

I'm Ivor Chodkowski, farmer and co-owner of Grasshoppers Distribution, KY's first all local food distributor.

So I want to give you just a brief history of Grasshoppers. Having involved as many as 21 different producers, 4 owners finally put money on the table and opened the company in 2007. You'd think we were in a smoky backroom somewhere. We weren't. We were in the Community Farm Alliance office on Portland Ave. and we each put in \$500.00. We also had help from a USDA value added producer grant and later we had help from the state Ag Dev. Board. We struggled with the name a little bit too as you might imagine. I remember crossing out a number of other options for as many different reasons and when we got finally to Grasshoppers we couldn't think of any reason why we shouldn't keep it, so we did. Where did we do this? We did this too in the CFA office on Portland Ave. And after the first year, having begun primarily as a wholesale distributor, the owners quickly recognized the value of CSA marketing and began to expand that segment as a primary focus. And today, we pay over 60 producers in 22 counties \$500K annually.

So I want to give a little more context too. The biggest picture is of a city, state, and country really suffering in terms of food, because of its industrialization. There are too many details here to recount. Some of you may have been here at Bellarmine for Daniel Imhoff and his discussion of CAFOs. Were folks here for that? CAFOs are just one of the things we've been suffering from. And then, largely because of the work of CFA, in 2000, House Bill 611, the tobacco settlement, with a huge push from CFA members, was passed in the legislature and signed by then Governor Paul Patton. CFA's urban work in Louisville followed, including the development of markets in limited resource areas, the coining of the term LIFE which stood variously for Local Integrated Food Economy or Local Innovative Food Economy, and the publication of the community food assessment which brought to the fore food access issues in Louisville and made wide use, for the first time here locally, of the phrase, "food desert." And then there was the help from CFA with the opening of Grasshoppers which came out of a 5 year plan to begin to implement LIFE, including the development of food related businesses and the encouragement of food entrepreneurship. Since CFA's arrival in Louisville in 2002, many, many other organizations have become involved in issues of food and agriculture.

Those other folks and organizations deserve recognition. There are just so many things going on now in Louisville around food and agriculture. It's really difficult to imagine that we would have come so far. Here are some things to think about:

- We have the highest number of farms per capita east of the Mississippi and the fourth most farms overall after Texas, Missouri, and Iowa, and we haven't yet lost the know-

how and the ingenuity to produce our own food. A Mennonite horse treadmill; Adam Barr's school bus chicken coop on wheels; Grasshoppers is launching a producer newsletter to share these innovations...

- We have a thriving non-profit sector that is innovating all the time, fueled by countless dedicated, energetic people: there are more than I'm aware of, I'm sure, there is CFA, the Food Literacy Project, Breaking New Grounds; Slow Food Bluegrass; 15,000 Farmers, SAL, Louisville Grows, Louisville Farm to Table. I'm just going to miss some. I can't help it. You all are many!
- We also have an impressive private sector driving the burgeoning food economy: There are countless fantastic chefs like Kathy Cary at Lillys, Rosendo Ucan at the Mayan Café, there are great caterers like Susan Hershberg at the Wiltshire Pantry, there's Heine Brothers coffee, Ruby Red Tea, Marksbury Market, Bourbon Barrel Foods, Stellar Sweets, there is Fresh Start Growers Supply. There are farmers markets on every corner (well not quite, but sometimes it seems that way).
- The city of Louisville is also fortunate to have had one of the most progressive health departments in the country with Dr. Adewale Troutman. I wish we could have kept him. Just think of it. There is now a Center for Health Equity at the Department of Health and Wellness. There is a Food in Neighborhoods Committee.
- Government efforts on the state level continue to bear fruit with the KY Ag Dev Board and the Ag Finance Corporation regularly contributing to the growth of Kentucky agriculture oftentimes in cooperation with the city's Economic Development Department.
- And now... now we have Political leadership from our Mayor and Private sector leadership from Stephen Reily and Emily Bingham as well as others to help shine a light on all these efforts, pull us all together, and spark our local food economy so that it can become an example to the rest of the country.

It's a really, really extraordinary moment. If I were an astrologist like my mother I'd say the stars were aligning for the local food economy. It's so important that the mayor speak to the many issues surrounding food. We are lucky and grateful to the mayor for having come and helped to make the case strongly for local foods. Folks, like Stephen Reily and Emily Bingham have stepped up in a huge way and have been instrumental in helping to make the case for private sector investment in the expansion of local food efforts, including grasshoppers, and many, many other people are involved in many issues related to local food, without whom, we wouldn't have the accruing political will and support for the sorts of changes we need at all levels of government.

It's important to keep that moment in mind, because, when all of us are struggling in the trenches, barely scraping by, trying to see the impact we are making, we can begin to feel as though we are pushing against a flood. When folks with not just the means, but the vision to see where we are trying to go, and even to help us think more ambitiously about the possibilities, shine a light on our efforts, it means more than I know how to put into words. Large change requires many components, much effort, and a multi-faceted team. Thank you Mayor Fischer,

thank you Emily and Stephen for joining our team and providing the leadership to help our efforts have a larger impact. With the support of public and private sector leaders, I do believe all of us who have been working so hard on these issues can shift the tides here and reverse the loss of literally centuries of knowledge and culture around family farming, as well as help people remember how to eat again in a way that is both healthy and sustainable.

So, I'm going to hand the microphone over here, but I need to give an introduction. I want to introduce our new partner at Grasshoppers without whom we probably wouldn't be having this event, at least, not now, and not here. When Ellen McGeeney came on at Grasshoppers the company was struggling for a couple of reasons. The business model was complicated (and still is) and very difficult to develop and operate at the same time. And the producer owners were spending most of their time. . . well. . . producing. And yet, we still had our wits about us enough to make our very best business decision to date. We hired Ellen. Ellen has a strong background in business and had done consulting and turn arounds for much larger companies than Grasshoppers. She has a Yale MBA, but such other things as she has don't come from schooling, she has great integrity and passion, and a relentlessness really not before seen in the local food business world. She could have gone on to (or gone back to) an extraordinary corporate career. Instead, she decided to go to work where her skills are much more needed. She has already rendered the local food economy an enormous service. Here she is, Ellen McGeeney.