

Now that the Farmer's Market season has come to a close and I assume most of your harvest season is completed, I am hoping that there is enough time in your day to sit down over lunch and pick up on the conversation that was started back in February at the first Recharge the Range event.

To help jump start the conversation here are some of the ideas that were brought forth at that event:

Develop a local food advocacy committee.

A policy to support local food on a regional and local level.

Coop with IRPS Sustainability Matters meeting.

Provide research.

Determine economic benefit of local foods.

An Iron Range cooking show/podcasts.

Financial assistance needed for producers/processors.

Need for low interest loans and grants.

Engage and inform local banks about local food finance needs.

Combine ED with sustainable agriculture (Seeds of Success Duluth).

Develop a local feed festival with locals arts and music.

A roving farmers market (convert a bus into a roving farmers market and set route ahead of time).

Provide incentives to remove turf and replace with pollinators and edibles.

Market "Real Range Food."

Ability to provide and educate on fresh foods to communities and students.

Farm maps/marketing materials.

Showcase the area food.

USDA certified meat processor.

Local processing for dairy production.

Regional farmers markets.

Hemp pilot project.

Specialty grain/textile production and processing.

Need for farm machinery/dealership service.

A farm-to-table restaurant.

## **Agriculture**

**December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

**Northeast Service Cooperative**

**12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.**

**In Attendance:** Steve Giorgi, Mary Finnegan, Sara Ferkul, Dave Lislegard, Marlise Riffel, Heather Lindula, Jeanette Mellesmoen, Doug Learmont, Missy Roach, George Pliml, Keith Aho, John Ongaro and Paul Fish

Discussion about the Iron Range Partnership for Sustainability (IRPS - <http://irpsmn.org/>)  
Mission of this group: *IRPS facilitates collaboration towards a sustainable and thriving Iron Range. The goal of IRPS is to build connections between community, economy, and environment to promote sustainable living in northeastern Minnesota.*

Lack of awareness of what is available for financial assistance, low interest loans and grants. Would it be worth doing an educational forum about what is available? At the next meeting, inviting USDA, Department of Agriculture and banks to discuss. There is a lot of financial assistance out there, however, it is coming from out of the area. Pulling all the different resources together so they are available in one spot.

Is it possible to have an area in local grocery stores that is a homegrown section? Would the local producers be able to keep up with the demand? The amount of regulations that are put in place as far as what can be sold, how it can be sold and the amount of what you can sell also plays a part. Lack of producers in the region, the average age of a producer is approximately 57, we need to start finding ways to grow the interest in the younger generation.

Trying to get healthier and fresh foods into schools. If they eat these foods regularly at a young age it may spark an interest in the agricultural fields. Grand Rapids has a FFA program (Future Farmers of America) in their school. Also getting fresh foods into assisted livings, nursing homes and hospitals.

When you qualify as an agricultural producer you do receive a tax break. Is there a way to offer an incentive to new agricultural producers?

Getting people excited to buy locally and organically. Getting the community more involved. Explain the benefits not only for themselves but also the benefits to the economy. Advertising of local farmers markets. Can we have stickers made that say something like made on the Iron Range, so people know that these products are grown and produced here. The farmers market in Virginia only allows vendors with products produced within 50 miles of Virginia. To participate in the Cook farmers market you have to produce the products within 30 miles. Also, making people aware of where extra food can be donated.

Production of survey that can be sent out to anyone in the agricultural field. Who is producing? What are they producing? Etc. Just to gauge what is there.

Regional Farmers Market – Steve talked about the possible creation of a regional market. As of now, it has been discussed about putting it in Mt. Iron. The producers that were at the meeting said they probably wouldn't want to be a part of it. Their reasoning's behind it, they already have followings at the farmers markets that they attend. It was brought up that if they were able to just drop off their products but not have to man the booth that they may be interested.

Lack of a USDA meat processing plant in the area. The regulations in place as far as how much you can sell of an item, how you can sell an item and where you can sell an item are very large. It can be a burden to producers.

**Next Meeting:**

Will be scheduled for February 2017