure 2: Overall statements of agreement.

Table 3: Statements of agreement by state.

	Total %
Iowa	
I learned something new from the workshop	95%
I would recommend this workshop to others	95%
The workshop was helpful for my professional development goals	79%
North Carolina	
I learned something new from the workshop	90%
I would recommend this workshop to others	80%
The workshop was helpful for my professional development goals	70%
Texas	
I learned something new from the workshop	88%
I obtained new ideas for partnership development and community engagement	67%
I feel confident in my work with communities in regard to food systems development	57%
Alaska	
I feel confident in my work with communities in regard to food systems development	84%
I learned something new from the workshop	83%
The workshop was helpful for my professional development goals	83%
Colorado	
I learned something new from the workshop	94%
I have a better understanding of working in food systems	89%
I would recommend this workshop to others	82%
Pennsylvania	
I learned something new from the workshop	87%
I have a new understanding of engaging new partners in food systems development	83%
I have a better understanding of working in food systems	80%
US Virgin Islands	
I learned something new from the workshop	88%
I have new ideas of how to engage with new stakeholders	88%
I would recommend this workshop to others	88%

The LFL workshop teaches individual skills and use of tools and resources within the context of food systems. These results signify that, overall, participants learned various new skills, tools, and resources taught in the workshop. This finding is reflected both in the overall statements of agreement results, as well as the individual state results, where learning something new from the workshop was rated the highest in six of the seven states and found in the top three in all of the seven state results. It could also be inferred that participants felt this workshop was worth their time and helpful to their work, as most (75%) of participants responded that they would recommend this workshop to others. Food systems development, professional development, and community engagement were additional themes that emerged in the individual state results and these topics are also reflected in the open-ended sections of the survey.

Many participants responded that they hope to think more critically about the food system, understanding their complexity and the multitude of stakeholders that come into play. For example, one participant stated they hope to, "Consider much more carefully all parts of the food system network." Other participants described their plans to include local foods in their work and utilize the framework discussed in the

workshop to “pursue local food.” Likewise, continuing research on the food system and utilizing various skills taught in the workshop, such as facilitating food systems conversations and utilizing a strategic approach for partnership development.

The LFL workshop additionally teaches tools for professional development and evaluation. Many pilot participants shared that they will use the professional development plan worksheet and discuss their goals with their supervisor to strategize how they can further their work. Other ideas included using the food systems sector and assets networking poster within their organization as a method for “determining areas that need addressing,” and utilizing the personal values activity to further understand “work-life balance.” The evaluation section teaches use of logic models and ways to specify project outcomes and goals, while providing ways to measure successes and impacts. Participants shared that they will utilize the evaluation logic model in their work to enhance methods of measuring project and program success. Other participants also described how they will use new evaluation skills to address systems change, such as creating metrics for “increasing food security.”

Engaging various community members and organizations for partnerships was another common theme discussed in the open-ended sections of the survey. One participant explained their hope to “engage more in the community and understand how to better serve them,” as well as considering connection to a larger scale, such as having a “clear vision of broadening the food system conversation” or using an “equity lens for creating a shared vision and commitment.”

Participants additionally valued workshop content on food systems development, practices, and activities that they could incorporate into their individual work and organizations. Participants discussed various aspects relating to partnership development, tools, methods, and collaboration for engaging their community, stakeholders, and partners in food systems work.

Conclusion

Participants in the Local Food Leader pilot workshops, in general, felt that components of equity, evaluation, and food systems were beneficial to their work. This is reflected through both the individual state and overall findings for usefulness. Equity and evaluation were consistently seen by participants across all seven states as some of the most useful sections of the pilot workshops. However, the open-ended section of the survey, overwhelmingly showed participants valuing networking.

This evaluation shows that the pilot workshops successfully taught the LFL learning objectives, as exhibited in the statements of agreement. Most participants (89%) felt strongly that they learned something new from the workshop. Although this statement was rated the highest, a majority of participants agreed with each of the six statements. The lowest rating was agreement for having a new understanding of engaging new partners in food systems development (still 60%).

Next Steps

Continuing these pilot workshops, a third series of Community Food Systems workshops were hosted in national “hubs” (Iowa, Massachusetts, Nebraska, and Oregon) in the fall of 2019. The evaluation report for these workshops can be found at: <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/ffed/wp->

content/uploads/20200210_Final-CFS-Hubs-Evaluation-Report.pdf. This report provides further insights into the successes and impacts of the Community Food Systems Certification workshops.

The LFL workshop and full certification has been adapted to a virtual setting in response to the COVID-19 pandemic; this also addresses the need for online food systems education nationally. The virtual certification features a blended delivery method where participants attend virtual workshop sessions and complete the corresponding online modules, resulting in full certification. The first virtual cohort started in fall of 2020 and will complete in late winter of 2021. Virtual cohorts will be offered each spring and fall.