NEBRASKA REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS INITIATIVE

FEBRUARY 2020 SUMMIT REPORT
Summit Planners

Back row from left to right: Ted Hibbeler (Nebraska Extension), John Porter (Nebraska Extension), John Westra (University of Nebraska-Lincoln), W. Cecil Steward (Joslyn Institute for Sustainable Communities), Vanessa Wielenga (Nebraska Extension), Jean Ann Fischer (Nebraska Extension), Rex Nelson (Nebraska Extension)

Front row from left to right: Ben McShane-Jewell (Nebraska Extension), Justin Carter (Center for Rural Affairs), Megan McGuffey (Community Crops), Angela Rushman (Nebraska Extension), Sarah Smith (Nebraska Department of Education)

Not pictured: Pat Anderson (NeighborWorks Lincoln), Tara Dunker (Nebraska Extension), Lisa Franzen-Castle (Nebraska Extension), Katie Kreuser (Nebraska Extension), Cathy Lang (Nebraska Business Development Center), Steve Schulz (University of Nebraska-Omaha)
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THANK YOU FROM THE FOOD SYSTEMS FACILITATOR TEAM

The 2nd annual Nebraska Regional Food Systems Summit occurred on February 4th, 2020, at CHI of the Midlands in Papillion, with over 80 organizations representing all areas of the food system coming together to learn, share and network. The energy was high and the room was packed as Phillis Stone of the Sicangu Lakota tribe kicked-off the event with a traditional blessing. Representative Jeff Fortenberry delivered a much appreciated recorded welcome to thank the attendees for their important work. And we want to say, THANK YOU to all of our attendees, planning committee members, funding supporters and CHI Health for hosting. An extra thank you to those of you who took the time to provide your wisdom and feedback on our event evaluation.

As planners and attendees of the event, we were excited by the energy in the room. The seats were filled with practitioners, farmers, educators and advocates seeking a more just and equitable food system. Networking and engagement happened throughout the day, and new connections were made.

An enormous, heartfelt thank you to all of the organizations, individuals, and speakers who gave your time and talents to making this event a success. And to each of you who attended, we are grateful to you for joining us. We can’t do this important work alone. This final report from the summit includes snapshots of presentations and discussions throughout the event, the feedback we received, as well as names of all attendees. If you haven’t yet, join our listserv to stay in touch.

- NERFSI Facilitator team
Tara Dunker, Lisa Franzen-Castle, Katie Kreuser, Ben McShane-Jewell, Rex Nelson, John Porter, and Vanessa Wielenga

Connect with us at foodsystems.unl.edu.
PRE-SUMMIT TOURS

WHISPERING ROOTS

Dulce Sherman, COO of Whispering Roots, recounted the pre-summit tours that their Founder & CEO Greg Fripp, Whispering Roots and staff hosted giving participants a great snapshot into urban agriculture. The tours were completely full – a testament to their good work in the food system, both in Nebraska and abroad. From greenhouse production projects in Macy with the USDA and Nebraska Indian Community College, to partnering with Creighton and the Charles Drew Health Center to study impacts of healthy diets on chronic disease patients, to working internationally in Haiti, Whispering Roots is making an impact through their efforts in urban agriculture.

The tours began with an introduction to their hard working crew, and a seated presentation providing an overview of their work. Participants toured the Whispering Roots facility and small farm lab which includes grow stations, mini greenhouses, and the small controlled environment computer built in partnership with UNO enabling a visual into different conditions in a small controlled environment that impacts the growth and taste of plants. The primary focus of Whispering Roots is in food desert areas where there is 50% or more food insecurity. Their staff train people to plant seedlings that are planted in aquaponics systems, raised beds and traditional plots providing communities with the concepts of growing food, and how to grow and sustain healthy eating habits. For more information on Whispering Roots, visit their website at www.whisperingroots.org.

