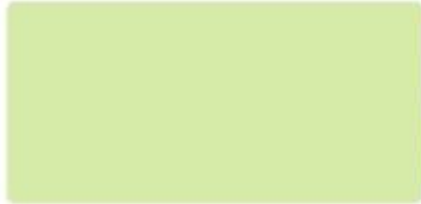
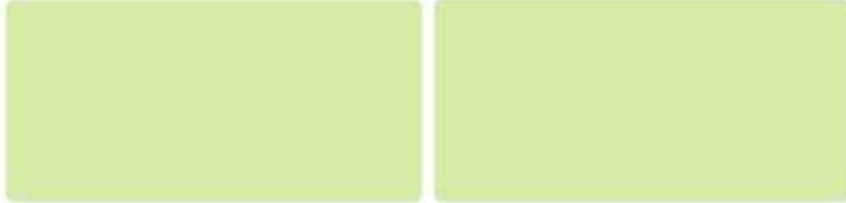


Local Foods, Local Places

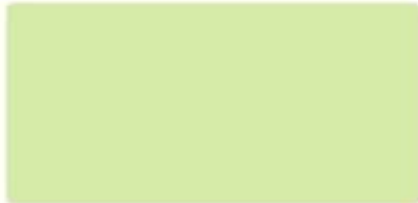
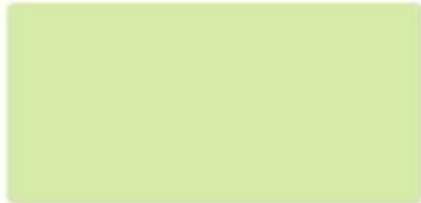
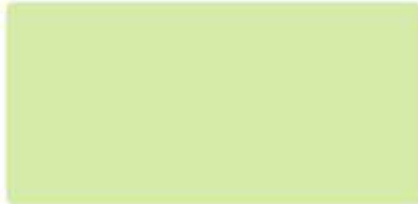
Technical Assistance Program



Strengthening the
Local Foods System:
Actions and Strategies
for the City of Idabel,
Oklahoma



October 7, 2015



Community Story

Idabel is a small city of about 7,000 people in McCurtain County, Oklahoma near the state borders of Texas and Arkansas in the Red River Valley. The city has a compact and walkable downtown area with a public event plaza, band shell, and farmers market pavilion.



Idabel's downtown is a mixture of local businesses and vacant buildings in need of revitalization and reuse. There are great public spaces already available that will be useful in helping draw more people downtown.

Though there are many key pieces in place for an active downtown and thriving local food economy, there are economic and health issues in Idabel and McCurtain County. Idabel is located in the Choctaw Nation Promise Zone, one of five locations nationally designated by President Barack Obama as places for a new anti-poverty program to provide resources to improve conditions in high poverty communities. McCurtain County is consistently in the bottom three counties in Oklahoma for household incomes. McCurtain County's 2014 Median Household Income was \$30,712, while Idabel's was even lower at \$23,992. Public health indicators also highlight some additional challenges with over 37 percent of adults in McCurtain County as obese, 9 percent with Diabetes, and 82 percent of adults eat fewer than the recommended five servings of vegetables or fruit per day.

Tyson's Chicken is the main employer in the region, with about 1,200 employees. Many of the local farms grow corn that is sold to Tyson's to feed the chickens. While agriculture is a key industry to the region's economy, most of the farming is related to livestock production. Figure 1 shows that only 12 of McCurtain County's 1,577 farms grow vegetables. While the county generates more than \$163 million in agricultural sales, only about \$193,000 of this amount is through direct-to-consumer channels such as farmers markets, roadside stands, or community supported agriculture programs. This figure seems especially small considering that Idabel's residents spend about \$14 million per year on food.

