

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Photo cut line:** Producers gathered for the first in the series of nine forums in Red Oak at the Montgomery County Extension on February 24<sup>th</sup>.

**When they ask, “What’s for dinner?” – Could the answer one night be frog legs?**

People attended a forum of their choice out of nine locations within a 22-county region to see if there was interest in beginning a business, sourcing locally produced product, to create family-style meals. Growers of fruits and vegetables; meat processors and producers; makers of sauces, jams and jellies; bakers and caterers fisheries and, yes, even a frog grower were all at the tables. Participants overwhelmingly decided to move the *Kitchen Project* forward into a next round forums to delve deeper into the business plan scenario. The initiative is sponsored by Iowa State University Extension - Extension to Communities and funded by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. The goal is to work with these and others to start a niche business in southwest Iowa that will use these local products to create home-meal replacements for purchase.

A home-meal replacement business is one that creates meals for families to eat together at home. The niche that will distinguish this business is that the menus will be centered around locally produced, seasonally available foods with the variety that would be on dinner tables if there were time and energy to prepare meals at home.

Home-meal replacements (HMR) became a trend in the 90s as families were choosing to re-establish the family dinner hour but did not have the time for meal preparation. *The Word Spy* notes on his Web site that news stories about HMRs peaked in 1997 and 1998 and comments that "This tells us that the press is less interested in home-meal replacements, but it doesn't necessarily mean that these meals are no longer popular. In fact, I read one report that predicted a U.S. \$170 billion market for "HMRs" by 2005. My guess is that the home meal replacement is now such an integral part of peoples' lives that there's no point talking about it anymore."

A basic business plan has been written for the HMR. It will be sent to those who attended the first round of forums who stated an intension to attend the next round of forums. Five forums will be scheduled with dates, times and locations to be announced. Those interested in participating in the forums who did not attend the first round should request materials in advance so that they can be prepared to fully engage in the discussions. Discussions will include, but are not limited to, areas with regard to the pricing of the meals, branding of the business, marketing and promotion plan, physical location of the business, organizational structure of the business, delivery strategies, and financing options.

“This is an exciting venture for southwest Iowa, and the positive reception by producers attending the forums was certainly encouraging,” states Lynn Adams, community development specialist, Iowa State University Extension to Communities. In addition to the potential suppliers of product and services, those from the food service sector and those who may be interested in investing in the home-meal replacement business should plan to attend the second round of forums according to Adams.

The dates and locations of the next forums will be determined by March 20th. In the meantime, Adams suggests new attendees request the basic business plan in advance. Requests for schedules and materials can be e-mailed to [foodforums@mchsi.com](mailto:foodforums@mchsi.com) or by phone at her office at the Iowa State University Extension office in Adams County at 641-322.3281.

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