

BOS Report on Business and Economic Development

4-16-2024

Yesterday, at the Plumas County Fairgrounds, the Lost Sierra Food Project, held a meeting of 40 Ag producers and agencies that are members of EPIC – Eastern Producers Informational Collaborative. Many thanks to Jessie Mazar of the Lost Sierra Food Project for organizing and facilitating this first meeting of growers from Modoc, Lassen, Plumas, and Sierra Counties. Attendees came all the way from Alturas and Loyalton.

- The purpose of the meeting was to convene those involved in the local food system to inventory existing infrastructure and initiatives, share information, and identify key projects that will build a stronger and more viable local food economy.
- There were short presentations by Willo Vierira (PC Ag Commissioner), Ben McNally (USDA's NRCS), Paul Mrowcynski (Emergency Food Access Plan) and Katie Harris (Community Action Agency)
- Breakout groups consisted of Marketing and Infrastructure, Farmer Training Programs and Education Needs, Food Access Planning, and an information session by Willo Vierira, Ag Commissioner.
- Lara Wheeler of the IVIH and John Stephanic of the Fairgrounds facilitated the breakout session on Marketing and Infrastructure.
- Major focus was on the need for Branding, more marketing, and the need for more local markets; transportation costs and a transportation network to transport products, rising labor costs with many potential local employees opting to work for PG&E and other agencies in disaster recovery. Those agencies are paying up to \$40 per hour, while local food growers are having difficulty finding workers for \$25 per hour. Lastly, we talked about the difficulty of finding housing for potential employees.
- We often take our food systems and our food security for granted. I pointed out to the attendees one of the most profound

statements I have ever hear about our food supply: “At any one time, we are only 7 meals from chaos.” Our society would start to unravel after people would miss 7 meals in a row.

In other business and economic news, PG&E, which has already raised rates twice this year, is planning a third. Legislation is being introduced to allow them to raise rates only once per year. More nails thrown at the coffin of small businesses in CA.

Speaking of energy costs, I want to applaud the BOS for approving an energy contract with ENGIE to save \$4.8 million in the coming years. That was not only prudent, it shows the power of investment, which not only saves money, but can also raise money. We need investments in Down Payment Assistance and First-time Homebuyers to reverse our Depopulation Trend of almost one family per week that is leaving Plumas County that has enormous costs to our economy and future.

FYI: The new hospital in Chester is coming along, albeit is having challenges with keeping a General Contractor. Activity this was slated for this month may not start until June 1st.

A reminder: In a normal economy, 80% of small businesses fail in their first 5 years. Businesses without a written business plan are six times more likely to fail than a new business with a written plan. Again, the power of investments can truly make a difference.

Thank you.

Clint Koble – Hamilton Branch. Clint.koble@gmail.com; (530) 375-0126

Indian Valley Innovation HUB