Jefferson County
Food Systems: Developing a Regional Food Hub in Northern New York

The Challenge, Need, and Rationale
Senator Ritchie kicked off the process of exploring a food hub in the fall of 2015 with a series of public meetings with various stakeholders throughout the region. The meetings have generated a list of interested groups to work with as the project progresses and also a forum to begin to gather stakeholder comments, suggestions and information. As staff have been exploring opportunities and engaging key stakeholders, several known challenges have been presented that need to be addressed. At its simplest, the food hub concept for the North Country is depicted in the following visual:

GROWER--------> DISTRIBUTOR--------> CONSUMER (Business)

This concept, currently in development, is looking at helping growers sell directly to existing distributors who would in turn sell the local products to businesses and organizations such as schools, restaurants, hospitals, and grocery stores throughout the North Country region.

It has been determined that new and existing growers in the area need assistance with GAP certification, costing of inputs, farm business financial benchmarks, horticulture technical assistance, business planning, and planning for geographic clustering/coordination. Likewise, information is needed from the distributors: type of products to grow, quantity of each product, schedule, and quality specifications. The distributors have indicated their ability to provide this and their desire to buy locally, but not to coordinate the entire effort. Time and time again, the need for coordination has been identified.

Currently the unknowns include how products will be delivered to the distributor and the required specifications for delivery. For instance, do the products need to be washed and packaged in a certain way? Which leads to further questions about the potential need for minimal processing and packing facilities to accommodate requests from area institutions. Other unknowns include specific local economic impact.

Multidisciplinary Approaches and Disciplinary Expertise
Given the challenges and needs described above, a multi-pronged approach and a diverse skillset are needed to move this project forward. Expertise in the following disciplines is needed:

- business development
- horticulture
- community development
- food safety
- marketing

The proposed project will increase the variety of programs CCE Jefferson is engaged in with the university as the key features and goals of this project require the interplay of several departments and specialties.

Key Features/Goals
The key features of this project involve work with growers, distributors, and end buyers – key members of the regional food system. Specific goals are outlined below.
1. Assist growers in developing business plans and models that involve selling directly
to a food distributor
2. Assist growers in obtaining GAP certification
3. Assist growers in producing food that meets the requirements of the food distributor
   (type, quantity, quality)
4. Assess and work through regional infrastructure challenges such as the size of the
   region, the aggregation of product and minimal processing and packing needs.
5. Assist food distributors in marketing local products to their customers.

Student Involvement and Solutions
The challenges presented must be worked on concurrently to move the project forward.
Attempting a piecemeal approach will make the process very cumbersome and likely lead to
failure. A multidisciplinary team of students, faculty, and CCE educators would have the
diverse skillset that would not likely be found in just one or two interns. This team will
provide coordination, technical assistance, research, and planning. In particular, business
development experts could assist growers in developing business plans. As the plans are
implemented, they would need to include the recommendations and technical assistance
from horticulture and food safety experts. Likewise, the community development
representatives would assist with the necessary level of coordination to ensure efficient
product aggregation, including planning for pickup and other transportation logistics, and
delivery to the distributor. In turn, marketing personnel would assist the distributor to reach
customers (institutions and businesses) and increase demand for local produce and ensuring
they are aware local products are readily available. In addition, information on the local
multiplier effects of increasing sales of local foods would be made available to educate
potential buyers on the economic impact and benefits of buying local.

Community Benefit Assessment
The benefit to the community will be measured in multiple ways and will impact many key
stakeholders. The intended benefits are outlined below.

Economic
a. Increased opportunities for farmers (measured by increased sales/profit)
b. Increased job opportunities (measured by jobs created)
c. Community economic impact (multiplier effect) for the local economy (measured by
economic impact study)

Health/Nutrition
a. Improved access to fresh vegetables and fruits which are often more nutrient dense
   (measured by the amount of locally sourced produce available in local
   institutions/businesses)
b. Improved access to food that is sourced following GAP practices (measured by the
   number of GAP-certified farms selling to the food hub)

Environmental
a. Decreased transportation (measured by miles driven by distributor to procure food
   or farmer to deliver food)
b. Maintaining or increasing the amount of local land that is used for farming
   (measured by the amount of land used for farming)
Social
a. Increased access to local high quality produce in high need communities (measured by the amount produce procured by institutions in high need communities)
b. Increased knowledge of agriculture, food systems, and sources of food (measured by consumer knowledge survey)

Strengths of the Student Work Environment
CCE of Jefferson County has a long history of working with interns from college, community, and military settings. The management staff value the opportunity to mentor and guide students as they engage in meaningful, experiential projects. CCE Jefferson staff will engage students in all aspects of the project and provide opportunities for inter-disciplinary collaboration and work that will truly benefit the community. Students will find a welcoming, comfortable environment that supports their desire to learn and make a difference. They will engage with staff, community partners, government officials, and business owners.

Student Supervision Plan
The team of students will be supervised by CCE staff including the agricultural and nutrition program leaders. Both Cathy Moore and Amanda Root have extensive experience in supervising staff and interns. Both have had multiple interns from several colleges, including Cornell University. CCE Jefferson has an intern protocol, orientation, and evaluation system in place. This includes a communication plan will supporting faculty at the sponsoring college.

Role/Active Participation by the Association and Community Partners
The North Country Food Systems/Food Hub project is sponsored by Senator Patty Ritchie. Numerous partners have participated in information and discussion sessions. CCE Jefferson has been asked to lead the effort. CCE Jefferson's local foods team is committed to maximizing the areas strengths and working through challenges to develop a vibrant food hub in the four county region. We look forward to the added benefit of engaging with a multi-disciplinary team of Cornell University students and faculty to further impact the success of the project.

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