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Taste of Place: Place-based Foods in Iowa

M02-05

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Nontechnical Summary

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During 2005, the Iowa Foodways Project: Taste of Place has researched via surveys, interviews, and photography Iowa produced foods that have a connection to place and heritage. The goals were to identify and tell the stories of at five to ten Iowa foods that met at least two of three criteria, e.g. have an ecological/geographical niche, a heritage basis, and a narrative that elucidates those connections to Iowa. Thanks to some excellent publicity from the Leopold Center, the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, Practical Farmers of Iowa, regional electric co-ops, email lists, and newspapers around the state, there was an overwhelming response about this project from all over Iowa. There have been at least 50 suggestions for Iowa place-based foods. I conducted interviews with producers and documented seven foods that meet all three criteria. Those foods include: Maytag® Blue Cheese, Maasdam's Sorghum, rhubarb wine from the Amana Colonies, Uncle Jack's Popcorn, K & K Tiny but Mighty Popcorn, western Iowa mettwurst, and Southeastern Iowa black walnuts and pawpaws. There were also several other foods that met at least two of the criteria such as lefse, flour tortillas, corn tortillas, Dutch letters, pork tenderloins, and kringle.

The intent of the project was to survey the state through a variety of methods—press releases to the media, contact with previously researched communities and individuals, online surveys, and interviews with reporters around the state. Results at different phases of the 2005 project have been presented at three national conferences and two in-state conference, as well as reported in a variety of in-state newsletters, websites, and to an ISU extension class.

Some general comments: First, there is a wealth of research that still has to be done. Second, while it was easy to find foods that met at least two of the criteria, there were few that met all three. Third, and most important, Iowa really is a state that is about food.

From the various research methods employed to do this study, I've determined that most of the foods that Iowans and others identify with Iowa fall into four categories:

- 1). those that are grown and processed here and have a heritage basis (pork tenderloins, Maasdam's sorghum syrup, rhubarb wine from the Amana Colonies, mettwurst, black walnuts, Muscatine melons, and pawpaws);

2). those that are processed here and have a heritage basis (Dutch letters, *lefse*, *kolaches*, Swedish pancakes, Norwegian *kringle*, Danish *aebleskivver*, Mexican flour and corn tortillas, and other ethnic dishes);

3). those that are grown and processed here but have no substantive heritage basis (several kinds of great salsa, cows' milk and goat milk cheese from Cresco and the Goat Sisters, Java chickens and most other heritage poultry, emerging vineyards and wineries, a variety of delicious local organic and natural dairy products—some of which is from re-emerging micro-dairies, farmed fish from western Iowa); and

4). those that are grown and processed here and that do have a heritage basis but are not necessarily produced organically or naturally—and which may, as a result, prove problematic to market without having to contend with other political and economic issues (buffalo from northwest Iowa, Amana® meats, pork tenderloins, Maidrite®, hybrid sweet corn, soy nuts, etc.).

Although visitors from Iowa and from away do search out that ubiquitous Iowa pork tenderloin or Maidrite®, the “best” sweet corn or ice cream, the “biggest” cinnamon roll or food on a stick, it is important to distinguish among those foods that really do have a taste of *Iowa* as a result of where and how they are grown as well as where and how they are processed. The ecological basis of IA place-based foods has to do with the grasses the animals eat, which effects the taste of the meat or the milk/cheese produced; the soils in which the crops grow (e.g. sorghum, Muscatine melons), the soil and climate for grapes and fruits (e.g. Hawkeye apples, rhubarb wine from the Amana Colonies), the effect of molds and humidity (Maytag® Blue Cheese), and so on. More research needs to be done as to exactly how those factors influence the taste of any one kind of food. But the where and the how become the substantive issues for growing and processing, especially given the very clear European definitions of *terroir* and *appellation*.

On the other hand, if the food comes from ingredients grown elsewhere or is so common that it doesn't really matter where it comes from (e.g. potato chips, doughnuts, hamburgers, sweet corn), it's difficult to make the claim for the food as having a taste of *Iowa*—as opposed to anywhere else—especially if the major ingredients do not necessarily come from this state. And as the various examples above demonstrate, the foods that are missing the heritage part that “tells the story,” somehow seem lacking in their pedigree. Identifying a food as “place-based” may be as deceptively simple and as inherently complex as “you know it when you see it.”

Besides those foods noted above, some examples of foods that really do fit into this category also include Muscatine's melons (see study by Sue Futrell and Craig Chaise). There are also several foods such as Hawkeye apples, Beeler's Hog Wild® pork products, Cloverleaf and Naturally Iowa® dairy products, and Radiance Dairy® milk, cream, and yogurt that may also fit into this category, but more research is needed.

Technical Report

Background and Introduction

During 2005, I conducted ethnographic research to locate and document a variety of Iowa foods and the people who produce them. The primary goal has been to identify those foods that can be distinguished as uniquely Iowan in terms of taste, heritage, and ecological niche. The objectives of the Iowa Taste of Place Project were to do research and documentation (notes, audiotape, photography) on Iowa foods that met at least two of three criteria, e.g. have an ecological/geographical niche, a heritage basis, and a narrative that elucidates those connections to Iowa. The intent was to survey the state through a variety of methods—press releases to the media, contact with previously researched communities and individuals, online surveys, and interviews with reporters around the state.

The timing for this project could not have been better. Iowa farms are disappearing at an accelerated rate; at the same time, CSAs are burgeoning along with the creation and production of artisanal foods that range from dairy products to breads, wines, meats. “Buy Fresh, Buy Local” has become a national movement.

Globally, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) has also been working to protect intangible intellectual property such as traditional knowledge and skills. According to Wend Wendland (WIPO), the Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore (the Committee) of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) “addresses three related yet distinct themes, namely IP and access to and benefit-sharing in genetic resources, the protection of traditional knowledge and the protection of expressions of folklore/traditional cultural expressions (TCEs/EoF). In this context, ‘traditional knowledge’ refers specifically and somewhat narrowly to technical knowledge and know-how concerning biodiversity, medicine, agriculture and the like. Discussions concerning genetic resources often also address the related question of ‘traditional knowledge’” (Wendland 2004). This international movement dovetails well with Leopold Center efforts to explore the potential of a geographic certification process (<http://www.wipo.int/tk/en/>) for Iowa.

Not surprisingly, the flavors of Iowa derive from a variety of regional and ethnic traditions. There are fish and shellfish supplied by the state’s rivers and lakes, the fruits, vegetables and meats supplied by our farms, and game from the flyways and woods. Different groups that made Iowa their home over the years have each added their own distinct contribution to Iowa’s cultural heritage—Meskwaki Indians, European Americans from other parts of the United States, Western Europeans (French, Germans), Northern Europeans and Scandinavians (Dutch, Norwegians, Swedes, Danes), British (England, Scotland), Irish, Southern Europeans (Greeks, Italians), African Americans, Asians (Tai Dam, Vietnamese, Hmong, Koreans, Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese, Lao, Cambodians), Asian Indians, Middle Easterners (Iraqis, Palestinians), Africans (Nuer, Dinka, Mabon, Somali, Liberians), Eastern Europeans (Czechs, Russians, Bosnians), and Latin Americans (Mexicans, Guatemalans, Nicaraguans, Puerto Ricans).

Here, as elsewhere, food is produced for and consumed at a variety of venues—community suppers, cafés, homes, churches, restaurants, farmers markets, fairs, festivals and so on. A survey

of Department of Cultural Affairs colleagues found that most folks identify pork tenderloins, Iowa chops, popcorn, pie plant (rhubarb), Muscatine melons, Red Delicious® apples, beef, and sweet corn as typical Iowa foods that provide a “taste of place.” Others suggested “finished” products like mulberry jam, apples, hot beef sandwiches (with brown gravy and mashed potatoes), Dutch letters, *kolaches*, and *kringles*. Wild asparagus and morel mushrooms are also identified with the state. Iowa food specialties do vary somewhat by region, with smoked, fried, or pickled fish available at river cafes along the Mississippi; *flaekesteg* (pork loin embedded with prunes) and *rødkal* (red cabbage) in the Danish Inn in Elk Horn; *kolaches* in Cedar Rapids, savory soups at Southeast Asian restaurants in Ames and Des Moines; Dutch marzipan-filled pastry “letters” and *stroopwafels* in Pella and Orange City; German sausage in Manning, Scavos’ and Grazianos’ Italian sausage in Des Moines; and tamales or tortillas in Des Moines, Muscatine, West Liberty, and Storm Lake.

