

The Economy of Food

Any community in Arkansas can have an economic and community development initiative based around food.

Arkansas’ economy was built on food production – the rice and row-crop agriculture of the Delta, the vegetables and canning of the Arkansas River Valley, the poultry industry that began in Northwest Arkansas and has spread to three-quarters of the state. Not to mention the smaller, specialty food production niches – the wine of the southeastern Ozarks, the strawberries around the Newport/Bald Knob area, the tomatoes from Warren, the watermelons from Hope, the sweet corn from Dumas, the grass-fed, organically grown pork and beef that’s so in demand by the fine restaurants across the state.

As the concern about the quality – pink slime, anyone? Chemicals or salmonella on your produce shipped in from California? – and the availability of our food supply rise, the economy of the small farmer is rising right along with it. Hundreds of families – many of them young families – are staking out a career in the hills and valleys where they grew up, or are moving to small towns across Arkansas where they can have a go at the latest trend – the resurgence of the family farm.

The popularity of the farm-to-table concept, as well as the concern about food additives and chemicals, is driving the growth in this agricultural sector. Along with the concerns about nutrition, obesity and “food deserts,” that growth has resulted in a number of new resources for funding local-agriculture-based projects. Among the potential economic and community development efforts in this area are:

* Community or school gardens
* Community kitchens/food processing facilities for either personal use or sale of processed products
* Buyers’ co-ops for meat, vegetables, and handcrafts
* Farmers’ markets
* Greenhouse growing for year-round consumption (in South Arkansas; extended growing seasons elsewhere)
* “Locally grown” cooperative marketing to restaurants and upscale markets in nearby urban areas
* Agritourism
* CSAs – Community Supported Agriculture cooperatives, a program where consumers buy a share of a farm’s output in advance, and enjoy the end result for the next year. It’s an ideal way to get into the local purchase of home-grown beef, pork, or chicken, as well as produce.

Future Focus Development Solution can assess your community’s suitability for development of a farm-to-table economic development strategy, point you to potential funding sources, and even write your grant and design and market your program for you. Programs are custom-designed based on the food production and value-added resources already present in your area, and designed to meet local economic development as well as community development needs.

Because of Future Focus CEO Kay Brockwell’s relationship with KIVA Zip, a crowd-funding initiative backed by the Clinton Foundation, zero-interest loans can be utilized for farmers who want to expand into the farm-to-table realm.

Fees for services vary according to project parameters. Contact Kay Brockwell at kbrockwell@futurefocusds.com, or at 870-762-5091.