

THE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

Local government policies, programs, and decisions can significantly influence the strength and stability of local economies. Agriculture, once a leading component of the Lake County economy, has been impacted by urban growth and development so that the future of conventional, commodity crop production here is in doubt. But as the amount of agricultural land and size of farms in Lake County shrink, the number of smaller farming operations is on the rise.

This trend parallels national and regional trends toward local food production, driven in part by the growing number of restaurants and chefs who pride themselves on using fresh, locally grown ingredients. This is a competitive advantage for these restaurants, and it has helped create market demand for food that is grown and processed here by our own neighbors, which generates and circulates money within our state rather than sending it elsewhere. Supporting a local food system is also good for the environment, helps improve nutrition, and provides fresh, high-quality food to residents.

Local farmers who produce food are important to our communities' economy, vitality, and culture. Local governments can help create good jobs by supporting local food systems and ensuring that the facilities, policies, and programs meet these systems' needs.

A local food system is an economic network in which food production, processing, marketing, distribution, consumption, and waste / resource recovery (composting) are tied to a geographic region such as Lake County or northeastern Illinois. The most visible parts of a local food system are the farmers' fields and the presence of farmers' markets and locally sourced products at retail outlets, but many more elements are important for a well-functioning system.

Lake County's current agriculture and food system faces a number of challenges. Commodity crop production typically requires large acreages and expensive inputs and equipment, presenting barriers to entry for most people interested in farming. Because over 90 percent of food consumed in Illinois is produced elsewhere, our food purchases support jobs and economies where the food is produced and processed remotely rather than in Illinois, where much of our food demand could be met. Without the use of sustainable farming practices, conventional agricultural operations can also affect soil health and environmental resources.

Definitions for "local" or "regional" food production vary, but a radius of 100 or 250 miles, respectively, is common.



Impacts of the Conventional Food System

- Commodity crop production can require expensive inputs and equipment, creating barriers to entry for many people interested in farming.
- Large acreages are often necessary to generate enough volume for farmer financial viability.
- Without the use of sustainable farming practices, operations can degrade soil health, cause the loss of topsoil, and pollute water, air, and land.
- Food purchases from the conventional system send billions of dollars annually out of the county and state.
- Municipal solid waste — *nearly 50 percent of transported food is lost to spoilage* — and food packaging material waste.
- Importing food can demand more transportation energy, increase the cost of food, and create emissions associated with shipping — *fruits and vegetables shipped from distant farms can spend 7-14 days in transit.*

Public Sector and Market Trends

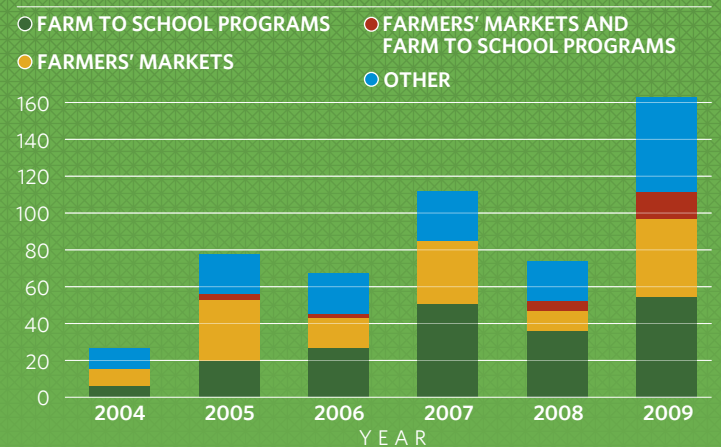
Across the region and the nation, the public and private sectors are moving toward locally and sustainably produced food, particularly as it relates to the market and economic potential of local food production and sales. Public policies and regulations that support local food systems include the Federal Farm Bill, the National School Lunch Act, the Illinois Food, Farms, and Jobs Act, and many others intended to preserve agricultural land and activity within our state and region and improve access to healthy, locally produced food.

Market research and industry surveys consistently find an increasing trend in demand and local economic potential of a local food system. From farmers' markets to national supermarkets (including Wal-Mart, Safeway, and Meijer), and from local restaurants to national franchises, offering locally and sustainably produced food is seen as a competitive advantage. The significant growth in the number of farmers' markets, Community Supported Agriculture networks, and the use of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits (formerly known as food stamps) at farmers markets is further evidence that the market is responding to consumer demand for locally-sourced products.