For the most part, however, these are the kinds of foods that evoke a taste of home, of place. They are foods that we make and eat at home, in our communities and ethnic groups, and at local restaurants. But most of this kind of food is prepared by group members for group members, whether in families, in religious communities, in ethnic enclaves, or within geographical regions. Authenticity is not an issue because such food by its very definition cannot help but be authentic—even if some of the ingredients come from afar.

The culinary tourism movement has paralleled interest in locally produced foods, nostalgia about foods from childhood, and the very real and ongoing production of ethnic and regional foods for ethnic and regional markets. Of particular importance and potential benefit are the ways in which naming a behavior, which has always been part and parcel of travel, has opened up possibilities for the preservation and enjoyment of traditional foods, wherever they are found. A more populist version of this movement has come into being, thanks to Jane and Michael Stern, authors of the book, *Roadfood* and other resource books about local foods throughout the United States, numerous columns in *Gourmet*, and their “Two for the Road,” spot on American Public Radio’s “The Splendid Table.” Simply put, culinary tourism has created an increasingly popular way for people “visit” different cultures—via restaurants, food markets, food magazines and cookbooks, websites, films, and the over-the-top popularity of the Food Network. Eating, like listening to music or going to museums, provides a window into other cultures. But with food, we aren’t restricted to just listening or seeing. We can use all of our senses—and even bring home a souvenir such as a special jam, a bag of pastries, or a cookbook to recreate our travels.

What ties all these movements together with this latest take on eating as tourism is that food is not and has never been just about eating. It is about who we are—and who others are. Food tourism lets us explore the places where food is produced and experience a taste of local life—whether we grew up in the place or we’re visiting it as newcomers. Designated food heritage areas are attractive to destination travelers, stimulating business and government investments in locally grown and produced foods.

For instance, visitors and residents travel to the Amana Colonies to experience the past via the home-cooked German-style meals and fresh-baked breads and pies. Those who gain entrée into the Amana Church Society community can further experience rhubarb wine, potato dumplings,

and what I suspect may be the prototype for that all-American green bean casserole—but the cream is not from canned soup, and the string beans and the onions don't come out of a can. Throughout the spring, fall, and summer, there are food, ethnic, and regional festivals in Iowa. Travelers visit Adel, West Point, and Gladbrook for sweet corn festivals or drive over to Donnellson for Apple Daze or to Long Grove and Farmington to celebrate the strawberry crop. The Cedar Rapids' based Czech and Slovak Museum and Library's hosts Houby Days—in honor of those wonderful morel mushrooms that grow wild in Iowa in the late spring. The city's annual Mediterranean Festival, sponsored by the St. George Greek Orthodox Church, not only helps visitors to experience the music and dance of Iowa's and America's earliest Lebanese community, it also provides home-cooked, multi-course meals as well as flatbread and coffee making demonstrations and tastings.

Visitors from near and far descend upon Decorah in early July each year for Nordic Fest, which provides such Norwegian delicacies as *krumkake* (thin, rolled waffle cookies), as well as locally grown organic food at town restaurants and Scandinavian music, dance, and crafts. Locals in Story City and other towns with Norwegian populations also have lutefisk suppers, usually the week or so before Thanksgiving, to raise funds and honor their ethnic heritage.

Des Moines locals visit the Greek Food Fair (always the first weekend in June) as well as the Jewish Food Festival a few weeks before to fill up on both food and a variety of cultural offerings. And each winter for Tai Dam New Year, Chinese New Year, and Tet, the Vietnamese New Year, as well as for Lao and Cambodian New Years in mid-April, community members gather to eat huge quantities of traditional homemade dishes now made from a combination of imported and Iowa-grown ingredients. In fact, it is hard to find a Southeast Asian home, or a Latino or Bosnian one, that does not include at least a patch of land devoted to growing foods from various homelands.

Despite the variety of cultural and regional ties of many Iowa foods, however, there are next to no state-level food marketing dollars tied to promoting an area with regard to the foods produced here. The A Taste of Iowa® marketing program was the single exception. Unfortunately, that program has been defunded and no longer exists at the state level in Iowa. This leaves both a vacuum and an opportunity to develop meaningful criteria and a marketing plan for Iowa Place-Based Foods.

According to the Iowa Dept of Economic Development, Iowa leads the nation in the production of hogs, soybeans, eggs, and corn, is eighth in cattle and calves, and twelfth in milk. Unfortunately, however, most of these foods are merely produced and not finished in Iowa, depriving the state of much potential revenue. Ironically, the very demand for such one-time “authentically” place-based foods as Amana® meats and wines has resulted in the use of non-Iowa grown animals and fruit juices to meet consumer need (Andelson 2004). Rich Pirog's publication “A Geography of Place” notes the need to further “research and document Iowa's food production history of unique and highly differentiated food products, including food folklore and traditions” (2004:5). Unless more of this place-based food research is done at this time, Iowa will continue to lag behind other states in producing identifiable, geographically certifiable food products with local, regional, national, and even international appeal.

Objectives, Strategies and Methods

Objectives

1. Conduct field research including surveys and ethnographic documentation in Iowa to provide a list of five to ten place-based Iowa foods that meet certain cultural, geographic, and ecological criteria, i.e.
 - a. Ingredients must be or have been grown and/or processed in Iowa.
 - b. There must be some heritage basis for the food/crop, whether historical, ethnic, ecological, or geographic.
 - c. Given the nature of this project, the food would have some kind of "story" related to it, which would make its Iowa connection clear and *could* be used to market the food.
 - d. The food would likely meet two or more of these criteria (e.g. Muscatine melons, Hawkeye apple, Albany onion, rhubarb wine from the Amana Colonies).
2. Provide a selection of "stories" from the state's major ecological regions regarding place-based Iowa foods that have the *potential* to be used for marketing those foods and encouraging their production.

Strategies

This project involved a variety of methods over 12 months to research, document, and report on traditional, place-based foods in Iowa. Documentation has consisted of fieldnotes, audio-taped interviews, 35mm slides (archival quality), digital photography, and requisite tape and photo logs. The Regional Food Systems Working Group and many others have provided some direction regarding specific research sites/foods. I have also re-examined previous research with Iowa's early culture groups (Meskwaki, Amana Colonies, Swedish, German, Dutch, French, Danish, and Norwegian) as well as Latino, Southeast Asian, and Bosnian communities.

The first stage of my research involved consultations with project partners and Iowa ethnic organizations and museums. This was followed by a round of press releases and notifications to several listservs, and then subsequent emails and phone enquiries/responses. Media attention persisted for several months, which resulted in specific stories in Iowa agriculture-related newsletters. At the same time, I began to do some site visits and interviews. By July, I had developed two surveys, one about place-based foods in general and one specifically about recipes and related stories. The surveys were designed to target CSAs, A Taste of Iowa members, century and sesquicentennial family farmers, and farmers' market vendors as well as ethnic museums and organizations, and anyone interested in Iowa place-based foods. They were posted on the Iowa Arts Council's website

(www.iowaartscouncil.org/press_room/announcements/finding-iowas-food-stories.shtml) and noted as hotlinks in press releases and articles on the Leopold Center's website (www.leopold.iastate.edu/news/newsreleases/2005/food2_081805.htm), in the Practical Farmers of Iowa Summer Newsletter (www.practicalfarmers.org/news_details.asp?I=58), Farm News, Iowa Environmental Council, (<http://iaenvironment.org/Archives/documents/IECNB08-2005.pdf>), and Ag Online (http://64.233.179.104/search?q=cache:tOdvlsaG_1wJ:iaenvironment.org/Archives/documents/IECNB08-2005.pdf+%22riki+saltzman%22+food&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=34). The outreach through press releases (www.culturalaffairs.org/media/dca_press_releases/2005/finding-iowas-food-stories.htm), Trees Forever www.treesforever.org/content.asp?ID=2088&I=3791, as well

as the Midland Power Co-op,
(www.midlandpower.com/asp/scnewsletter/SCNewsletter.aspx?CampaignID=31&NewsID=587, The Hawk Eye http://64.233.179.104/search?q=cache:wGJZm-DNzQJ:www.thehawkeye.com/weekly/stories/fi7_0821.html+%22riki+saltzman%22+food&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=29, Butler County REC <http://64.233.179.104/search?q=cache:k8OclSkHRagJ:www.butlerrec.com/asp/News/Default.aspx%3FNewsID%3D587+%22riki+saltzman%22+food&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=45>, Prairie Energy <http://64.233.179.104/search?q=cache:hSZdxOqLYUMJ:www.prairieenergy.com/asp/News/Default.aspx%3FNewsID%3D587+%22riki+saltzman%22+food&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=46>).

