



Working Regionally: GETTING STARTED [Part 1 of 3]

Authors and reviewers:

Julie Garden-Robinson, Professor and Extension Food and Nutrition Specialist, North Dakota State University (NDSU) Extension; Rebecca West, Program Assistant, NDSU Extension; Londa Nwadike, Extension Associate Professor of Food Safety, Kansas State University and the University of Missouri, and Shannon Coleman, Associate Professor and State Extension Specialist, Iowa State University.

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Why form a regional Extension group?

We formed for the same reasons we form connections of all kinds:

- Share strengths – What do each of us bring to the table?
- Connection – Being a part of a group makes us stronger together.
- Mutual support and mentorship – Bolster as well as advise each other.
- Flexibility – Form and maintain informal networks with the ability to respond quickly to needs.
- Relationship – Build bonds between each other that strengthen the entire group.
- Collaboration – Work together in programming, publishing and presenting; more hands (and heads!) make lighter work.

Begin forming your regional group.

Who:

- Identify initial core members – Consider two to four across state lines.
- Grow membership – Have at least one member from each state in your region, eventually.
- Establish leadership – Dual leadership works best to share responsibility.

EXAMPLES FROM OUR NETWORK:

- Our founding group began in 2016 during a regional Extension meeting in Chicago.
- Seven of 12 states in our region were initially in the group.
- We now have a membership continuum established in all states in our region, rotating members in and out as they are hired and retired.
- We began with one leader, but after she retired, decided dual leadership would work best – each leader is from a different state, and responsibility is shared for running meetings and maintaining documents.

What:

- Central topic – What will your group rally around, where do your members have the most expertise, and what is the demand out there among consumers?

EXAMPLES FROM OUR NETWORK:

- At our group's inception in 2016, we chose the topic of food safety.
- The other North Central Region groups formed at that time had topics focused on aging and diabetes, plus a few others.
- Choose a topic that has urgent and immediate implications and applications to consumers in their everyday life; for example, food safety involves frequent handwashing, which is a daily practice that does much to prevent disease and has become supremely important in pandemic times.
- Understand that your topic will have many layers; for example, food safety involves cottage foods, farmers market safety, and home food preservation safe practices, which again have become particularly popular in pandemic times.

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