Survey and Market Research

- **Local sourcing** (meats, seafood, and produce) is the top menu trend of 2012.
- **89 percent** of fine-dining, **63 percent** of casual dining, **56 percent** of family restaurants, **45 percent** of fast-casual chains, and **28 percent** of quick-service restaurants serve locally sourced items.
- **90 percent** of chefs believe demand for locally sourced items will grow.
- **70 percent** of adults are more likely to visit restaurants with locally produced food.
- **90 percent** of chefs promoted locally grown food on their menus or advertising.
- **73 percent** of Americans want to know if food is produced locally or regionally.
- **One out of six** Americans will go out of their way to buy local products.
- **31 percent** of consumers purchase local fruits, vegetables once per week or more.
- Survey of 14 potential Illinois buyers (institutional, grocery stores, and wholesale) found they would spend over **\$23 million** on local food if available.
- Rick Bayless, founder of the Frontera food empire, sources **90 percent** local ingredients in summer and **45 percent** in winter.

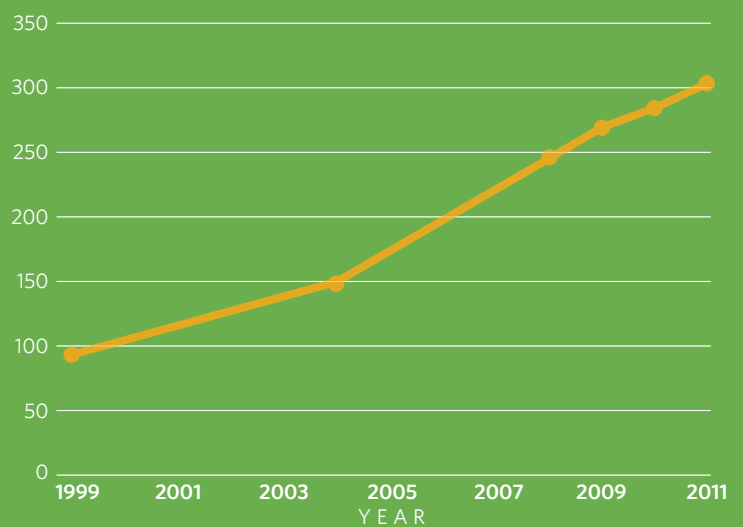
Number of state legislative bills focusing on local foods, 2004-09



Source: National Conference of State Legislatures, Healthy Community Design and Access to Healthy Food Database 2010.

Legislative action related to local food has increased steadily since 2004.

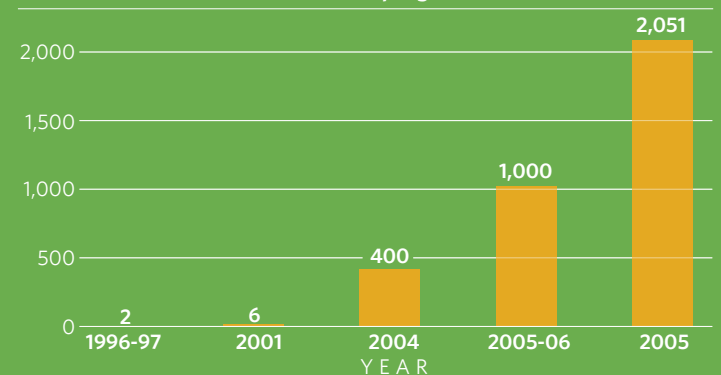
Number of farmers markets in Illinois



Source: Illinois Department of Agriculture.

Illinois ranks fourth nationally in number of farmers' markets.

Growth in number of farm to school programs



Source: National Farm to School Network.

The Farm to School Program has seen a steeply rising trend since 2001, with a number of programs active in the Chicago metropolitan region.

The Economic Potential of Local Food

In the Chicago metropolitan region, and Lake County specifically, the acreage of land in farms and the size of farms are decreasing. Lake County lost 18,000 acres (34 percent) of agricultural land between 1997 and 2007. The number of farms and the value of direct-to-consumer agricultural products, however, are increasing. Lake County farm operations are trending away from cash grain and livestock and toward vegetable and nursery operations on smaller farms, generating \$21.6 million of the \$36 million local agricultural economy in 1997.