Although very few individuals filled out the actual surveys (three did the survey and five submitted recipes), which turned out to be much too detailed for online surveys, a large number of people contacted me as a result of this outreach. And again, the very few survey results noted the importance of Iowa pork, muskmelons (sic), sweet corn, tomatoes, morels, apples, and rhubarb as place-based Iowa foods. I used those contacts combined with further fieldwork with local producers and cultural representatives to gain some perspective on some already known products (e.g. Stanhope meat locker beef jerky, Scavos' sausage, Amana Colonies-grown vegetables (e.g. the Amana Colonies radish, Amana Colonies string bean, celeriac, egg lettuce, Ebenezer onion, and ground cherries [tomato]), popcorn, sweet corn, and the organic vegetables and herbs produced by Hmong truck farmers in the greater Des Moines area. As a result of all the outreach, I was able to identify several place-based foods to target. I spent the remainder of the project research time documenting those foods and their cultural, economic, and ecological relationships. I also gave several public presentations about the project (in state and out of state), wrote an article for PFI, and responded to requests for media interviews. Those public presentations, as well as the media reports, provided still further contacts and suggestions for place-based foods in Iowa.

Discussion

As has been noted, the excellent publicity from the Leopold Center, the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, Practical Farmers of Iowa, regional electric co-ops, email lists, and newspapers around the state resulted in an overwhelming response about this project from all over Iowa. There are more leads than I have been able to follow up for potential place-based foods. I received emails and phone calls from 50-100 individuals—some of whom I have known from previous research but most new contacts as a result of this project. I have exchanged emails and or phone calls to obtain more information from all of them people. While most of those have consisted of informing me about one or two foods that “should” be included in the list of Iowa place-based foods (e.g. Muscatine melons, sweet corn, Maidrite®, popcorn, buffalo, wine, brats, pork tenderloins, morels, rhubarb, lefse, etc.), a few have resulted in more extensive phone interviews (pork tenderloins, Nieman Ranch® pork, hogs in general, cheese, sorghum syrup, food festivals, K & K popcorn, wine, buffalo, general information about a region of Iowa, historic recipes, ethnic recipes, and so on), and some of those have led to in-person, on-site interviews.

Some of the more useful of the phone interviews and preliminary meetings were with Eli Bergmeier (Viticulture Technician, Golden Hills RC&D), Glenn Downs (Sand Hill Preservation Center, heirloom fowl), Jennifer Kramer (Maasdam Sorghum), Nelda Christian (Iowa Pork Producers, Iowa Pork Tenderloin Contest), Jan Libbey (CSA and Eat Wright, County), Gary Schoening (mettwurst, Mineola), Eldon Everhart (Commercial Horticulture Field Specialist, ISU Extension, leads on food production in other heirloom poultry), Gene Mealhow (K&K Tiny But Mighty Popcorn), and Sue Futrell (One Backyard, food marketing specialist, Muscatine melon study). Those talks led to several on-site interviews including ones to do with mettwurst (cold-smoked Platte German pork sausage) production in Southwest Iowa, Maytag® Blue Cheese in Newton; the Suburban Restaurant in Gilbert, the 2004 best pork tenderloin winner just north of Ames; a hog breeding facility in Goldfield; pawpaw and black walnut growing at Red Fern Farms in Wapello; Nieman Ranch® pork in Thornton; dairy products from Fairfield’s Radiance Dairy; apple fritters with Red Delicious® apples in Winterset; and Maasdam’s sorghum in Lynnville.

Since foods at festivals were also the target of this project, I documented the Adel Sweet Corn Festival, Winterset’s Bridges Festival, Wright County’s Eat Wright Festival (I also advised on and assisted with the food demonstrations for this event, which also received Iowa Arts Council grant funding), and some of the food contests at the State Fair (I also served as a judge for products from heirloom fruits and vegetables). Beyond the food expected at the food festivals (e.g. corn), there were a variety of wonderful looking homemade pies for sale, kettle corn, pork tenderloins, brats, local ice cream, and the like. As well, I interviewed participants about food at several ethnic events such as Des Moines’s Tai Dam New Year, Vietnamese Tet, Chinese New Year, and Lao New Year; Sioux City’s Cinco de Mayo; and Waterloo’s Bosnian Festival.

At the end stage in the research, I had planned to do further interviews with producers in Northwest Iowa (buffalo), in northeast Iowa (cheese, chickens, lefse), Crimson Sweet watermelon, and with rhubarb wine makers in the Amana colonies. Unfortunately, there was not much information to be had about buffalo in northwest Iowa and I was not able to pursue the

watermelon research. According to Glenn Downs, there is not much call to emphasize place-based for Iowa heirloom poultry, though there is evidence to support this movement for the sake of species diversity as well as organic and/or natural production). Downs has found that while there is a significant taste difference in fowls raised organically and/or naturally versus those raised conventionally, there is not a significant difference among heirloom breeds themselves. I also tried several times to follow-up with Tim Beeler of Beeler's HogWild® pork products, but had no luck. I did give a presentation at the Leopold Center Symposium in December 2005, reporting on many of these findings as well as another in January 2006 to colleagues at the Department of Cultural Affairs. The former event put me in touch with goat and lamb farmers that cater to ethnic (Latino and Bosnian) markets in central and eastern Iowa; I've begun to follow up on that information. My presentation to DCA colleagues netted me the suggestion for K&K Tiny But Mighty Popcorn®, which turned into a recent and promising telephone interview.

From the various research methods employed to do this study, I've determined that most of the foods that Iowans and others identify with Iowa fall into four categories:

- 1). those that are grown and processed here and have a heritage basis (Muscatine melons, pork tenderloins, Maasdam's sorghum syrup, K & K Tiny But Mighty Popcorn, Uncle Jack's Popcorn, rhubarb wine from the Amana Colonies, mettwurst, black walnuts, and pawpaws, popcorn from northern and eastern Iowa);
- 2). those that are processed here and have a heritage basis but no or little ecological connection to Iowa (Dutch letters, *lefse*, *kolaches*, Swedish pancakes, *kringle*, *aebleskivver*, and other ethnic dishes);
- 3). those that are grown and processed here but have no substantive heritage basis (several kinds of great salsa, Nieman Ranch® pork, cheeses from Cresco and the Goat Sisters, Java chickens and most other heritage poultry, emerging vineyards and wineries, a variety of delicious local organic and natural dairy products—some of which is from re-emerging micro-dairies, farmed fish from western Iowa. There is some promise in the realm of goat and lamb production in central, eastern and western Iowa for Latino, Middle Eastern, and Bosnian markets, but there is probably not enough time depth to really call this place-based yet.); and
- 4). those that are grown and processed here and that do have a heritage basis but are not necessarily produced organically, naturally, or sustainably—and which may, as a result, prove problematic to market without having to contend with other political and economic issues (buffalo from northwest Iowa, Amana® meats, pork tenderloins in general (breaded, battered, and dipped), Maidrite®, hybrid sweet corn, soy nuts, etc.).

Although visitors from Iowa and from away do search out that ubiquitous Iowa pork tenderloin, however it is prepared, or Maidrite®, the “best” sweet corn or ice cream, the “biggest” cinnamon roll or food on a stick, it is important to distinguish among those foods that really do have a taste of *Iowa* as a result of where and how they are grown as well as where and how they are processed. The where and the how become the substantive issues for both, especially given the very clear European definitions of *terroir* and *appellation*. If the food comes from ingredients grown elsewhere or is so common that it doesn't really matter where it comes from (e.g. potato chips, doughnuts, hamburgers, sweet corn), it's difficult to make the claim for the food as having a taste of *Iowa*—as opposed to a taste of anywhere else—especially if the major ingredients do not necessarily come from this state. An exception may be Dutch letters, which are apparently

not produced anywhere but in Holland at Christmas time and in Pella and Orange City, Iowa (Millie Rahn, Heritage Partnerships/New England, email communication). As the various examples above demonstrate, the foods that are missing the heritage part that “tells the story,” somehow seem lacking in their pedigree. Identifying a food as “place-based” may be as deceptively simple and as inherently complex as “you know it when you see it.”

Some examples of foods that really do fit into this category are Maytag® Blue Cheese, Maasdam’s sorghum® (syrup), Amana Colonies' rhubarb wine (two wineries), Mineola’s mettwurst, black walnuts, pawpaws, K & K Tiny But Mighty Popcorn®, and Uncle Jack’s Popcorn®. Sue Futrell and Craig Chase have already extensively documented Muscatine melons (report on LC website), which also meet all three criteria. As I’ve noted earlier, I suspect that Hawkeye apples, pawpaws, Beeler’s pork, and a few others will also fit into this category, but a bit more research needs to be done on those foods as well as on the sausages (Dobbersteins and Mike’s Wieners) produced by the Skoglund Meat & Locker in West Bend, Iowa.