NO MORE EMPTY POTS

Summit participants also had the opportunity to tour No More Empty Pots (NMEP), a grassroots non-profit organization connecting individuals and groups to improve self-sufficiency, regional food security, and economic resilience of urban and rural communities through advocacy and action. Their vision is to support communities in becoming self-sufficient and food secure through collaboration and adhering to our core values of education, stewardship and sustainability. Their community education focuses on garden education, urban/community gardening and sustainable farming, nutrition education that provides hands-on cooking education programming for all ages that centers on local, seasonal and healthy eating and STEAM education around food systems. NMEP also prepares individuals to enter the workforce through their Culinary Workforce Training Program. A large part of their operation is their Food Entrepreneur Program. Local food entrepreneurs looking to start or grow a business are provided access to rent commercial kitchens at an affordable cost, market opportunities, resource and technical assistance for continuous improvement from our team of culinary experts and entrepreneurship management. For more information about No More Empty Pots, visit their website at nmeponaha.org.

“THE EVENT WAS VALUABLE BECAUSE IT PROVIDED A LOT OF EMPHASIS ON BUILDING UP COMMUNITIES AND RELATIONSHIPS, WHICH IS VERY IMPORTANT FOR ANYTHING TO THRIVE.”
SUMMIT BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Summit participants were given the opportunity to participate in sessions focused on one of the following topics:

**BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES**

Panelists Aretha Boex and Brendan Evans shared public and private sector sources for business resources and market research. Cecil Steward illustrated opportunities in the broader food system spanning production, distribution, consumption and resource management. Good discussions ensued on challenges encountered by food system businesses related to market size, margins and profitability.

**PROGRAM TO POLICY**

Program to Policy breakout highlighted existing programs in the state of Nebraska related to healthy food systems as well as how public policy changes can impact this work. Topics included food policy network organizing, urban agriculture (including vacant lot programs, forestry plan, and impact of cottage food law), and Double Up Food Bucks.

**FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES**

The Food Sovereignty in Tribal Communities breakout provided the audience with a first-hand look at Tribal gardening projects, Tribal farm-to-school programs, traditional Tribal farming practices and Tribal farmer’s markets. It also created excitement in the tribal communities to partner with the UNL Extension and the Center for Rural Affairs to sponsor a Tribal Food Systems Summit in the fall.

**FARM TO SCHOOL**

A panel of local producers (Ryan Pekarek and Mark Roh) and food service directors (Judy Poehlman from Wayne and Sharon Schaefer from Gretna) discussed the challenges and opportunities for local procurement in Nebraska schools. Alena Paisano from the National Farm to School Network gave an overview of local procurement efforts across the country, and provided some best practice strategies to attendees.
BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

SUMMARY

Aretha Boex led off the panelists with a synopsis of resources available to businesses through Nebraska Business Development Center. While NBDC does not typically work with producers, some of their resources can be useful to both producers and food supply chain businesses. Besides lending tools they also offer secondary market research for business clients.

Brendan Evans does primary market research at his company Research Associates. He emphasized that there are ways to better understand customers and opportunities for businesses through primary research that uses tools such as focus groups and surveys.

Panelist W. Cecil Steward leads the Joslyn Institute for Sustainable Communities. Their feasibility study on the proposed Lincoln Public Market indicates that there may be more demand than current market channels demonstrate, that production needs to increase concurrently with market development and that often unrecognized business opportunities will emerge in the larger circular food system. That model recognizes all aspects of the food chain including processing, distribution, and post consumption work on resource management and reducing food waste.

Good dialog with session participants included business, producers and NGO affiliated. It was noted that price and demand dynamics currently being experienced by producers don’t necessarily support optimistic demand scenarios.

For more info, contact Rex Nelson at rex.nelson@unl.edu.

“I LEARNED SO MUCH FROM THE SPEAKERS THAT I FEEL CONFIDENT IN GOING FORWARD TO EDUCATE THE PUBLIC AND OTHER EDUCATORS.”
PROGRAM TO POLICY

SUMMARY

Attendees divided themselves around two topics of conversation: urban agriculture and Nebraska Double Up Food Bucks (NDUFB).

