

November 3, 2009

Local Food Policy Report to the Planning, Building and Zoning Committee

At its meeting on May 5, 2009, the Lake County Planning Building and Zoning Committee (PB&Z) authorized staff to forward a report on sustainable agriculture and local food in Lake County to the Regional Planning Commission (RPC) for further review and direction.

After examination of the issues and opportunities for local farming and food policy development, on October 20, 2009, the RPC voted to recommend the following actions to the PB&Z Committee.

Lake County should:

1. Review Land Use and Zoning policies to identify barriers to local commercial and hobby growing of fruits and vegetables and adopt amendments to remove those barriers
2. Review the *Regional Framework Plan* to identify and implement policies that encourage local food production
3. Publicize tax valuation procedures more clearly for Lake County residents who are involved with commercial agriculture and are seeking property tax relief
4. Promote economic development and job training in agriculture
5. Promote the use of open land for local food, such as:
 - a. Forest Preserve District lands (currently in corn and soybean production)
 - b. Community and institutional gardens
 - c. Park districts and school yards
 - d. Floodplain properties (identified by the Lake County Stormwater Management Commission)
 - e. Private properties (e.g. ComEd rights of way and vacant lots)
6. Identify liability issues of growing food on lands owned by other entities
7. Suggest ways that state funded Lake County institutions can purchase 10% of food from local sources, in compliance with the Illinois Local Food, Farms, and Jobs Act (2009) by 2020.

The RPC recommends that County staff be primarily responsible for implementing the above recommendations, however they would benefit from assistance from other organizations involved in local food production and distribution.

The following recommended actions are outside the typical purview of county government, but could be performed by other local organizations with the encouragement of Lake County.

8. Increase access to training for commercial and home food growers
9. Improve access to small business loans for beginning farmers
10. Identify strategies to improve the limited infrastructure for processing and distributing local produce

11. Coordinate Lake County's farmers' markets in order to:
 - a. Improve access across communities
 - b. Facilitate use of LINK card access
 - c. Create common standards for products being sold
12. Identify opportunities to promote CSAs (Community Sustained Agriculture)
13. Address disparities in access to locally grown fresh food across Lake County, in light of the incidence of obesity and type II diabetes, particularly in lower income communities
14. Improve countywide communication to inform the public of the opportunities and benefits for local food production and consumption
15. Encourage municipal participation

The RPC recommends the Lake County Board create a **Lake County Local Food Policy Council** to address all of the above recommendations in a collaborative and comprehensive manner, together with County, municipal, agricultural and nutrition-related partners. The RPC recommends inviting the representatives from organizations that have appeared before the RPC this summer and others that support local food production and distribution to participate in the Lake County Food Policy Council. The RPC recommends that the Lake County Local Food Council make periodic reports back to the RPC and the PB&Z.