Sewing the Seeds of Conversation--North Dakota Local Food Systems Initiatives: A Needs Assessment
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Introduction
Begun in 2009, this needs assessment originated as a statewide campaign to gather information about local foods initiatives by the North Dakota Department of Agriculture. Rural communities were invited to participate and were enlisted by grants to local cooperatives (Balcom, 2009).

Background
Local foods initiatives are a matter of national security. Only 1% of America’s population are farmers. Approximately, 82¢ to 93¢ of every dollar spent on fresh foods goes to a middle-person, while farmers earn only 7¢ to 18¢. (Merrigan, 2011). Much of America’s food supply is shipped; produce travels, on average, 1300 - 2000 miles from farm to consumer. and is calculated as food miles (ATTRA, 2011). Large-scale centralized distribution, now common practice around the globe, is dangerous. The January 2010 earthquake in Haiti, for example, proves the perils of corporatized shipment of food. Haitians starved as food rotted at ports; the country was limited to public and private organization such as schools, hospitals, and restaurants. During fall 2010, a second round of phone surveys (n = 30) were conducted targeting local farmers. These first set of surveys sought to determine interest in participating in local food systems initiatives. Both producers and consumers were asked what stood in the way of being involved in buying or selling local foods.

Problem
North Dakota ranks first in the nation in more than a dozen major crops (nd.gov, 2011). However, much of what is produced in North Dakota does not stay at the local level. Local infrastructures rely on regional or national distribution centers. The absence of a local food systems places the nation at risk in the event of cataclysm (Clay, 2002).

Purpose
Previous research studies show the general populace do not fully grasp the concept or urgency of local foods systems initiatives (Giovannucci, 2009). While local foods are plentifully available, farmers and consumers tend to be unaware how to access viable outlets and sources, respectively (Guptill, 2002). This needs assessment explores the communication gaps between producers and consumers in rural areas of North Dakota.

Research Questions
1. What communication gaps inhibit local foods initiatives in rural communities of North Dakota?
2. What obstacles stand in the way of local foods initiatives when interest exists?

Data Collection and Methodology
This qualitative study began fall 2009 with surveys (n = 45) of local consumers in Valley City, ND. These interviews were conducted by phone and were limited to public and private organization such as schools, hospitals, and restaurants. During fall 2010, a second round of phone surveys (n = 30) were conducted targeting local farmers. These first set of surveys sought to determine interest in participating in local food systems initiatives. Both producers and consumers were asked what stood in the way of being involved in buying or selling local foods. Spring 2011, face-to-face interviews of rural producers. This needs assessment will attempt to show definitively that despite disparate communication styles, the outcomes desired by producers and consumers are identical.

Discussion
The future of local foods is the future of America (Ikerd, 2010). This study is part of a grassroots movement toward common sense practices in America agricultural practices. During fall 2011, this study will culminate with a continuation of face-to-face interviews of rural producers. This needs assessment will attempt to show definitively that despite disparate communication styles, the outcomes desired by producers and consumers are identical.

References
Merrigan, K. (2011, March 3). Know your farmer, know your food. Speech presented at College tour presentation in Portland State University, Portland, Oregon

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