Figure 1 - Agricultural Statistics for McCurtain County, Oklahoma

U.S. Agriculture Census Figure	2007	2012
Total Farms	1,796	1,577
Vegetable Farms	23	12
Fruit, Tree Nut, and Berry Farms	32	39
Livestock, Poultry, and their Products Farms	1,255	1,066
Total Agricultural Sales	\$186 million	\$163 million
Agricultural Sales Direct to Consumers	\$182,000	\$193,000

Source: USDA Census of Agriculture (2012)

To address these issues, the Idabel Industrial Development Authority, the City of Idabel, Oklahoma State University Extension Office, the McCurtain County School District, the Idabel Chamber of Commerce, and Idabel Main Street are working on a number of initiatives to expand the local food system and including expanding and growing the existing farmers market, building a certified kitchen, and including youth and seniors in the local food system.

The farmer’s market pavilion is used by three or four local farmers on a regular basis, typically on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings. They usually sell out quickly, leaving people who are unable to make it to the morning market without a chance to purchase from the local farmers. Some of the opportunities highlighted by local community members to strengthen the market include increasing the number of producers at the market and rethinking the operating hours to align with a broader customer base and stimulate additional downtown activity that will encourage people to visit downtown and shop in the surrounding stores and restaurants.



The farmers market pavilion is situated in a prime location in downtown across from the public event plaza and bandshell, and the Main Street Bakery & Café.

The Idabel Industrial Development Authority, in partnership with USDA RD, is looking into purchasing the building directly adjacent to the market pavilion. The idea for the building is to use it as a certified kitchen that can be used by local value-added producers to make jams, salsas, bake bread, and any other number of products that require the use of a certified kitchen.

In 2014, the Idabel Industrial Development Authority requested assistance through the Local Foods, Local Places program to develop an action plan for achieving its vision. The program is supported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Appalachian Regional Commission, and the Delta Regional Authority (DRA). These agencies worked with the community to develop the following action plan. Implementing the actions described later in this plan can bring several benefits to the community including:

- Better access to healthy local food, especially among disadvantaged groups.
- A revitalized downtown that is the economic anchor of the community.
- More economic opportunities for local farmers and businesses.

Engagement

The City of Idabel hosted a small team of federal agency staff and consultants for a two-day workshop on April 10-11, 2015. The workshop also included a tour of Idabel and a series of visioning, brainstorming, and action planning discussions among a diverse group of citizens and local, state, and federal stakeholders. These discussions helped workshop participants identify community values that underlie the action plan for their local food system initiatives, including growing the farmers market, improving connections between the youth and seniors, including schools in the local food system, and purchasing the building next to the farmers market for value-added products. These sessions also clarified how local foods can help make Idabel a stronger, healthier, and more economically sound community.



The two-day event kicked off with a public workshop with over 25 local farmers, business owners, and residents in attendance.

Participants identified obstacles to and solutions for expanding access to local foods and created an action plan that is described herein.

Among those in attendance were representatives from the City of Idabel, Oklahoma State University Extension Office, Idabel Main Street, School Board Superintendent, Idabel Chamber of Commerce, Choctaw Nation, USDA RD, Oklahoma Community and Home Education, local farmers, local business owners, and local teachers. While the two-day workshop is the key event that contributed to this action plan, it was preceded by several conference calls, background research, and case study development. Figure 2 lays out the steps leading to this action plan.



Participants in the first evening meeting were treated to some local foods.