DATA

Following are several “stories” about those Iowa place-based foods that fit all three criteria, as set out, and also do or could meet sustainable agriculture requirements. There are also several foods that meet two of the criteria (heritage base and good story) that could well fit into a variety of culinary tourism ventures (e.g. pork tenderloins at local restaurants from around the state, Czech foods and events around Cedar Rapids; Swedish foods and the annual events with foods at Swedesburg; Dutch foods such as Dutch letters, ring bologna, and the like from Pella and Orange City; Norwegian foods such as lefse and kringle and community events in Story City, Bode, and Decorah; and a variety of sweet corn festivals).

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The relationship between ISU and Maytag® Blue Cheese is probably the best known of Iowa’s food stories. But what most people probably do not know is that the company made a decision some years ago not to expand their herd into what would have become a factory farm. Instead they opted to buy their milk from local Newton small dairy farms. Maytag® Dairy Farms also do not advertise (though they do now have a website); word (and taste) of their blue cheese were spread via the Maytag® appliance company’s sales force in the 1940s and 1950s. Brought into Newton for training, the sales people were taken on local tours. They tasted the cheese, bought it, and took it home—and thus around the country. The result of these two situations was a business that truly supports the “buy local” philosophy and creates an artisanal, internationally award winning cheese.

Myrna Ver Ploeg, the President of Maytag Dairy Farms, started working for the family-owned business several years ago. She personally tastes all the cheese produced at Maytag, and that means trying twenty wheels of blue cheese a day. Maytag’s blue cheese is produced in small batches by a master cheese maker, who, like Myrna, tastes every wheel every day. In keeping with their philosophy of keeping the business small and human, Maytag also favors selling its cheese to cheese shops and small restaurants that feature the Maytag name on their menu. Myrna refers to herself as the “cheese czar” who decides who gets the cheese and who doesn’t when demand outruns supplies.

Another little-known fact to industry outsiders—cheese, like wine, can vary in flavor, mouth feel, and texture—hence the need for tasters. This can occur naturally, due to a number of factors. And different variations are used for different products. Cheese crumbles, for instance, come from less creamy wheels. But only the standard tasting cheese gets shipped out to supermarkets and other bulk retailers. If a regular customer likes her cheese a little stronger, a little milder, or a little creamier than the standard that goes on the supermarket shelves, however, then Myrna will try to provide it from the stock that is set aside.

The Maytag family farm started in the dearlly 1900s. The original house, where the herdsmen stayed, is still there, as are the three old barns on the property. Today, Maytag family members still stay in the house when they visit, and they remain active in the company's management. Family members are very conscious that this is grandpa's farm and part of their family heritage. They have truly emphasized their role as land stewards and try to create a quality product with a good quality of life for their workers. In fact, there are workers in this company that have been with Maytag for as long as 31 years. Benefits are high, and workers' children and local Newton residents often take on part-time employment during the heavy seasonal business in November and December.

When the dairy farm started out, it was run by E. H. Maytag, who, as Myrna explains, loved cows and quiet. It was his father who started the appliance business, which has no corporate relationship to the cheese company. Before E.H., there was no safe milk available in Newton for the family and appliance workers. So the Maytag dairy became the supplier and established its herd of award-winning Holsteins in 1919.

Fred Maytag inherited the dairy farm from his father in 1940, and, after traveling to Europe, became fascinated with cheeses. Fred, who wanted to make a fine cheese, approached Iowa State University food chemists, who'd been working on creating Roquefort cheese (traditionally made from sheep's' milk) from cows' milk. Fred offered to build the cheese plant and to pay royalties to ISU in return for the opportunity to create a new American blue cheese. And in 1941, as the company website notes, Maytag "began producing its world famous blue cheese in the heartland of America, with milk from a prize-winning herd of Holstein cattle."

The business developed from there, with no advertising or sales force—just the good word-of-mouth publicity from the Maytag appliance company sales force. An expansion in the 1970s was the only change in the company until ten years ago. At that time, Maytag had to make a decision—expand the dairy herd to what would amount to factory farm size, with the resultant expansion in farm workforce or, focus on the cheese making and acquire the milk from elsewhere. Not desiring to compete with local Newton dairies, the company made the decision to sell off the herd and just make their award winning cheese.

Maytag blue cheese starts out as whole, raw milk from a mixture of Guernsey and Holstein cows, which live on six neighboring dairy farms in Newton, Iowa. Maytag trucks go out twice a day to pick up the milk, which, as Myrna notes, can vary in consistency with the seasons. In the winter, the cows eat mostly feed, while in the summer they eat grasses. The milk's consistency determines the quality of the curd.

Once the milk is delivered to the cheese plant, the cheese maker mixes it with rennet, which produces curds and whey. The whey is poured off, and the curds hand scooped into metal hoops. The fresh wheels of cheese are placed onto a drying table to expel any further liquid, and each wheel is hand turned to provide consistency in taste and texture. Workers pull off the hoop the following day and place the cheese wheels in caves dug into the hillsides of Newton. There, the cheese is exposed to high humidity and cool temperatures.

Maytag blue ages for four to six months. Each box is checked individually to make sure that the cheese hasn't either aged too quickly or too slowly. The consequence of the former is broken down proteins resulting in a too soft cheese; the latter creates a cheese that is not creamy enough.

The cheese maker hand salts each wheel of cheese, rolling the wheels by hand in the salt and then hand waxing each one. Packaging, like cheese production, is done by hand, and 26 local women crack and scrape the wax from the big cheese wheels, removing extra butterfat, and then cutting and wrapping wheels or wedges by hand. Wheels and wedges are cooled and stored in carefully controlled refrigeration units.

Maytag Dairy Farms is currently undergoing a controlled expansion. The last one was in the early 1970s. General wear and tear has dictated the need for a more convenient work space for office and cheese plant workers. But the business is still small and quite committed to remaining small. At this point, there are plans to start an on-line ordering business, but at present, the only way to get Maytag Blue Cheese, and other tasty varieties (swiss and cheddar) produced by small, locally-owned dairies in Iowa and nearby Wisconsin, is to visit your local store, fill out an order form, or give Myrna a call.

Maasdam Sorghum Mills (sorghum syrup)

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The Maasdam family has been producing dark, fragrant, and healthful sorghum syrup since 1926. Now in its seventh generation, the family grows sweet sorghum on the family farm in Lynnville. They also press the cane and bottle the syrup under their own and several other labels. Currently involved in the business are Jennifer Kramer, whose young sons (the seventh generation) help out a bit, and her husband, John, father-in-law and mother-in-law, Charles and Marge Kramer, along with Marge's nephew Craig Maasdam. The family members operate the cane-powered furnace, steam engine, presses, and filtration system created by Marge's father, L.J. Maasdam.

One of the only surviving sorghum mills in Iowa, the Maasdam operation started at a time when many more Iowa farmers made syrup from home-grown cane for home use. A few other mills do exist northeast of Pella, in Kalona (Kaufmans), south of Knoxville, and perhaps in Bloomfield. Though family members made sorghum on and off for their own use prior to 1926, it was then that L.J. Maasdam, Marge's father, officially started the business. According to Marge Kramer, as far as she knows, her family's "S" corporation currently has the largest number of acres of sorghum grown in the United States.

Born in 1904, Leonard Maasdam, whose family was of Dutch heritage and settled around Pella, home to one of Iowa's earliest settlements (1847), spoke Dutch as his first language. His father, Leendert "Lane" Maasdam, had a farm in rural Lynnville, roughly 60 miles from Des Moines. Lane purchased a used cane mill in 1925 so the family could grind their own sorghum for syrup and not have to rely on that produced by their neighbors, also of Dutch background. According to the family story, Leonard, who was quite the mechanical genius who loved sorghum, fell ill in the fall of 1925 with measles. The illness eventually passed, and the family got back to producing sorghum, even tripling their output, thanks to some adjustments that Leonard made on the machinery, when he fell ill again, this time from what they reported as inflammatory rheumatism. Bedridden for much of the time between 1926 and 1928, he spent much of his time pondering the sorghum business. In 1928, the family bought a larger mill from Missouri, tore it down, and moved some pieces by truck and the rest, piece by piece, by train. Up until 1945, when Leonard installed a steam engine, the family used horses to operate the mill.

