

THE GATHERING: COMING TOGETHER AROUND LOCAL FOOD

FARMERS, BUYERS, AND CONSUMERS of locally-produced food found common ground at The Gathering in February. This conference, held at One Vision in Clear Lake, brought together more than 80 people from many parts of the North Iowa local food system for the first time.

"We were very happy with the event and pleased with the number of people who attended this inaugural event," said Shaun Arneson, Vice President, Existing Business and Project Management, for North Iowa Corridor Economic Development Corporation. "We had a great group of panelists. They did an awesome job."

NIC participated as a sponsor, assisting with logistics and planning, as the growing popularity of locally-produced food is seen as an economic opportunity for this region. Sponsors also included Ag Ventures Alliance, One Vision, Alpha Media, CL Tel, Clear Lake Bank and Trust, and Healthy Harvest of North Iowa.

Panelists in two workshops discussed the readiness of North Iowa for getting local food into commercial markets and making the most of direct-to-consumer opportunities.

Dr. Kamyar Enshayan, keynote speaker, talked about why the local food system is so important to North Iowa. Enshayan is the director of the Center of Energy and Environmental Education at University of Northern Iowa. He discussed the

progress and opportunities here, based on his involvement in local food and community development over more than 20 years.

Marie Boyd of Healthy Harvest said, "He admired our partnership and local food activity, while challenging us to consider that even ten percent of food dollars being spent on local products would mean millions of dollars in economic

generations, but since 2016 we've been in direct-to-consumer sales," she said.

In the first workshop, Recknor explained how Purple Ribbon works with buyers in the wholesale market such as restaurants. "From a producer standpoint, I talked about how we label products, food safety issues, discussions with restaurants, and how we could make more products available on a larger scale." Other panelists represented commercial markets such as groceries, restaurants, and schools.

The second workshop focused on how to market local foods directly to consumers, through farmers' markets or directly off the farm. "Our business produces a newsletter, for example. We give out samples at farmers' markets and have a weekly special," she said. Purple Ribbon Beef sells ground beef, steaks, and hamburger patties, as well as quarters, halves, and whole freezer beef.

During The Marketplace, Recknor said she was able to sell some product and engage with new people curious about Purple Ribbon's operations. "People were really positive and wanting to learn more."

For more information about the North Iowa local foods scene, visit healthyharvestni.com.



activity."

Twenty-two exhibitors participated in The Marketplace, a chance for participants to sample and buy local foods, learn about partners in the movement, and tour One Vision's greenhouse productions.

Ashley Recknor, from Purple Ribbon Beef in Clarion, was one of the panelists. "I was excited to give our perspective," she said. Purple Ribbon Beef is a family-owned farm involving Ashley, her husband Jess and their infant daughter, and her parents and sister. "We've been in the cattle business for three

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