Innovative Local Foods Access

This case study series highlights an innovative local foods access initiative happening in southwest Iowa. It includes a variety of initiatives and projects that can serve as idea-starters to incorporate in other communities.
The Center for Rural Affairs is able to assist in developing local food access plans across the region. Visit cfra.org for more information.

👤 **Emily Paulsen**
🏪 **Brun Ko Farm**
📍 **Exira, Iowa**

2015

Emily and her husband, Nathan, moved to a 15-acre farm from 6 acres, where they couldn't access rural water and their well wasn't very deep. They needed more water to start farming to grow food that people would eat. They began with pasture-raised livestock and vegetables.

2023

The couple grows 30 different veggies, including zucchini, tomatoes, and radishes. Brun Ko Farm has beef cattle, laying hens and broilers, five cow-calf pairs, and 8 to 10 heritage breed pigs per year. They have planted various fruit trees over the years, and are hopeful those will start producing soon.

Scaling up

Emily and Nathan got involved with various groups like Practical Farmers of Iowa and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Brun Ko Farm recieved a Choose Iowa grant and an Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) grant. These opportunities are important for beginning farmers because they allow farms to scale up, make infrastructure purchases or improvements, develop their marketing and production practices, and more.

Food access difficulties

The area doesn't have a lot of grocery options, with the nearest grocery store 30 minutes away. Community members who can't afford to drive settle for convenience store food.

Choose Iowa allowed Emily and Nathan to remodel an open air building into an enclosed washing and packing area, complete with workspaces and stainless steel sinks. A walk-in cooler keeps produce fresh.

> " We've pieced together education through various resources. It would be revolutionary if there was a trade school for farming, specifically food farming. It's not that simple when you scale up. You need marketing skills. We teach people how to be plumbers and electricians, but not farmers. You are not just born with the knowledge; it is a skillset. "
>
> -Emily

Grow Another Row

Grow Another Row is food-sharing organziation in Cass County, Iowa. Farmers and gardeners are asked to grow an extra row (or more) of produce to donate. Donations of all types and sizes are accepted. Volunteers help harvest, package, and transport produce to community produce stands.

Grow Another Row stands can be found in neighborhoods, libraries, low-income housing communities, and other areas.

Emily is very involved with Grow Another Row, helping on the back end and growing to donate.

> *Grow Another Row is run by volunteers, and started with no budget.*
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> *The organization also hands out vegetable plants at food pantries and through summer school lunch programs. This year, more than 300 plants will be handed out. People who take the plants tend to donate back excess produce.*
>
> *-Emily*

Moving the needle forward in local food space

> *Having local foods more easily available will move the needle. It takes extra effort to go to the farm rather than just one store.*
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> *In 2022, we sold through the local quilt shop. We'll start partnering with the local pastry shop in 2023, selling spinach and lettuce. Partnering with other businesses increases access on multiple days per week.*
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> *You can't hit everybody's schedule. Having continuity through the winter would help. It's hard to do in a seasonal environment. We're hoping to put up a high tunnel next year.*
>
> *-Emily*

Unexpected blessings through early education

> *We enjoy seeing kids try new things. We've had school tours at the farm and we want to do more.*
>
> *We had a group of elementary school kids on the farm and had peppers for the kids to try. At first, the kids thought peppers wouldn't be good, then they all tried them. All but one ended up liking the peppers.*
>
> *-Emily*