With the beginning of the Depression, the market for sorghum was good. A cheap and locally available sweetener, sorghum was also high in iron and potassium. Available throughout the Midwest up until the 1950s and 1960s, sorghum sold at \$.60 - \$.90 a gallon—a good money maker compared to corn at \$.10 a bushel and hogs at \$.02 - \$.03 per pound (Kramer 1996:18). Leonard began peddling his sorghum door to door, giving tastes and building confidence in his product. Today, the family markets its sorghum under the Maasdam label as well as several others, including House of Webster, Midwestern Meats, and Rogers. Most of their business is

wholesale and goes to Dahls, HyVee, Fareway, Campbells, Heart of Iowa, and Iowa Orchard in Iowa and as far afield as Arkansas, Missouri, Wisconsin, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Arizona.

The busy time of year for Maasdam-Kramers is the fall. “The steam engine is running and alive in September,” says Marge. “It’s like a junk yard come to life.” The noise of the machinery is so loud that the family has long used steam whistles to call for the mill operator, steam operator, and cook (furnace operator).

Sweet sorghum is planted in the spring, like most grasses, and is harvested in the late summer and early fall, usually in September. For about three to four weeks, work in the mill is nearly nonstop, and the family hires ten to twelve employees (mostly local retired people) to fill syrup jars. Marge and Charles Kramer, their son, John, and daughter-in-law, Jennifer, and their nephew Craig Maasdam are all busy in the mill. Everyone has a job to do, but they all know about other jobs as well, from loading and feeding in the cane, stoking the boiler, making sure that the machinery is operating smoothly, boiling, skimming, and straining the cane juice, filtering it several times, to finally bottling and sealing it for shipping. Each batch of sorghum takes about two hours and produces 60 gallons of syrup from 600 gallons of juice.

In 1970, the family started having field days for school children and their families. People come out to the farm, see where the cane is grown, how the mill works, and get to taste the syrup. They can also purchase sorghum suckers, jars of sorghum to take home, and sorghum cookbooks. Marge also gives samples and sells sorghum while a local cook demonstrates sorghum recipes at the Old Threshers Reunion in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa.

Unlike molasses (made from sugar cane and dependent on near slave labor conditions and resource depleting growing conditions in south Florida and elsewhere), sorghum is not a by-product of cane sugar manufacturing; it is *the* product from sorghum cane, does not need to be refrigerated, and contains high levels of iron, calcium, and potassium as well as antioxidants. Sorghum syrup can be substituted for molasses and corn syrup in all recipes as well as for sugar in many others (with some allowance made for reducing liquid in other ingredients).

Although the Maasdam farm is not an organic one, their management of the crop is close to sustainable. Family farm workers do apply minimal atrazine as an herbicide, but they are open to other methods that might make their operation eligible for organic certification. They use no fumigants or chemicals in the processing of the syrup, and the boilers that power the engines are fueled by sorghum cane stalks—making their operation remarkably efficient. The Maasdam-Kramer family also saves much of the sweet sorghum seed that they plant each year; that seed originally came from Waconia farm and mill near Cedar Rapids, which made sorghum from the 1930s through the mid-1970s. While they do have experimental plots of new seed each year (currently, Keller), the bulk of the crop is from that saved seed, which differs from varieties planted in southern states. According to Charles Kramer, the family currently plants three different varieties: Waconia (at least since 1963), Simon (since 1995 or so), and Mississippi (since 1970 or 1975).

Challenges that the business faces, according to Marge Kramer, are marketing and education. Those who are not privy to the delights of sorghum do not know that sorghum is not molasses. Their main competition is, in fact molasses, and not corn syrup. Molasses is stronger in taste than and not as sweet as sorghum, and neither molasses nor corn syrup has anywhere near the level of nutrients found in sorghum.

rhubarb wine from the Amana Colonies

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Though I did not get the opportunity to interview the wine makers in the Amana Colonies, I did have several conversations with Amana Arts Guild president, Gordon Kellenberger, about the traditional foods of the Amana Colonies. And I was able to taste both the sweet and dry varieties of rhubarb wine at the Amana Arts Guild's annual harvest supper. Gordon himself, and many others in the Amana Colonies do grow their own rhubarb and use it in pies as well as in drinks, soft and wine. In fact, Kellenberger thinks there is great potential for creating a rhubarb soda, given the popularity of the flavor in baked goods.

The Community of True Inspiration, a German Lutheran sect founded in 1741 by Christian Metz, came to Iowa from Buffalo, NY in the 1854 and established the Amana Colonies. A community devoted to communal living and worship, the members of the group settled in several groups just southwest of Cedar Rapids. They lived in communal houses, worked in communal kitchens, ate in communal dining houses, worked in communal gardens, and produced a variety of products from communal businesses, from wineries to rug weavers. Each family worked in the vineyard and all contributed grapes for the annual harvest. Each adult received an allotment of wine each year. Besides Concord grape wine, the Colonies produced rhubarb wine, the original and traditional wines produced in Amana Colonies. This continued until 1919, when Prohibition necessitated the destruction of over 19,000 gallons of wine.

In 1934, however, Congress repealed Prohibition and commercial wine production began again. The separation of business and church affairs in 1932, which dissolved the Amana Colonies' communal system of business ownership, further laid the groundwork for the establishment of new businesses. More recently, visitors to Iowa's number one tourist attraction has contributed to the expansion and re-establishment of wineries in the Amana Colonies..

The Amana Colonies produce a couple of varieties of rhubarb wine from locally grown rhubarb. There is a sweet dessert one, more typical of nineteenth-century German wines and homemade American wines. There is also a lesser known but potentially marketable dry rhubarb wine, which goes well with mild to medium cheeses. In fact, this could be a good marketing angle, especially given the current interest in food and wine pairings and in sweeter wines.

Rhubarb wine, known colloquially as *piestengel* (pieplant), is one of two original Amana Colonies' wines (along with Concord grape wine) and is actually produced from local rhubarb, as opposed to from commercially purchased juices. While the dry wine is not as easy to find as the sweet, it is both a part of the Amana Colonies' (and thus Iowa's) story and heritage, and might find a common and broader niche market with specialty wines like ice wine and aperitifs. It is currently being produced by Ehrle Brothers (re-established 1934) and Ackerman's wineries (re-established 1956).

According to the Stephen Reiss's "The Wine Road-Iowa" (5/18/05, <http://blog.wineeducation.com/2005/05/wine-road-iowa.html>), "rhubarb and Dandelion wines are the exception [to wines made from outsourced juices]. With a long tradition of making these wines at home, the wineries of Amana have carved out a niche, no matter how unusual it may be. These wines were actually fun, and differed from winery to winery."

Mettwurst, Mineola and NW Iowa

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http://remseniowa.net/Remsen_Processing_Center/Remsen_Processing_Center.html

Among the many sausages produced in the Midwest and in Iowa is *mettwurst*. This is a cold-smoked ring sausage, similar in texture to bratwurst but made in a bigger casing and produced by several small communities of Platte German (Schleswig-Holstein), Dutch, and Luxembourg heritage in southwest Iowa and northwest, Iowa. Typically made in midwinter (the traditional time to slaughter hogs, due to the cold weather and lack of other high intensity farm duties), the sausage is ground, mixed with spices, and then smoked at 70 degrees F for three hours. Although Germans (and likely Dutch and Luxembourgois) in Europe eat the sausage without further cooking, those Mineola community members of Platte German descent do boil or grill the sausage after smoking to make sure that all bacteria are killed.

Gary Schoening, whose Platte German community of Mineola in western Iowa celebrated its 125th anniversary in 2005, told me that his community commemorates its annual founders day with the local production of mettwurst—not bratwurst, which are not part of the community’s heritage. Several families, including Schoening’s, continue to make their own recipe for home or church-consumption only, since the cold-smoked process is not a legal or commercially-sanctioned method.

Schoening’s family came to Iowa from Schleswig-Holstein in 1858 with thirty other families. Fleeing the Prussian take-over of their homeland in 1848, many residents of the region settled in first in Davenport area and then made their way west to southwest Iowa. Schoening’s father, like his father before him, farmed 220 acres and raised hogs, corn, and soy. Ormand, Gary’s father, also made about 300-400 lbs of mettwurst a year for family consumption as well as for peddling to friends and local bars. During the 1980s Farm Crisis, Gary along with a neighbor and a cousin

considered taking over and starting a sausage business, but they ended up buying and running a doughnut shop instead.

St. John's Lutheran Church in Mineola has long had an annual mid-February church supper that features boiled or grilled mettwurst as well as homemade sauerkraut, green beans, rye bread, fried potatoes, and banana cream pie. Each year they make and sell over 1200 lbs of sausage to church members and neighbors. People eat the sausage on the spot and buy extra to take home to mix with meatballs (for spaghetti), in spaghetti sauce, or on pizza--or to eat grilled or boiled. Since mettwurst is made only once a year, community members buy it up as soon as it goes on sale.

