

USDA AND REGIONAL FOOD HUBS

Background on KYF2 Regional Food Hub Subcommittee

USDA's "Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food" (KYF2) Initiative is a Departmental effort to support the development of local and regional food systems as a way of enhancing local economic development, creating "green" jobs, and enhancing access to fresh food in underserved communities. As part of this Initiative, a special subcommittee has been created to support the development of regional food hubs as a critical strategy in achieving these objectives. The immediate task of the subcommittee is to document the current challenges and opportunities facing existing and potential food hub sites, and to identify emerging best practices that can be used to further the development and expansion of food hubs.

Rationale for Supporting Regional Food Hubs

Many farmers continue to be challenged by the lack of distribution and processing infrastructure that would give them wider access to retail, institutional, and commercial foodservice markets, where demand for local and regional foods is reaching an all time high. This problem is particularly acute for operators of mid-sized farms, who are too large to rely on direct marketing channels as their sole market outlet, but too small to compete effectively in traditional wholesale supply chains. We believe Regional food hubs can greatly support these ag-of-the middle farmers and to encourage smaller farmers to scale up their operations.

Background on Regional Food Hub Collaboration

The Regional Food Hub Collaboration is a strategic partnership between the Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food (KYF2) Regional Food Hub Subcommittee and the Wallace Center at Winrock International to support the development of regional food hubs. A regional food hub is loosely defined as a centrally located facility with a business management system that facilitates the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and/or marketing of locally/regionally produced food products. By offering a number of these and other services, regional food hubs can provide wider access to institutional and retail markets for small to mid-sized producers, create new jobs along the food value chain, and increase access of fresh healthy food for consumers, with strong potentials to reach underserved areas and food deserts.

As lead agency of the KYF2 Regional Food Hub Subcommittee, the Agricultural Marketing Service is entering into this cooperative agreement with the Wallace Center to carry out the following objectives: (1) *Establish a Food Hub Advisory Group* composed of key public and private stakeholders to encourage on ongoing dialogue of the challenges and opportunities for food hub development and expansion – key partners to date include Wallace Center's National Good Food Network, Project for Public Spaces, and the National Association of Produce Market Managers; (2) *Create a Regional Food Hub Resource Guide* composed of the following elements: (a) an inventory and profile of existing food hubs, (b) a synthesis of lessons learned, challenges, opportunities, emerging best practices for the development of food hubs, which would utilize a mixed methods research approach of phone interviews, site visits, and stakeholder focus groups; and (c) the identification of existing and potential resources (i.e., grants, loans, technical assistance) that can be brought to bear to support food hub development; (3) *Develop a Coordinated Communication and Outreach Strategy* so that lessons learned, emerging best practices, and potential funding and technical assistance resources can be effectively disseminated to assist potential food hub developers and partners, as well as to strengthen existing food hub operations.