

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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If you have vegetables, herbs, meat, value-added agriculture products or are a food service provider who is seeking a supply avenue or business opportunity to sell your product, regardless of your size, Iowa State University Extension to Communities invites you to attend an *Information Exchange Forum* to explore viable opportunities. These forums are the kick-off for *The Kitchen Project* and will allow agriculture producers to review information and have open discussion. Together we will explore the possibilities of creating a niche business that will market and sell these products and identify potential sources of product for the business. *The Kitchen Project* is being funded entirely by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

The forums will introduce and explain the idea behind The Kitchen Project, give you an overview of a working business plan and hear from agricultural producers about their interest to participate in sourcing the product or owning the business. Locations and times for these forums are varied to give producers a choice most convenient for them to attend. They have been scheduled for February 24 in Red Oak at 3 p.m. and Walnut at 7 p.m.; March 1 in Creston at 3 p.m. and Winterset at 7 p.m.; March 2 in Guthrie Center at 3 p.m. and Logan at 7 p.m.; March 3 in Bedford at 3 p.m. and Leon at 7 p.m.; March 5 in Denison at 10:30 a.m.

Southwest Iowa is rich in agricultural history. The Kitchen Project will look at a home-meal replacement business, with an emphasis on using locally raised foods in seasonal-sensitive menus. The business example uses the product the producers are currently ready to supply to the market while preparing them to eventually supply their product to a more diversified market including institutions and restaurants.

Lynn Adams, community development specialist, Iowa State University Extension to Communities said that, "This is a valuable tool for those who have moved into alternative farming and for those who have hesitated to make the move because of the challenges of finding consumers for their products." Commenting further she said, "It is critical to the success of this project that the forums are well-attended by a diversified group of people. It may be that some from the food service sector would also choose to attend and participate in the process."

A second round of "partnership building" exchanges will be determined by the participants from the first round so that they can immediately begin to take ownership of the business venture proposition and contribute to the strategy and decision making process. These exchanges will evaluate available resources (financial, partnership and community infrastructure) and begin to envision what a partnership for implementation might look like for the business. It is recognized that the level of participation and what each person will bring to the table in regards to expertise and interests will vary.

"We expect that we will have at least one group of partners that will form a home-meal replacement business. There may be more than one as well as there being the potential for other niche businesses," said Roxanna Sieber, one of the project administrators. "What will come from these forums will be shaped in large part by those attending and expressing a desire to move forward."

Those interested in attending can find out the location of the forums in the communities by calling their county's Iowa State University Extension office or by e-mailing foodforums@mchsi.com. Information will also be available on the Southwest Iowa Events page at www.villiscareview.com.