Gary Schoening related that while few families in southwest Iowa are making the sausage today, when he was a child and a young adult, most families had their own recipe, which some kept as a family secret. Different families used slightly different spices or different cuts of pork. Gary's family always included Boston butts or pork shoulder in the mixture, but in his opinion, it was the two hams from a hog his uncle would butcher that extra flavor to the sausage along with the addition of brown sugar, sage, salt, pepper, and some secret spices. When Gary's daughter was young, he would make mettwurst with her. And later, when Gary was busy with the bakery and other jobs, one of his nieces from San Diego returned to learn how to make mettwurst the traditional, family way.

Everyone in the Schoening family was involved in making mettwurst. When Gary's daughter was young, he would make mettwurst with her. And later, when Gary was busy with the bakery and other jobs, one of his nieces from San Diego returned to learn how to make mettwurst the traditional, family way. But when Gary was younger, his father, Ormand, was in charge of the seasoning, while Gary and his brother-in-law did the deboning. There was a designated sausage stuffer, hand meat grinder, and mixer. Gary's mother guided the casings during the stuffing process and also tied them off. The latter was the worst job, due to the danger of cut fingers.

Once the sausage was prepared, family members would make a fire in the smoke houses (small wooden buildings once found on every farm). Beds of coals were laid and wet logs gradually added to produce a lot of smoke and not much heat. But air temperatures were generally at least as low as 38-40 degrees Fahrenheit, so spoilage was not likely.

Besides the annual church supper in Mineola, mettwurst can be found at lockers in northwest Iowa. Since these lockers do produce and sell mettwurst, someone has apparently reconciled a legal way to prepare this savory meat. Given that more than 50% of Iowans (and Americans) have some degree of German heritage, there might be a market for this specialty sausage that uses Iowa pork and has been made traditionally for many generations—and in a way that is demonstrably German-American/Iowan, Dutch-Iowan, or Luxembourgian-Iowan.

Lockers where mettwurst is prepared and sold include the Lyon County Locker in Rock Rapids in Iowa's northwest corner. This locker also makes ring bologna, a Dutch specialty, and sells organic pork.

The Remsen Processing Center in Remsen, Iowa also makes and sells mettwurst as well as other ethnic German and Luxembourg foods. According to the Remsen Processing Center website, Incorporated in 1889, Remsen was settled by Luxembourg immigrants who fled their homeland to escape religious persecution, Prussian military conscription and economic problems. "A little bit of Luxembourg is still evident at mealtime in some Remsen homes. Treipen, blood sausage, Luxembourg apple cake, and Luxembourg Quetchen Fluet (Plum Pie), and many other foods from the 'Old Country'" are still served on occasion. Each year the [Remsen Oktoberfest](#) celebrates Remsen's Heritage with a fine fare of Luxembourger food and "Old Country" entertainment and celebration" (http://remseniowa.net/general_information.html).

Grandpa Jack's Popcorn
Steve McLaughlin
McLaughlin Brothers
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Grandpa Jack's popcorn from Belmond in north central Iowa involves at least a 4th generation and possibly heirloom 3-color corn variety. Steve McLaughlin told me that his father and his grandfather before him would gift newly married children with one ear each of brown, white and red popcorn. Although Steve, like his father and grandfather, grew up on a farm, he now runs a successful small town car dealership and can't really afford to retire just yet to grow popcorn. According to Steve, Grandpa Jack's popcorn is smaller than and not quite as fluffy as the leading national brand, but it is certainly much tastier!

Jack McLaughlin grew up in Cummings, south of Des Moines. His family moved to Belmond around 1922, moving their livestock and equipment by train. One of eleven children (seven boys and four girls), Steve's family "ate popcorn all the time." He remembers that after the supper dishes were done, they would pop corn in the old dishpan, talk and read the Sears catalogue. His childhood memories are idyllic. The family grew all their own food, from potatoes to watermelon. They hunted every fall and raised cattle as well as hogs, chickens, and a large variety of vegetables, including onions, carrots, beets, several kinds of potatoes, radishes, cabbages, and pumpkins. Steve also remembers going to town to get locally made ice cream at the creamery where his family sold its milk.

After Steve grew up and his father grew too old to plant the family popcorn seed, Steve started growing it himself in order to supply family members-and to gift the newly weds. Eight or nine years ago, after not planting it for nearly two decades, he found some old seed and planted a couple of rows. The corn grew, and he and his wife harvested 15 gallons. His children loved the popcorn and asked him to plant more the next year. He did and produced 40 gallons and gave each child a five-gallon pail of shelled corn. One of his sons suggested trying to microwave the popcorn and did some research on packaging. Snappy Popcorn in Breda packaged the corn, which is named for Steve's grandfather, and produced 1000 custom bags from 45 gallons of corn. It was so good that McLaughlin's grown children and his grandchildren all wanted some. Three years ago, his son set out to market 10,000 bags, produced from 3500 lbs. of corn. They sold out at \$1.50 a bag.

Like K&K Tiny But Might Popcorn, Grandpa Jack's comes from small kernels that produce small but tasty popcorn. According to McLaughlin, popcorn loses its flavor when the seeds get too big. His corn has been cross-pollinated and not kept separate by color, so each ear has some of each color of corn. McLaughlin's challenge today is to find someone with the equipment to plant and harvest the corn, since he is too busy with his car dealership to devote himself to farming again.

Pawpaws and Black Walnuts

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Nut tree farmer and contact for the Southeast Iowa Nut Growers (S.I.N.G), Tom Wahl of Red Fern Farm, thinks there is a definite future in growing naturally certified chestnuts and paw paws, as well as black walnuts and heart nuts, a fast growing tree that produces a mild, sweet-flavored nut in a heart –shaped shell. Unlike walnuts, heart nuts can be easily extracted whole, and there is a huge market for this nut just because of its looks.

Chinese chestnuts are an extremely viable crop for Iowa: they grow well and quickly here, require no investment in expensive agricultural machinery, do not cause soil erosion, and have a proven demand as a specialty crop. But Italy dominates the marketplace for a nut that brings an average wholesale price of \$4 per pound. USDA records show that the United States imports 41 million pounds of chestnuts and produces only half a million. According to Wahl, chestnuts are the third most popular nut worldwide, after peanuts and coconuts.

But of greater interest for this project is Wahl's work and background with pawpaw trees. Although Wahl didn't have much in the way of family stories about pawpaws, as a boy, he did stumble across pawpaw patches along waterways in southeastern Iowa. A member of the custard apple family, pawpaws are also known as the Midwest banana. The trees, which are native to Iowa, are a hardy species, but the rich fruit, which ripens from early September through mid-October, is soft, does not ship well, and is loaded with seeds. On a more positive note, pawpaw pulp does freeze well and is great in pies, jams, custards, and cakes as well as in ice cream. Wahl reports that an upscale restaurant in Tennessee sells pawpaw ice cream for \$10 a gallon. And white tablecloth restaurants in Iowa City stand in line to get all the paw paws he can produce. Of even greater importance, however, says Wahl, are pawpaws potential for treating head lice and cancer, for which research is ongoing at Perdue University. The University of Kentucky has done more extensive research on pawpaw production (<http://www.pawpaw.kysu.edu/>), but there is every reason to think that further cultivation of the trees could result in a very lucrative niche market for southern Iowa.

Black walnuts are also native to Iowa, as well as to other states. While they are difficult and labor intensive to harvest, there are several roasted and candied nut small businesses that would buy Iowa-grown black walnuts if they could find them. These businesses are most often found as concessions in various county and local fair and festivals. I ran into the same ones at the Adel Sweet Corn Festival and Madison County's Covered Bridges Festival. Again, these nuts are require a certain amount of labor to harvest and shell, but the trees can withstand hard freezes and the nuts are tasty and favored by many Iowans for baking, as evidence by a host of recipe books.

K&K Tiny But Mighty Popcorn, Shellsburg

Gene Mealhow

K&K Tiny but Mighty Popcorn

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Gene and Lynn Mealhow, and their sons, have been producing K&K Tiny But Mighty Popcorn ® since the late 1990s. A farmer and soil consultant by profession, and a consultant for USDA organic certification, Gene comes from a farm family. He bought the business from Richard Kelty, whose family had farmed in Shellsburg, IA for several generations. In fact, Kelty had first called upon Gene to consult with him as to how to increase his popcorn yield.

According to Gene, who consulted with experts from around the United States, the tiny K&K kernel is most likely a variety of flint corn. The Kelty and Kramer families either found it growing here in Iowa when they settled here in the 1850s or they traded for it with local Indians, who had probably gotten it from western tribes. What makes this corn unique, besides its tiny kernels and disappearing hulls, is that it is open pollinated. A 128-day corn, K&K is also difficult to raise, process, and keep its integrity.