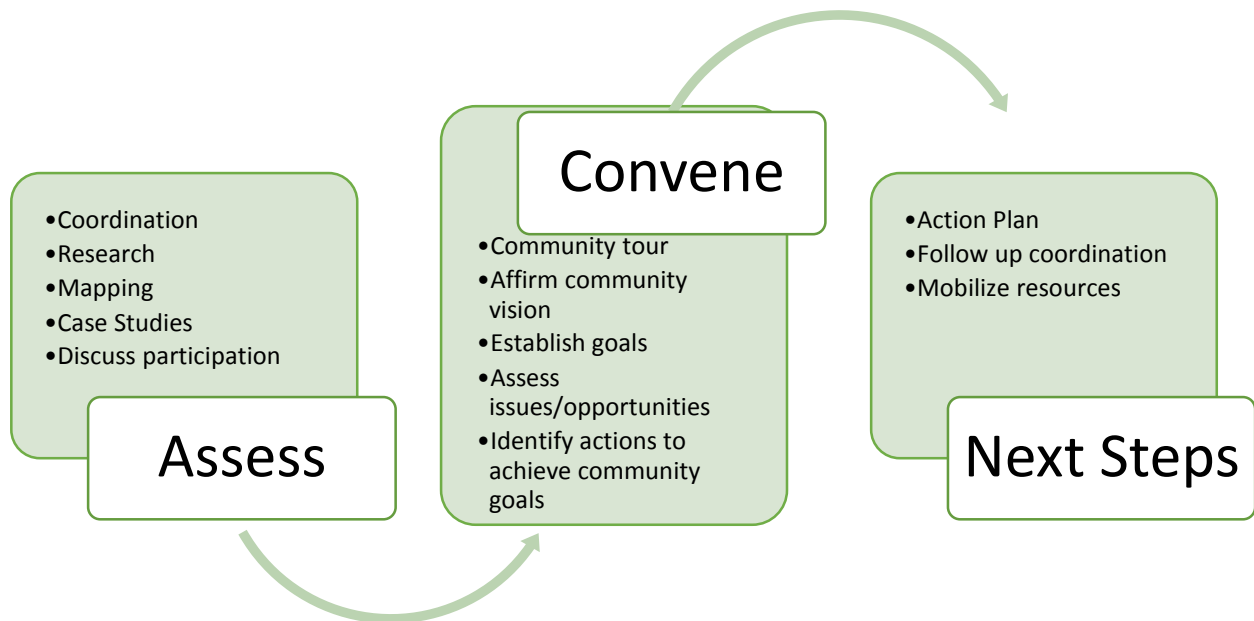


Figure 2 - Technical Assistance Process Diagram

Vision

Idabel’s placemaking and local foods vision centers on expanding the existing food-based initiatives and downtown initiatives to create greater access to fresh local foods, provided added income and strengthen the business opportunities for small local farmers, and spark additional entrepreneurial food based business opportunities. They envision a downtown farmers market with consistent hours and produce

supply that draws people from all over town and region. The improved farmers market will be coordinated with events in the public plaza and band shell that attract more people to the walkable downtown and foster community. The future certified kitchen will provide a space for existing home-based gardeners that create value added products to prepare those for sale at the farmers market and in local retail outlets. The certified kitchen space can also serve as a location for knowledge exchange between the youth, lower income populations and older residents on how to make value-added products, grow their own foods and prepare foods. The space could also be a hub for additional health and nutrition educational initiatives.

The workshop facilitators led several exercises and discussions during the two days to tease out more of this vision, refine the goals, and identify steps to take to achieve those goals. One exercise on the first evening involved participants writing down on a notecard a newspaper headline that described a positive story 15 years in the future about Idabel. Below were some of the responses:



The site of the future certified kitchen, located directly next to the farmers market pavilion.

- Idabel Recognized as State’s #1 Small Town
- McCurtain County Breaks Ground on Regional Food Hub, Largest in Central US
- McCurtain County is the Healthiest County in Oklahoma
- McCurtain County is the Specialty Wine Leader of Oklahoma
- Visitors from 7 States Represented at Saturday Farmers Market in Downtown Idabel
- Sales Reach All Time High in March for Local Farmers Market
- 10,000,000 Pounds of Fresh Produce Coming Out of McCurtain County
- Obesity Drops 50% in McCurtain County
- Farmers Market has Contributed to a Healthier Population in McCurtain County
- City to Expand Farmers Market to Include a Community Garden
- Idabel the New Destination for Texans!
- Idabel has Gone Back to Providing the Majority of its Food and to Being More Conservative Development a Better Quality of Life
- New Businesses Crowd to Downtown Idabel
- Farmers Market Open 4 Saturdays a Month
- Fresh Produce Proven to be Good for You in Idabel
- Cannery Supplies Food Outside of Idabel

Strengths, Challenges, and Opportunities

The Idabel community stakeholders have a clear, achievable vision, but there are several hurdles to overcome in realizing this vision over time. One activity of the workshop entailed a discussion of the challenges and opportunities Idabel faces in expanding the farmers market and achieving its other local food system and downtown placemaking goals. The strengths, challenges, and opportunities identified during this activity are described below.

