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Study advocates year-round farmers market in Louisville

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A new study outlines ways to increase markets for locally grown products and suggests that Louisville develop a year-round, centrally located farmers' market.

Mayor Jerry Abramson said he will follow a recommendation in the study and set up a task force to try to "better connect" farmers across the region with Louisville-area consumers.

The report, titled "Building Louisville's Local Food Economy," was released yesterday by Abramson at a press conference at Miss C's Kitchen & Pantry on Story Avenue in Butchertown.

"With the rising cost of gas, cities across the nation are beginning to buy and eat" more locally grown food, Abramson said. "Louisville is in a great position to help feed itself because of the many family farms located in Kentucky and Southern Indiana."

Abramson has dubbed the effort to promote the marketing of locally grown food as "the fresh food initiative."

The study says Louisville can reduce its reliance on imported food by increasing the number of neighborhood farmers markets and developing more meat-processing plants and a better food-distribution network.

The consultants, a team of **Market Ventures of Portland, Maine**, and Karp Resources of Southold, N.Y., were paid \$150,000 for the 100-page report. Half the money came from the state tobacco-settlement fund, and the rest from the city, some nearby counties and communities and a Brown-Forman Corp. grant.

The study involved interviewing consumers, farmers, grocers, restaurant operators, food distributors and several focus groups.

Among the key findings:

Creation of a year-round, centrally located farmer's market "would be expected to provide about \$5.1 million in sales to Kentucky farmers" and also provide a showcase for Kentucky food.

A group of investors called NuLu Bridgestone LLC already plans a year-round farmers market near Jefferson and Clay streets on a one-acre tract, a former tire business that they recently bought.

One of the investors, film producer Gill Holland, said they hope to have a year-round market operating by the end of 2010. The group envisions dozens of area vendors in a covered, permanent structure selling not only a wide range of produce, but also meat, cheese, fish and wine, Holland said.

"We believe the city is big enough to support" a large, year-round market, Holland said, adding that the group doesn't see such a market competing with weekend, seasonal outlets that set up in parking

lots.

Set up a regional task force to try to decide which of the study's recommendations to pursue and to find money to help implement them. It will be overseen by Susan Hamilton, assistant director of the Louisville Economic Development Department. The task force would include agricultural and business interests from Louisville and surrounding counties.

Abramson spokesman Chris Poynter said the task force may try to persuade government agencies that buy food, such as jails and schools, to buy locally grown food. And, he said, the task force may try to set up small farmers markets in areas where there are few, such as southern Jefferson County.

Elaine Hambley and her husband, Charles, have a 100-acre farm near Lanesville, Ind., and are big believers in the worth of open-air markets.

They grow tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and other vegetables and fruits. She said they make a modest living selling produce at outdoor markets in Louisville and Corydon from April to Thanksgiving.

"It's a wonderful experience hearing customers brag about your products and having a relationship with them," she said. "Customers have the advantage of knowing they are getting great stuff."

Get restaurants to use locally grown products.

Chris Sundberg and Charlotte Noel operate Miss C's Kitchen, a deli that opened in late 2006. They buy locally grown products almost exclusively, Sundberg said.

The store, which sells jams, jellies and ice cream, "absolutely saves money by buying locally," Noel said, adding that the women grow some of the food they sell.

Sundberg said there is less chance of "something going wrong with the food, if you buy from someone you know."

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