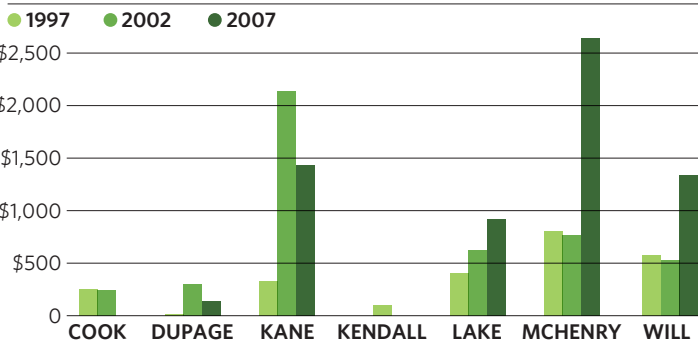
National figures indicate that the economic potential for direct-to-consumer sales is growing: Marketing figures rose from \$551 million in 1997 to \$1.2 billion in 2007, and sales of vegetable and melon products increased 69 percent from \$198 million in 2001 to \$335 million in 2002. Studies further show that farm income and per acre net revenue for fresh market vegetables surpass that for commodity crops by 5 to 50 times. Labor income and jobs follow a similar trend: fruit and vegetable production has the potential to generate three to seven times more jobs and farm income than corn and soybean production.



Most Illinois food purchase dollars leave the state.

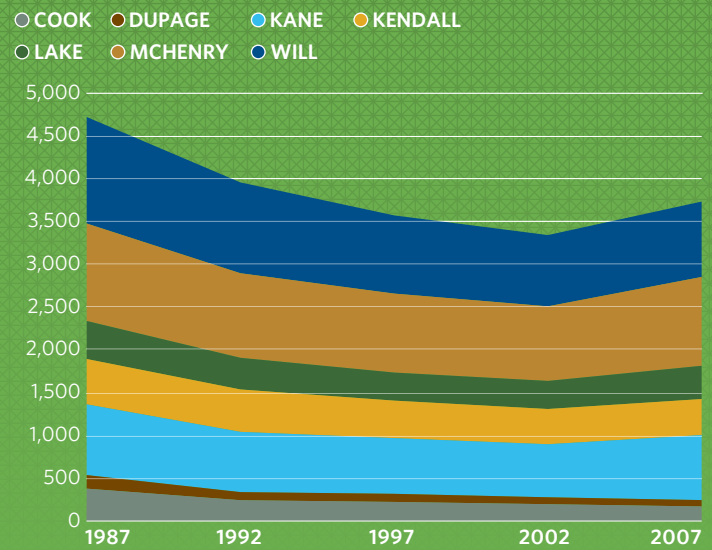
In Illinois, an estimated \$46 billion (96 percent) of annual food expenditures, \$14 billion of which consists of fruits and vegetables, is spent on imported food. A significant portion of this demand could be produced in the state and region, yielding an estimated \$2.5 billion in economic activity in the region and \$10 billion in the state. And because money spent on locally grown food creates a multiplier effect, internally circulating dollars 1.4 to 2.6 times within the local economy, \$10 billion in unmet local demand could accrue to \$14 to 29 billion in increased economic activity within Illinois. The Chicago metropolitan region and surrounding counties are well-positioned to meet the demand for local food because the majority of the direct-to-consumer supply comes from metropolitan and collar counties, where farms across the nation earned \$1.1 billion from direct sales in 2007. By supporting and strengthening the local food system, Lake County is poised to tap into this economic potential.

Market value of agricultural products sold directly to individuals for human consumption, in thousands of dollars



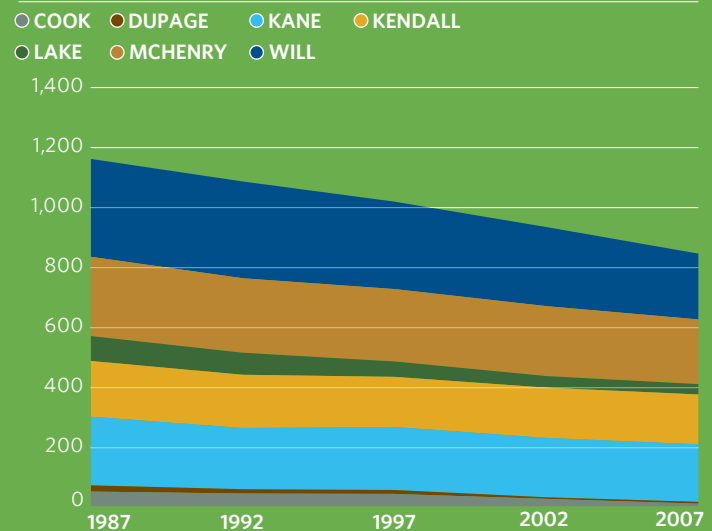
Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Services, Census of Agriculture 1997, 2002, 2007.