Strengths

- There are already well-established partnerships in place
- The physical spaces are in place (farmers market pavilion, public plaza, band shell, walkable downtown)
- Community has many talented people willing to share their knowledge with the younger generation

Challenges

- There is perception that healthy food is more expensive
- Some people are set in their ways and not willing to change
- Educational programs on food and nutrition exist but there is a lack of knowledge of them
- There is a need for more producers and additional training and resources (hoop houses, value-added)
- Provide more structure to the farmers market to ensure regular participation by vendors
- Define “local” for the farmers market and entice more growers to come – in turn this will create more demand
- Need to advertise and market to attract more growers
- Linking up the initiatives at the school, 4H, FFA and OCHE will be critical to engage youth and elderly
- More outreach to lower income communities is needed; understanding opportunities for accepting WIC and SNAP benefits is needed
- Need to work with main street retailers to explore expanding hours and other efforts to attract people downtown
- Organizational structure – agreements between growers; Team and collaborative structure needed

Opportunities

- Increase the supply at the farmers market
 - Grow at local schools
 - Extend the growing season by using hoop houses
 - Look into options of aquaponics or hydroponics
 - Consider selling crafts
 - Ornamental plants
 - Include growers from around the region and update market stipulations as such
 - Create a Farmers Market Board representing all interests
- Allow use of WIC/SNAP to draw Choctaw buyers
- Engage local schools – they are energized local partners seeking to advance local foods
- Provide educational opportunities (Oklahoma Home & Community Education, workshops, classes)
 - Consumer education at the market (what produce to expect at certain times of the year, recipes for produce, cooking at the market, providing recipes)



One of the opportunities for expanding the farmers market is to update the market rules and regulations.

- Extend the life of locally grown produce
 - Certified kitchen to create value added products
 - Facilities and equipment to create dried, frozen, canned foods
- Bring business downtown
 - Consider holding market one week night per month, with extended store hours for the downtown stores
 - Advertise the market
 - Coordinate market times with events occurring downtown i.e. layering of events
 - Hold food-based events, such as a salsa making contests

This discussion helped in further defining the goals for Idabel’s local food system and the specific actions needed to achieve those goals. The goals are shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Goals for Advancing the Idabel

Workshop participants also identified some action steps for achieving each goal. Additional actions have been added by the workshop facilitators to supplement the actions needed to achieve these goals. The goals and corresponding actions are outlined in the Action Plan section.

Action Plan

Though the workshop focused in on expanding the farmers market and determining needed actions to move forward, actions related to the broader local foods, placemaking and community health goals were also discussed and are documented in this action plan. Workshop participants identified several action steps for achieving each goal. The goals and corresponding actions are outlined in this section. The goals and action items are presented in Appendix A in their complete form, which includes a time frame, lead role, supporting cast, cost, funding sources, and near-term steps.