Gene's first reaction when he encountered the corn was "What in the world is this stuff?" He consulted with a seed salesman from Idaho, who said it was one of the rare varieties of popcorn that the big guys in the business do not want anything to do with. According to Gene, it has different gene expressions and is hard to breed; the seed salesman thought it would crossbreed with only one of his old varieties of seed. When Gene had it tested, the results indicated that it had the lowest GMO content of any popcorn currently being grown. Several consultants have told him that all the old open pollinated varieties came from original Indian seed corn.

According to Richard Kelty, original owner of K&K Popcorn, his great, great, great-grandfather, Samuel Kelty, settled just northwest of what is now Cedar Rapids in the 1850s. While no one in his family knows exactly where the seed came from, they believe it came from Indian neighbors. As the story goes, a returning career army family member found a fruit jar of it on a shelf in the mid-1970s. He planted some and popped the rest—and a new business was born.

Mealhow, who has worked in a variety of agriculture-related businesses, is fascinated by his unique and tasty popcorn. When his father and uncle got out of agriculture, Gene got back into farming. In the 1980s, he started to look at the whole picture involving groundwater and chemicals, and decided to go organic. That business failed and he began work for a soil consultancy company, which advised farmers about soil nutrients, seed selection, and the like. One of Gene's first customers in the early 1990s was Richard Kelty, who brought Mealhow in to cut his throwaway and increase his yield. The popcorn stalks were falling down and producing only 600 lbs per acre, which was not commercially viable.

As Gene tells it, in the very first year, Kelty's corn crop "went nuts." Yield went to 1000 lbs, per acre and he cut the throwaway by 10%. One of the early challenges was getting three-inch long ears to fill to the tip. Gene notes that it was "totally fun to work with Richard." The two changed something each year—upped population, planted deeper, selected for certain traits, and planted different seeds. After five or six years of this, Kelty told Mealhow, who had come up to do a fertilizer order, that he wanted to sell his popcorn business after another year. Gene tried to discourage him—after all, Kelty was the oldest son of more than three generations of farmers. But his sons didn't want the business, and he asked Gene to help him find someone.

Mealhow did his best, telling the story of the amazing popcorn to any one who would listen. One day, his wife's cousin, a marketing expert with his own company in Minneapolis, tried some of the popcorn and asked what it was. Gene told him the story about Richard, the cousin asked to visit the Kelty farm, toured the farm, and suggested that Gene just buy it himself. After discussing the proposition with his wife, Lynn, he asked Richard if he could buy the business. According to Gene, Kelty stuck his spade in the ground, light a cigarette, and said, "I was wondering how long it would take you to do this." In typical low-key Iowa style, Kelty said he'd wanted to sell it to Mealhow all along—but he wasn't going to tell him that; he'd have to come to it on his own.

The Mealhows face certain challenges with this popcorn. Gene still has to figure out how to keep the stalks from falling down, which requires more breeding work. He says he needs to go through his pool, select seeds, find the ones with the fullest ears and strongest stalks, and propagate those. This can be especially labor-intensive given the open pollination method and need to bring forward the promising recessive traits. He is also hoping to find five to six varieties that can be used in organic cereals. Since Gene already works with the Hawkeye Community College Horticulture Department, what he'd really like to do is to turn the research over to students and give them not only the experience but the benefit of supervision.

The other challenge with the K&K popcorn is converting it all to organic production. While some of the fields are organic, not all of Mealhow's growers are. The issue right now is weed control, and he needs another year or two to convert all the fields. His own farm will be certified organic this year. Except for the current use of herbicide on some of the fields, K&K maintains organic standards. There are no fumigants or sprays used in the barns after the corn is harvested.

At this point, K&K Tiny but Mighty Popcorn® is taking off. Mealhow has done an interview with Jan Michaelson of WHO in Des Moines, and he's gone to food shows in Chicago. He's currently working with Whole Foods to market the popcorn, which a local gastroenterologist has recommended the popcorn to those suffering from diverticulitis; the absence of hulls make it a non-irritant for those patients. Gene's son's orthodontist also recommends it for teenagers with braces, since there are no hulls to get stuck in the hardware.

For the Mealhows, their popcorn is not just a business. It's their passion and a product they do not want to let die. One of Gene's biggest pleasures is meeting his customers, which range from friends to people from around the United States. He tries to build relationships, not just customers. And he trusts those who buy his popcorn to just send back their checks; "I've never

been stiffed.” At a recent trade show in Chicago, Mealhow was thrilled to have a mother say to her kids, “This is real farmer, and he’s from Iowa.”

Summary and Recommendations

This study has been just one of the necessary precursors for assisting farmers in choosing sustainable alternatives. Without the identification and solid research among place-based food producers, appropriate marketing cannot happen. And unless economic development dollars and/or a concerted and united private effort to promote Iowa foods, the research from this project as well as related and previously completed studies (exploring produce markets, consumer preferences and awareness of regional food systems, and the relationship between geography and taste) will have gone to waste.

The wonderful research that has been done and that is currently going on as well as the vast variety of really good, locally and sustainably produced Iowa food must be promoted in popular food publications, television and radio shows, and websites (Gourmet, Food and Wine, Bon Appetite, Epicurious.com, RoadFood.com, Food Network, The Splendid Table, Kitchen Sisters, and so on) as well as in academic ones—and at academic conferences. If this enterprise to promote Iowa place-based foods is going to work, there must be a popular and media buzz.

Not to anyone's surprise, there are some very good and popular place-based foods in Iowa. They are foods that have solid local adherents as well as statewide, national, and international fans. Following from recommendations of some ISU service-learning students, it would be important that these foods be framed as wholesome, from the heartland, and affordable—as opposed to catering to a high-end specialty foods market. There are those foods that meet all three criteria and that follow or could follow sustainable and/or organic practices. And there are those foods, among the most well-known and most widely identified as having a taste of Iowa that simply have nothing to do with sustainable farming practices. The challenge will be to figure out ways to encourage at least some producers of those foods to practice better production methods. The current issues with clean groundwater, the increasing cost of fossil fuels, and other environmental and health issues may well continue to encourage this movement—creating better income sources for farmers and better food for consumers.

The irony inherent in combining a marketing approach with one that involves food produced locally, humanely and organically, however, is that the former can create disincentives for the latter—exactly what happened with Amana® meats. When demand outgrew supply, the label ceased to refer to pork and beer actually raised in the Amana Colonies. Instead, the challenge for the Leopold Center, is to encourage geographical identification of Iowa heritage foods and niche marketing, to stay small rather than going the way of Ben & Jerry's ice cream, Horizon milk (now owned by Dean and not always using free range dairy cows), and other once local producers and processors. Such a marketing strategy can “pollute” authenticity, leaving us with tasteless nostalgia, disconnected from any place.

Recommendations for next steps include the next phase of this project, which is to produce a series of web-based “fact sheets” for five Iowa place-based foods. The Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs will create a linked series of pages on its website to introduce the concept of place-based foods to a general public and those involved in agriculture and food production. The web pages will provide informational outreach and models for Iowa place-based foods. Each of the fact sheets will consist of text, photos, audio of the producer/s of a particular food, transcript

of audio, and producer contact information as well as a downloadable PDF of the fact sheet. The web pages will be linked to such sites as the Leopold Center's, Iowa Wine & Beer's (<http://www.iowawineandbeer.com/grapevine.html>), and Practical Farmers of Iowa's.

Other possibilities include developing and refining models for local food and culture tours. Besides these foods that meet all three of the criteria set out for place-based foods, there are a variety of others that one could make a strong case for pursuing, at least for developing further markets and for culinary tourism purposes. This could support and promote those foods that are heritage-based, produced in Iowa, but not necessarily with ingredients from here, as well as those Iowa produced foods whose ingredients are being grown here but that don't have anything in particular to do with ethnic or regional heritage. The former would include Dutch, Danish, Norwegian and other such foods and regions of Iowa, while the latter could encompass those "roadfood" items like tenderloins, cinnamon rolls, but also local ice creams and cheeses, wines, cider, and the like—as well as local restaurant, bakery, and market finds.

Other possibilities include Latino and Southeast Asian foods. Latinos have been in eastern and central Iowa for over 100 years, while Southeast Asians began to settle here 30 years ago. Both groups have been integrally involved in the agriculture of the state, have made significant contributions as agricultural workers, small producers, and, in some cases, as creators of finished products that use (or could use) Iowa-grown crops and meats, including tortillas, chicharones, tamales, and other goat and pork products.

