

# Finding Funding for Congregate Nutrition Programs

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## Brief Description:

Congregate nutrition programs have been challenged with limited funding for several years. At the same time there has been an increasing demand for locally grown food. The opportunity exists for collaboration of local farmers and congregate nutrition program kitchens to generate funds for the nutrition program.

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*This submission was selected as part of a national challenge issued to leaders in all communities seeking new "best practices" and "best possibilities" for the future of nutrition and aging.*

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The Iowa congregate nutrition program has been challenged with limited funding for several years. This is becoming an increasing problem with the growth in the number of seniors and more of them being food insecure. Iowa has experienced opportunities in the area locally grown fruits and vegetables. There has been an increasing demand for local produce that tastes good and is good for you as well as supports the local economy.

The Iowa Food Systems Council is made up a group of individuals including food producers and organizations from both the public and private sectors that has been established to recommend policy, research and program options for an Iowa food system which supports healthier Iowans, communities, economies and the environment. The Food Systems Council identified a need of local producers to have a licensed kitchen to prepare their produce for market. In exploring potential solutions to finding kitchens that were close to the producers, it was identified that there were congregate meal site kitchens all across Iowa.

In 2012, the Iowa Food Systems Council received a Specialty Crop grant from the Iowa Department of Agriculture for exploring the collaboration of local producers and congregate meal site kitchens. The grant was to support processing of specialty crops with the potential to: 1) increase food dollars circulating in Iowa's economy; 2) increase production of Iowa's specialty crops; and 3) potentially increase the availability of fresh produce to the nutrition program 4) provide a revenue source for congregate nutrition programs. Iowa has over 400 licensed kitchens that are used for a limited time each day

and seldom on weekends thus creating the opportunity for use by producers for value-added processing, thus eliminating the need for on-farm kitchen facilities that requires significant capital investment. The opportunity exists for a win-win for both producers and congregate nutrition programs.

The work plan of the grant included:

1. Surveying and analyzing Iowa congregate meal sites to determine feasibility for producer use i.e. interest in renting their kitchen, potential available hours, kitchen equipment, etc.
2. Survey and analyze specialty crop producers in geographic areas where congregate meal sites surveys show promise for interest and appropriate kitchen facilities;
3. Convene meetings in two geographic areas of Iowa with a high interest (from #1 and 2) to discuss feasibility issues such as management, liability, schedules, fees, barriers, etc.
4. Complete a feasibility report that includes analysis of surveys and meeting results and lessons learned from the meeting discussions.

The meetings were held at the congregate meal sites with producers, kitchen managers, Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals who is responsible for food establishment inspections and licensing, members of the Food Systems Council and the Iowa Department on Aging. Great discussions were generated. Everyone was able to express his or her needs and concerns. Topping the list of concerns were licensing requirements and liability issues. It was very helpful having the Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals present to address many the questions. The kitchens were concerned about the cleanliness of the kitchen when the food processing was completed. They mentioned the need for having a staff member present until they were comfortable with the producer and knowing they used the equipment properly and left the kitchen in the same condition they found it in.

The producers were looking for a variety of equipment depending on the processing they planned to do. Stainless steel tables, choppers, knives, cutting boards, stove and large pots, trays and racks and a flash freezer were some of the equipment of interest.

At the end of the two group discussions, everyone felt more comfortable with being able to work out some type of a working relationship. It was decided that both the kitchen and the producer would need their own food establishment license. From the information gained, a tool kit will be developed to help producers and congregate nutrition programs. The toolkit will have sample procedures or best practices, forms and

agreement templates. It will also contain a flow chart as a guide to the type of license needed for the type of food being produced and where it will be sold.

This project will benefit existing congregate nutrition site kitchens through increased revenue from rental of their kitchen space to specialty crop producers. A conservative estimate for 25 existing congregate meal site kitchens in Iowa is \$450,000 per year (or \$18,000 per kitchen) additional revenue from processing specialty crops (\$18 per hour X 10 hours per week X 5 specialty crop farmers X 20 weeks per year).

The example for revenue generation is just an estimate. But it does demonstrate there is an opportunity to generate revenue to help support the nutrition program. At a time of limited funding from state and federal sources, nutrition programs need to be creative in identifying new funding opportunities.

An additional benefit resulting from the congregate nutrition program working with local producers is the access to locally grown fruits and vegetables. The provision of a certain amount of produce to the nutrition program might even be written into the agreement. Including fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables will most certainly be a marketing tool for promoting the benefits of the nutrition program to existing and new meal participants. Menus incorporating produce from a local producer that everyone knows could generate interest in the meals and help achieve the goals of MyPlate by getting meal participants to eat more fruits and vegetables.

The Iowa Food Systems Council has provided the opportunity to bring together congregate nutrition programs and local fruit and vegetable producers to lay the ground work for a collaborate project that has the potential for creating additional revenue to support the nutrition program.