

Appanoose County Making Strides with the Sustainable Economies Program

Two years ago, Appanoose County found itself in the public eye with a series of news events that broadcast the region as Iowa's poorest, least healthy, and highest child abuse county. Rather than continuing to accept the tolls waged on the area, Centerville community members rallied behind the belief that they could improve their county's stature.

CIRAS Selects the County for the Sustainable Economics Program

CIRAS recognized signs of economic growth potential in Appanoose County, noting the existing businesses were stable and the community leaders were committed. With these key strengths, the county was selected for the Sustainable Economies Program, funded by the Economic Development Administration University Center Program (EDAUCP) administered by CIRAS.

The Sustainable Economies Program team performed in-depth research on the regional economy. Iowa State University economists performed an analysis of the region's industrial and occupational structure, wages, commuting patterns, and other traditional economic analysis measures. The team also assessed the region's economic sustainability using indicators of financial, social, and economic well-being.

Sustainability Summit Launches the Process

In July 2012, the Iowa State team held a Sustainability Summit in Centerville. Iowa State economists shared the results of their study examining how Appanoose County performed on 100 financial, social, and environmental indicators and explained how they relate to the region's ability to sustain economic growth.

"The summit was a great opportunity for us to start working together on common goals and for future planning strategies," says Tod Faris, executive director of the Appanoose County Economic Development Corporation.

"This summit brought together participants from the business sector, government, nonprofits, education, and citizens interested in sustainability issues," says Mike O'Donnell, CIRAS EDAUCP program director. "Part of creating sustainability is developing synergy around shared concerns and shared opportunities. Continued discussions will help the community focus on the steps needed for long-term success."



Moving Forward with Results and Progress

With assistance provided by CIRAS and partners, the region's stakeholders formulated an improvement plan. Their areas of focus include the following:

Leadership Development—The region addressed the need for effective leadership, a key gap identified in the assessment process. Local stakeholders worked with CIRAS and launched a regional leadership development program designed to maximize the strengths and skills of current and future community leaders.

Financial Education—This group works with Iowa State's Department of Human Development and Family Studies as well as the area's school districts to improve financial competencies and literacy.

Appanoose County Marketing—Efforts of all local and county government entities will be coordinated, and a unified branding strategy is under way.

Natural Resources—The existing strengths of the region, such as Honey Creek Resort State Park and Lake Rathbun, need to be showcased with improved trail systems and wayfaring signage. This group will also unify trash pickup within Centerville and other Appanoose County communities.

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