Iowa's first "official" refugee group, the Tai Dam from Laos, transported a certain type of green from Laos, which they sauté with local maple tree whirligig seeds. While those whirligig maple seeds, harvested in early spring and frozen for use for the following lunar New Year, are certainly available around the world, their use by Tai Dam occurs only in Iowa and in their former homeland.

Local Bosnian refugees have brought banana-type pepper and tomato seeds from their former homeland, because they much prefer the taste of home-grown vegetables from those seeds to produce from what they regard as tasteless peppers and tomatoes from GMO seeds. Again, there are Bosnian refugee communities elsewhere, but Iowa does have a unique role in the Bosnian resettlement story—and in their attempts to readapt their foodways.

Norwegian traditional holiday foods such as lefse and kringle as well as Czech kolaches and Dutch letters are also strongly identified as Iowa foods. Many families and communities as well as commercial bakeries are involved in making and passing on these tasty baked goods, without which no Christmas or Thanksgiving holiday celebration would be complete. Given the high numbers of Norwegians in Iowa and the fact that northeastern Iowa was traditionally the potato growing region of the state, it might be quite possible to create a market for lefse made from locally grown potatoes. The lefse makers are already around, and frozen lefse (usually from Minnesota) can be found in refrigerator cases in supermarkets from Des Moines to Belmond.

And finally, neither pork tenderloins nor Maid-Rites® (or loose-meat sandwiches in western Iowa) can be ignored. While not necessarily made from organic or sustainably produced meats, it would be remiss to ignore the popular acclaim and knowledge of these savory meats. For the best

list of Iowa restaurants making and selling breaded tenderloins, check out Allen Bukoff's website <http://www.allenbukoff.com/wildBPTiowa03/>. For grilled pork tenderloin, make sure to visit the Suburban Restaurant in Gilbert. Winner of the 2004 Iowa Pork Producers Association Award for the best grilled tenderloin in Iowa, the restaurant is owned and operated by sisters Susie Lyon and Diane Cox. The two women, who graciously welcome customers to their roadside café along Highway 69, north of Ames, use a lot of their father's recipes. The women grew up in the restaurant their parents ran in the 1940s and 1950s and make a tasty and more traditional breaded tenderloin as well as homemade desserts. Derived from German recipes for wiener schnitzel, pork tenderloins, whether battered or breaded, are as ubiquitous to Iowa. In fact, they are found only in Iowa, Illinois, and western Indiana.

I would further recommend the development of ongoing discussions with the various interest groups (PFI, CSAs, Leopold working groups)—perhaps a listserv. It is critical not to lose the work that has gone into branding Taste of Iowa®, but the program needs to be rethought, the criteria strengthened and clarified, and the program needs funding and marketing.

Finally, I would recommend further research into more potential place-based foods as well as an overall effort to link the networks of Iowa food value chains, from farmers to value-added producers, to points of sale (farmers markets, CSAs, locally-owned supermarkets and convenience stores, ethnic markets, and specialty markets), as well as to restaurants, fairs, and festivals.

Impact of the Results

It is difficult to assess the impact of this project's results at this time. Certainly, there are now the beginnings of documentation of Iowa's place-based foods. The project has garnered a lot of media attention at a time when this movement is taking off nationally and internationally. And with the second phase of the project (development of web-based fact sheets) having been awarded Leopold funding for 2006, there would seem to be great potential to provide publicity and models as well as outreach for Iowa place-based foods. The project has also created national connections to other folklorists doing research on place-based foods around the United States. And, perhaps most importantly, the opportunity to work on this project has created new connections with other RFSPG working group members, which has also created new project ideas for promoting Iowa's place-based foods.

Outreach and Information Transfer (Publications, Workshops, Education and Outreach, Cooperative Efforts)

Presentations and Publications

"Taste of Place: Place-Based Foods in Iowa," different versions presented at:

Society for Applied Anthropology, 4/05

National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, 9/05

American Folklore Society, 10/05

Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture Symposium, 12/05

Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, 1/06

"Taste of Place, Iowa's Food Culture and Heritage," PFI Newsletter, Summer 2005.

Food Surveys:

http://www.iowaartscouncil.org/press_room/announcements/finding-iowas-food-stories.shtml

Food Stories: <http://www.iowaartscouncil.org/programs/folk-and-traditional-arts/taste-of-place/survey.htm>

Recipes: <http://www.iowaartscouncil.org/programs/folk-and-traditional-arts/taste-of-place/recipes.htm>

Those surveys noted as hotlinks in press releases and articles on the Leopold Center's website http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/news/newsreleases/2005/food2_081805.htm, in the Practical Farmers of Iowa Summer Newsletter (http://www.practicalfarmers.org/news_details.asp?I=58), Farm News, Iowa Environmental Council

<http://iaenvironment.org/Archives/documents/IECNB08-2005.pdf>

Ag Online

http://64.233.179.104/search?q=cache:tOdvlsaG_IwJ:iaenvironment.org/Archives/documents/IECNB08-2005.pdf+%22riki+saltzman%22+food&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=34

General Press releases

http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/news/newsreleases/2005/food_030205.htm

http://www.culturalaffairs.org/media/dca_press_releases/2005/finding-iowas-food-stories.htm

Trees Forever <http://www.treesforever.org/content.asp?ID=2088&I=3791> , as well as the Midland Power Co-op

<http://www.midlandpower.com/aspx/scnewsletter/SCNewsletter.aspx?CampaignID=31&NewsID=587>

The Hawk Eye <http://64.233.179.104/search?q=cache:wgJZm ->

[DNzQJ:www.thehawkeye.com/weekly/stories/fi7_0821.html+%22riki+saltzman%22+food&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=29](http://64.233.179.104/search?q=cache:wgJZm - DNzQJ:www.thehawkeye.com/weekly/stories/fi7_0821.html+%22riki+saltzman%22+food&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=29)

Butler County REC

<http://64.233.179.104/search?q=cache:k8OclSkHRagJ:www.butlerrec.com/aspx/News/Default.aspx%3FNewsID%3D587+%22riki+saltzman%22+food&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=45>

“Recognition for Iowa Foods,” Kathy Eastman, Humboldt County REC, 4/13/205

Prairie Energy

<http://64.233.179.104/search?q=cache:hSZdxOqLYUMJ:www.prairieenergy.com/aspx/News/Default.aspx%3FNewsID%3D587+%22riki+saltzman%22+food&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=46>

Evaluation

The original evaluation plan called for evaluation to be ongoing and part of the planning and staged research process. I assumed that after the preliminary surveys were done that I would present those initial findings (about 10-15 days' worth) to RFSWG with suggestions for the next stage of research as well as after the next stage of research is completed. Instead, I ended up doing two presentations (PFI and SfAA) within the first few months of the project's starting. Several members of the RFSWG were present at the PFI conference (January 2005), while others read versions of the paper presented to the Society for Applied Anthropology conference (April 2005). While the first was more about presenting my previous work on Iowa food traditions, the second and more academic presentation occurred after the results from the first round of press release responses were in. Comments I received as well as further contacts from those presentations informed the next stage of the research, which involved follow up via phone, email, and in person visits to various food producers and professionals in the field.

The next stage of the project involved developing the online surveys. While I based the initial questions on my previous work with ethnographic interviews, the actual research itself informed what I asked and how I asked it. As well, several colleagues, both those in Iowa and those from outside but also working on issues related to food and place, made comments and suggestions for revising the surveys. As it turned out, however, those surveys were much better suited to being used to guide in person or phone interviews. As I noted above, they were much too detailed for most respondents and, indeed, fewer than ten people actually filled them out. On the other hand, however, the surveys did result in further stories and several email and phone contacts. The survey stayed up on the DCA website through November 2005.

My article about Iowa place-based foods published in the summer 2005 PFI newsletter, which directed online and hard copy readers to those surveys, included the results of the research done in the spring and early summer of 2005. Again, comments and contacts from that article served to further refine my research. Several colleagues reviewed the surveys before they were posted as well as the PFI article, which also had the result of providing evaluation of that stage of the project.

I continued to do research online, over the phone, via email, and in person throughout the summer and fall. At the same time, I also spoke with news media about the project and gave three more presentations (National Assembly of State Arts Agencies in September, American Folklore Society in October, and the December Leopold Center Symposium). The end result was to receive an ongoing series of written and oral commentary on the various stages of the research.

In sum, this project has been quite successful at generating publicity for the subject and issues regarding place-based foods in Iowa. I have found the requisite number of place-based foods in Iowa, written up their stories, and have plans to follow up this project with a series of web-based fact sheets on several Iowa place-based foods. The Leopold Center has also deemed the initial results successful and approved funding for the fact sheets.

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