



Ohio
Smart
Agriculture
SOLUTIONS FROM THE LAND

Market Development Work Group Interim Report March 2018

Mission Statement:

Valuing all forms, sizes and types of food, feed and fiber production systems, recommend: public policy frameworks; research, technology and infrastructure priorities (physical and social); market mechanisms; and risk management solutions that can be deployed to expand markets for regionally-produced crops, fresh fruit and vegetables, meat, dairy products, eggs, other agricultural products, value-added products, ecosystem services, and any other potential returns accruing from agriculture.

Preliminary Findings:

Strengths/Assets

- Ohio agriculture is more diverse than that of other Midwest states
- Temperate climate and average annual precipitation allow for the production of a wide range of commodity crops, livestock and edible fruits and vegetables
- Significant material processing capabilities
- Growing consumer demand for fresh/local/nutritious edible foods raised and grown in an environmentally friendly and humane manner

Weaknesses/Threats

- Steady decline in processing capability for specialty products
- Burdensome/unnecessary food systems regulations
- Increased dependence on out of state specialty meat processing services
- Growing chasm between those who want to farm and those who have access
- Inadequate workforce to support 21st century operations
- Decreasing public perception regarding value and benefits of agriculture

Opportunities

- Consumer demand for specialty meat/protein production
- Raising institutional demand for fresh fruit and vegetables
- Food-grade grains (distilling, brewing, baking, etc.)

Preliminary Recommendations:

- Invest intentionally in agricultural workforce development, creating avenues and opportunities into diverse agricultural enterprises
- Develop emerging markets, guided primarily by consumer demand and preference

- Invest in processing/distribution/marketing infrastructure for food-grade grain, specialty and small-scale meats, and fresh fruits and vegetables, that allows the food-chain to remain fully within Ohio
- Explore specialty and small-scale meat processing models that allow operators regulatory flexibility without compromising food safety
- Develop processing infrastructure for fresh produce to meet increasing institutional demand
- Develop new business models and finance mechanisms
 - Support collaborative and innovative business models
 - Attract technical assistance and financing for the models
- Facilitate access to land, reduce barriers for those who desire to farm
- Communicate value of agriculture, educating consumer on benefits, positive environmental changes, eco-system services, etc.
- Explore value-added bio-products that reduce waste, add value, and benefit the environment
- Establish a network of supply chain options for meat, fruit, vegetables, and food-grade grain (cold storage, processing, transportation, distribution)
 - Explore option to utilize existing Ohio supply chains

Launching Pad Initiatives:

- Increase specialty and small-scale meat processing infrastructure
 - Investigate mobile processing options for meat and fish
 - Explore collaborative cold storage options
 - Encourage models that allow regulatory flexibility without compromising food safety
- Invest in intentional agricultural workforce development
 - Develop process for training agricultural professionals, starting at school-age (4H, FFA, etc.)
 - Remove barriers to young adults learning their craft and exploring their agricultural options, recognize value of youth working alongside experienced adults in influencing future career decisions
 - Create avenues for young adults to advance and pursue their desired agricultural professions, utilizing on-the-job training, technical school curriculums, and bachelor/master degree programs
 - Advocate for, and remove regulatory barriers from, innovative development opportunities (internships, work programs, semester sabbaticals, etc.)
 - Collaborate with education and trade groups to train/empower non-traditional growers/workers (2nd career, veterans, etc.)
- Develop processing infrastructure for fresh produce to meet increasing institutional demand
 - Support access to institutional buyers for all scales of fruit and vegetable production
- Evaluate consumer needs/preferences of Ohioans, communicate value of agriculture
 - Focus efforts with these preferences in mind, with the understanding that the consumer is the ultimate authority and guarantor of success
 - Strive to communicate value of Ohio agriculture to consumers, educating them on developments in environmental stewardship, humane animal treatment, eco-system services, and societal value