

2015 Johnson County Food Policy Council Recommendations

Approved May 18, 2015

Background

The Johnson County Food Policy Council (JCFPC) is charged by the Johnson County Board of Supervisors (BOS) to provide the Supervisor's policy recommendations that aim to strengthen our community food system.

The Council's recommendations serve to provide specific actions the Board of Supervisors can take to strengthen our community food system by increasing resources to citizens, taking action to create a stronger market for food grown in Johnson County and by publicly supporting small-scale farmers in Johnson County.

1. Johnson County Poor Farm

The Johnson County Food Policy Council recommends that the Board Of Supervisors work with community stakeholders to adopt an overall comprehensive plan for the use of the County Poor Farm property. The feedback from the public forum hosted by the JCFPC on February 7, 2015 should be taken into consideration. More information is available in the summary document submitted to the BOS and to all attendees.

Past recommendations of the Johnson County Food Policy Council have called for the Board of Supervisors to find solutions to the unique challenges met by small farmers in Johnson County including the high cost of farmland and the need for housing on-site for farmers, families & workers. In addition, the JCFPC has called for the BOS to find ways to support public gatherings on farms, agritourism and access to land for beginning farmers. We believe the comprehensive plan for the County Poor Farm could include solutions for most, if not all, of these issues for small farmers in Johnson County.

In addition, the JCFPC recommends that the Board Of Supervisors continue issuing the Request for Proposals (RFP) to farmers and organizations to grow food at the Johnson County Poor Farm on a yearly basis.

2. Definition of a Farm

We advise the BOS to support Planning & Zoning in moving forward with changing the current definition of a farm to exclude a minimum acreage size.

We also encourage the BOS to support the creation of criteria and an ordinance for exemptions on accessory buildings for farmers with any size acreage.

3. Soil & Water Conservation

The BOS should show their commitment to soil and water conservation by:

- Ensuring that any farm leases for the County Poor Farm (and any county-owned farmland procured in the future) include language requiring the

highest level of conservation practices for row crop systems. Some of these could include cover crops, contour and riparian buffers, setting aside less productive ground into federal conservation programs and extended crop rotations.

- Commissioning a soil test at the County Poor Farm to establish a data set on the following metrics: macronutrients, micro/trace nutrients, pH, organic matter, cation exchange capacity and toxicities.

4. Johnson County as a Resource

The BOS can create opportunities for farmers by gathering and providing specific information to the public that showcases its support for local food and local farmers. For instance, the county can provide information on the Johnson County website containing the following:

- A list of opportunities for farmers or community gardeners to grow food on county-owned land;
- A virtual bulletin board for county residents to offer yard space to growers
- Information regarding existing resources, particularly regarding land stewardship, local food production and sustainability for new, current, and future farmers and landowners.

In addition, the county should compile a list of properties available for sale in Johnson County on A or AR zoned land that is less than 40 acres with a residence to reference when needed.

5. Meat Processing

The BOS should adopt policies that allow local farmers to process meat and poultry on a small-scale on the farm as allowed by state and federal laws. Specifically, allow farmers on A & AR zoned land to process 1000 poultry and/ or 30 or less livestock per year, following all state and federal laws, by right. In addition, adopt a policy that allows for mobile processing units that follow all state and federal laws to operate in Johnson County.

6. Land-Use Plan

In order to demonstrate that local food production in Johnson County is a priority, the BOS should appoint a small-scale farmer in Johnson County and a member of the Food Policy Council to the Land Use Plan update committee.

7. Local Food Label

With the support of the BOS, the JCFPC has partnered with Iowa City Area Development (ICAD), Iowa Valley Resources Conservation & Development (IVRC&D) and Field to Family to work with the Tippie School of Management at the University of Iowa to complete market studies on the prospect of a county grown and/or made food label. The BOS can show their support for this project by appointing a staff person and/or a member of the BOS to serve as an active committee member, host committee meetings when needed and provide administrative support.