

Agriculture Focus Group Notes



Farmland Consolidation & Preservation

Questions

- a. What development pressures exist in Jasper County?
- b. What current agricultural business development is taking place?
- c. What are the agricultural needs of Jasper County
- d. What are the agricultural resources of the county
- e. What are the county level programs that encourage small scale and new farmers

Areas of concern

- a. Barriers for beginning farmers
- b. Narrative for preserving farmers autonomy
- c. Protecting farms; specific farms threatened by village development
- d. Narrative of succession planning resources available in the county

Strategies proposed

- a. Land use planning
 - i. No one size fits all plans, more targeted approach
 - ii. Economic development zones
 1. Targeting specific areas for development outside of prime agricultural land
 - iii. Agricultural Business zones/Farmland Preservation
 1. Farmland and farms are protected
 2. Regulations at the county level to protect farmers autonomy
 - iv. Transition zones
 1. Areas of agriculture that can be slowly transitioned to development over 15-20 years.

- b. Communication about county, state and national programs for beginning farmers
- c. More access to closer markets, specifically grain.

Young & Beginning Farmers

Questions

- a. How to start a farm from scratch
- b. What resources are currently available to beginning farmers
- c. What education is being done about available markets
- d. Watershed associations in Jasper County
- e. Is technology currently accessible to beginning farmers

Areas of concern

- a. Many people want to farm but there isn't a clear direction on how to start
- b. Financially how to young people make it
- c. Loan payback
- d. Protection needed to stop land consolidation
- e. Protection needed to limit land bought as investment
- f. What support exists to participate in specialty markets
- g. Networks needed for farmers to support each other
 - i. Education
 - ii. Communication
- h. Affordable technology
- i. Cultural stigma

Strategies proposed

- a. Larger farms split into smaller parcels
- b. Relocating farms to the county, making the county attractive to beginning farmers
- c. Identify strategies that can be used to reach potential new markets
 - i. Farmers markets
 - ii. Small grains
 - iii. CSAs
 - iv. Direct to consumer meat
- d. Shared equipment sets
- e. Shared infrastructure
- f. County regulations to support markets
- g. County level incentives to bring back farmers

Future of Agriculture: Innovation

Questions

- a. What marketing assistance is currently available
- b. Involvement from the extension
- c. How do we add value while reducing cost

Areas of concern

- a. Collective awareness of county level issues with markets
- b. High costs of inputs

Strategies proposed

- a. Farm to Table
- b. Branding the agricultural region

Natural Resources

Questions

- a. Is a voluntary adoption plan needed for water quality
- b. Myths that exist in the county regarding conservation programs
- c. What programs are currently available and the most popular

Areas of concern

- a. Water quality is controversial, how to target this with the community
- b. Ag needs more of a voice in water quality conversations
- c. County conservation board is focused on parks not agriculture
- d. Cover crops are still underutilized
- e. Conservation and agriculture are sometimes at odds
- f. Landowners aren't always on board for BMP
- g. Losing farmer autonomy, voluntary versus mandatory
- h. Farmland development, once it's gone it's gone
- i. Wildlife protection

Strategies proposed

- a. Non-confrontational conversations for water quality concerns
 - i. Local producers, county and state need to work together
- b. Ag centered programming
 - i. Field days

- ii. Educational programs
- c. Targeting specific watershed: South Skunk River
- d. Acknowledge good land and water management
 - i. County level incentives
 - ii. Tax abatement

Agricultural Relationships

Questions

- a. How do we attract a younger population
- b. Can social media be used for communication

Areas of concern

- a. Disconnect between farming and non-farming communities
- b. Food grown locally isn't feeding the community
- c. Lack of food knowledge
- d. Kids aren't farming
- e. Farms are lacking diversity
- f. Farm liability laws
- g. Healthy ecosystem concerns
- h. Management tensions
- i. Land is needed adjacent to villages for development
- j. Communication
 - i. Lack of community papers
- k. Businesses for the farming community to meet at closing, especially in Monroe

Strategies proposed

- a. Encouraging small scale farming
 - i. Migrant families
 - ii. Hmong Americans
- b. Accessing places where farmers are already meeting
 - i. Elevator
 - ii. Diners/coffee shop