Goal 1: Grow farmer’s market with new producers, more predictable supply, and with an extended season

- **Action 1.1** Develop a list of growers in the region and contact them to schedule a meeting about the market
- **Action 1.2** Establish Farmers Market Board or governing structure for the market
- **Action 1.3** Set rules and regulations and have City Council approve and adopt
- **Action 1.4** Extend operation hours of market
- **Action 1.5** Find out who wants to build hoop houses and build them
- **Action 1.6** Get signs and banners made to advertise the market
- **Action 1.7** Establish marketing strategy with Facebook, newspapers, and swap shop
- **Action 1.8** Determine purchasing options (SNAP, WIC) and what needs to be done to implement them
- **Action 1.9** Recruit non-produce vendors, such as artists, crafts, woodwork
- **Action 1.10** Determine options for selling prepared foods
- **Action 1.11** Hold events downtown during market hours (school chorus, read-in, school art)

Goal 2: Connect youth and seniors

- **Action 2.1** Have demonstrations/workshops with local producers to teach students
- **Action 2.2** Coordinate mentorship or apprenticeship programs between youth and elders
- **Action 2.3** Hold farm or canning facility tours for students
- **Action 2.4** Have youth deliver locally grown foods to senior centers

Goal 3: Certified kitchen in building next to farmers market.

- **Action 3.1** Buy building next to the farmers market downtown
- **Action 3.2** Tour certified kitchen to determine what all is needed to become operational
- **Action 3.3** Establish agreement between IIDA and OHCE to run incubator kitchen
- **Action 3.4** Establish Board and operating rules
- **Action 3.5** Identify users for the facilities by working with the Farmers Market Board to determine interest
- **Action 3.6** Develop program for facility (education, certify kitchen)
- **Action 3.7** Reach out to local hospital and health department as potential partners in programming the facility

Goal 4: Include schools in local foods programs

- **Action 4.1** FFA/Schools meet with local organizations & agencies to see where FFA programs can help
- **Action 4.2** Have students work at market (manning tables, setting up/taking down, clean up)
- **Action 4.3** Sell school grown foods and school made crafts at the market
- **Action 4.4** Farm to school program at the four local schools

Funding

The following represents some other specific projects and corresponding livability principles for which additional grants, loans, or other funding could apply.

Key Actions for Additional Funding and Support

- Funding to build hoop houses for extending growing season.
- Funding to advertise the market and developing marketing strategy
- Funding to research offering SNAP/WIC payment options
- Funding for mentorship program for students
- Funding to purchase building next to farmers market
- Funding to program certified kitchen, establish rules

Selected Livability Principles Advanced by Action Plan

Provide more Transportation Choices

Several of the action steps relate to supporting growth of business and activity in downtown. The downtown business district is already very walkable, but additional business growth and a robust farmers market would also potentially encourage more people from the surrounding residential neighborhoods to walk or bike to downtown.

Enhance Economic Competitiveness

Expanding the farmers market so that it attracts people from all over the region and out of state will positively affect the local economy. Strengthening the local demand for local foods can help foster growth of small farmers. Bringing more people downtown will provide an economic boost to local main street businesses. Providing a certified kitchen will help small business owners with jumpstarting their businesses when they would not have been able to without the kitchen.

Support Existing Communities

Much of the conversation centered on the fact that there are many talented people and available resources in Idabel, they just need to be tapped into and organized. Additionally, teaching Idabel youth about farming practices, canning, and other local food initiatives will help continue the traditions in the community. All of these initiatives also center on creating more economic opportunities and quality of life improvements to make Idabel a great place to live which in turn may help attract and retain entrepreneurs, college educated youth and retirees.

Coordinate and Leverage Federal Policies and Investment

The workshop efforts identified several opportunities to build on investments already made and leverage different local, state and federal funding sources to support the farmers market and other local revitalization and livability efforts.

Value Communities and Neighborhoods

The farmers market and certified kitchen will serve as a community gathering place that will help strengthen the vibrancy of the existing downtown area, improving the attractiveness and livability of the surrounding neighborhood by providing access to healthy, local foods.

Appendices

- Appendix A – Action Plan Details
- Appendix B – Local Food System Diagram
- Appendix C – Key Health and Agriculture Data

Local Foods, Local Places Action Plan – Idabel, Oklahoma

- Appendix D – Workshop Participants
- Appendix E – Funding Resources
- Appendix F – Resources
- Appendix G – Presentation Slides
- Appendix H – Reference Materials