




Case Study (#3 of 5) in southwest Iowa: 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.



 Bonnie & Theo Ramsey
 Ramsey's Market
 Lenox, Iowa



2015-2017

Theo and Bonnie Ramsey assumed ownership of what was formerly Cheese's Food Center in April 2015, transforming it into Ramsey's Market. In 2017, Ramsey's Ace Hardware opened, and the concept of Fresh Out of the Box started to bloom.

2017-2021

In 2017, Ramsey's ACE Hardware opened adjacent to Ramsey's Market. Bonnie and Theo started a new technology grocery service called Fresh Out of the Box in 2021 (read more about this concept below).

2023

The Ramseys invest time and dollars into their community by operating the market, hardware store, and Fresh Out of the Box.

From serving their country to their community

Theo and Bonnie were in the Air Force. Although neither of them had a grocery store background, the couple enjoyed visiting grocery stores, taking pictures, and studying them as a hobby.

Bonnie grew up 8 miles south of Lenox, Iowa, on a farm. Theo is from Seattle. Bonnie wanted to raise her kids in the community where she grew up and wanted that to be an option for anyone looking to move back to southwest Iowa. On a date night, the couple started talking about areas with low food access and about how they could help those communities.

They had served their country in the military and decided it was now time to serve their community. Communities with no grocery store in town have health concerns when fresh food isn't easily accessible. Retaining jobs, schools, and people becomes harder without fresh food in town. They felt a responsibility to help sustain these communities.



What is Fresh Out of the Box?

Ramsey's Market aims to be the source for fresh produce and meat in southwest Iowa. Customers can also order from the adjacent Ramsey's ACE Hardware and have those items included in their grocery order.

Orders are placed on their website and customers schedule their drop to a locker or home delivery.

Fresh Out of the Box (shop.freshootb.com) lockers are located in Griswold. Customers order by 5 p.m. and get their order delivered to the locker by 5 p.m. the next day.



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Selling local foods

“ We help local producers get products into Fresh Out of the Box. Some local products sold are: honey, beef sticks, jerky, summer sausage, various meats, BBQ sauces, sweet corn, watermelons, and other various produce.

In 2023, we partnered with Taylor County Cattlemen to hand out 500 free meals to those in our community.

A local baker wants to get their product out more, and we are hopeful to be able to rent out space to them when they are ready.

-Bonnie ”

Food access issues

“ The threat of food access is the most significant issue in our communities.

Towns with populations of 1,500 or less in any state experience food insecurity without fresh food options.

-Bonnie ”



Independent grocers in Iowa

Changes in technology and pricing make it much harder for independent grocers to stay in business.

There were no other competitors like Amazon, Hello Fresh, or Dollar General when most of the Iowa independent grocery stores started. As grocery stores close, more and more communities lose food security.



Scaling up

“ Fresh Out of the Box needs to grow with integrity and with the purpose that it began with.

How do we not lose the original components with scaling? Everyone has to scale to remain viable. How do we accomplish this without losing the integrity of the past? We need to leverage technology while keeping our roots like we're delivering to Grandma's house.

-Bonnie ”



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