

County Food Policy Council

Melvin Houser from the Pottawattamie County Board of Supervisors spoke about a county food policy council. The council consists of eight people to promote community supported agriculture. This initiative is an outgrowth of the Southwest Iowa Farm Food Initiative which started in Cass Country through the Wallace Foundation.

In the Fall of 2007, Houser invited local community members to a meeting to work on a strategic plan for this initiative. About 50 people attended the first meeting. The plan was completed in June 2008. Then the county hired a full time coordinator to connect local farmers with local restaurants and stores to promote local production and sale of food items.

Mr. Houser said that our food travels an average of 1500 miles to get to our tables. Since Iowa has some of the best soil in the country, why do we ship out all our food for processing and consumption elsewhere?

The same amount of labor is used today for food production as in the 1950s. Producing and using food locally contributes to the local economy, cuts down on fuel consumption and pollution, and provides fresher products. Mr. Houser considers the county involvement in promoting local food production and consumption a natural progression from the historical county responsibilities for economic development, which were recording farm deeds and road development.

For other state and county business, Mr. Houser said that the state offices are not staffed yet to give out grants from the Federal stimulus package, so that will be slower in developing than expected. The county does not have enough tax dollars to complete all the needed road repairs and the Governor will not approve a tax increase on gasoline to provide more tax money.

The county has case managers to help people with mental health issues. The program began in 1996. State funding was cut in 2000 and again this year.