Number of farms in northeastern Illinois, by county, 1987-2007



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Services, Census of Agriculture, County Profile, 1987, 1992, 1997, 2002, 2007.

Farmland in northeastern Illinois, in thousands of acres



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Services, Census of Agriculture, County Profile, 1987, 1992, 1997, 2002, 2007.

The number of farms in the region is increasing, while the size of farms is decreasing.

Local Government Support for Local Food Systems

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) elevated Local Food to one of twelve regional priorities in its GO TO 2040 comprehensive regional plan. Lake County policies also support the creation of a local food system and economy. Challenges remain, however, and there is a significant role for counties and other local governments to provide support by addressing regulations, land access, facilities, coordination, and supportive market conditions. Potential local government responses include:

- **Provide access to land, facilities, and infrastructure** to give the local food system a chance to become established. This can include entering into farming leases for food production on public land; supporting the development of facilities for storage, processing and packing through financing or donating county resources; and supporting business incubation centers or clusters of mutually beneficial activity.
- **Adopt or modify policies and standards** to encourage local food uses and operations and to reduce the cost and uncertainty of projects. This can include expedited permitting, supportive zoning, land use, and public health regulations, and financing tools such as guarantees, revolving loans, and tax rebates.
- **Encourage the market, innovation, business, and entrepreneurs** by adopting local food procurement targets; supporting workforce development efforts; linking hunger assistance programs to local food producers; and including local food system in economic development plans.
- **Support a forum (such as a food policy council) to discuss and address local food system issues.** Such a forum or council can serve to coordinate policy initiatives, research, education, programs, and events; support governments and business; and connect stakeholders, buyers, and sellers.

Lake County is well-positioned to take advantage of the metropolitan market and demand for locally produced agricultural products. By supporting the creation of a Lake County food policy council, participating in discussions about related market, policy, and regulatory issues, and allowing staff to participate in the council, the County can take the first significant step in the region towards capitalizing on the economic, environmental, and other benefits associated with a local food system. Beyond such political support, the County can dedicate additional in-kind resources (meeting space, a webpage, publicity, and other low-cost investments) to support this growing movement.

This brochure is a product of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning Local Technical Assistance (LTA) program. The LTA program is working to strengthen the local food system in Lake County in partnership with Conserve Lake County, Lake County Forest Preserves, the College of Lake County, Libertyville Township, The Farm Business Development Center, and Openlands. For a project description, a list of resources used in this brochure, and a link to the regional comprehensive plan chapter on local food, visit www.cmap.illinois.gov/lake-county.

Lake County Regional Framework Plan Policies

Goal 4.8: Preserve select remaining farmland.

- **Policy 4.8.1:** Promote new and expanded farming activities...that provide fruits and vegetables...and other agricultural products directly to consumers.
- **Policy 4.8.3:** Analyze the impacts of County regulations on farming operations ... to identify County regulations that make it difficult to start, expand, or continue agriculture operations.
- **Policy 4.8.4:** Establish partnerships to protect farmers who want to keep farming but need financial incentives.
- **Policy 4.8.5:** Help retain the farming, open space, and scenic vistas for future generations.

Knox County, Illinois, Creates Local Food Council

In 2010 the Knox County Board officially established a local food council to strengthen and develop local food networks. The decision is intended to take advantage of the Illinois Food, Farms, and Jobs Act goal of 20 percent local food procurement by state agencies by 2020, creating hundreds of sustainable jobs in the county. There is potential to connect locally produced food to local businesses such as a food wholesaler supplying food to Walmart, Caterpillar, John Deere, and Western Illinois University. The Council hopes to establish a consolidator to connect local growers to markets by taking the burden off individual farmers to find buyers. The council is also considering a workforce training and business incubator facility, processing facility, and ways to extend the growing season through hydroponics and greenhouses.

Public-Private Partnerships help Facilitate the Emerging Local Food Economy

- Baltimore County, Maryland, developed an agricultural resource and education center to support sustainable agricultural industry and demonstrate activities and operations. Numerous public, private, and non-profit organizations use the center facilities and resources.
- The Countryside Initiative is rehabilitating 20 Cuyahoga Valley farms. The Cuyahoga Valley National Park retains land ownership over land leased to farmers for up to 60 years, while the Countryside Conservancy provides sustainable farming technical assistance to lessees.
- San Diego County leases agricultural land to experienced agricultural producers or organic farmers with a strong financial position.