Joe Gaube, Douglas County Health Department, Lisa Smith, City of Omaha Planning Department and Timothy Kerkhove, City of Omaha Planning Department facilitated discussions on urban agriculture. Joe Gaube presented on the impact of the cottage food law in Nebraska broadly and in Douglas County locally. The health department is fee-based for inspections and permits, which funds their work. For items covered under the cottage food law, there is a single set of regulations and information on the Nebraska Department of Agriculture website. There are differences in implementation for Lincoln and Omaha.

Lisa Smith discussed the city of Omaha’s vacant lot program and work around the urban agriculture ordinance in the city of Omaha. Lots can be leased at no cost for one year with no limit for renewals. The group discussed recommendations for other cities trying to start this type of program, which included starting with city planning to see what property they have available. The breakout discussed tradeoffs with short-term leases. Farmers/gardens are investing in the land so sustainable land access is key. Omaha has around 50 lots in their program that vary in size but most are one quarter of an acre. A drawback is that water access is not provided and can be expensive to install. The breakout also discussed regulatory issues around livestock and issues with goats due to lot size. Timothy Kerkhove followed with a discussion of the Heartland 2050 Natural Resource Committee project around urban forestry.

Vanessa Wielenga, the NDUFB program manager, and Casey Foster from the Ag Promotion division of the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, led the conversation and answered questions. Challenges, successes and opportunities discussed include: NDUFB is showing significant and positive correlation between length of use and reported consumption of vegetables; program sees regular growth and maintains good redemption rates; insufficient funding to meet the demand; communication plan could still be expanded; and, devoted staff time for the program is limited.

A community can bring NDUFB to their area if they have a champion - Extension staff is not needed. Communities are asked to match resources for their NDFUB program - this could be as little as $500 depending on the size of markets and outreach and nutrition education needs. For more information, contact Vanessa Wielenga at v wielenga2@unl.edu.

“This event was the highlight of my week. Everyone who attended is passionate and enthusiastic about purchasing local products.”
FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

SUMMARY

The Tribal Food Sovereignty breakout session welcomed experts from Native American communities in both Nebraska and South Dakota. Each panelist discussed the food security challenges in their own tribal communities and the steps they’re taking to combat these. The panel brought together individuals from the communities of Macy, Winnebago, Walthill, and Santee, NE as well as Mission, SD. The session attracted a diverse audience of fellow tribal community members, representatives from the University of Nebraska, and other stakeholders in the food systems throughout Nebraska.

The panel was led by students from Winnebago public schools, on the Ho-Chunk tribal lands, who shared a presentation on the cultivation of traditional corn in their community. Students have been able to return to the custom of growing sacred blue corn and selling it within the community as an income generating activity. Community gardener Carmelita Sully of Mission, SD, on the Sicangu Lakota tribal lands, shared her expertise in cultivation and how she’s working to combat disease and food insecurity in her community. Suzi French, of Walthill, NE, explained her own community garden efforts as well as her role in creating a rotating farmers market between the towns of Macy and Walthill on the Umonhon tribal lands. Also from Macy, NE, Barry Webster and Mike Storm discussed the role of Umonhon tribal farms in cultivating land for the benefit of community members.

Rounding out the group was Anthony Warrior of Santee, NE, on the Santee Sioux tribal lands, who also served as a summit speaker. Warrior, a chef who uses traditional ingredients to create meals, presented on the need for a return to tribal food sovereignty. Warrior discussed the value Native Americans have for their traditional foods and how this value has been suppressed and dismantled over years of oppression. Warrior gave a moving synopsis of how this has motivated him to create healthy traditional meals to improve the well being of fellow community members and bring a return to tribal food sovereignty. The session provided an opportunity for community members to meet and collaborate on food security solutions for our Native American communities.
A healthy local food system for **ALL**...

- **Equality**
- **Equity**
- **Justice**
FARM TO SCHOOL

SUMMARY

Questions abound for growers and buyers when it comes to the how-to of procuring local foods for Child Nutrition Programs (CNP). Alena Paisano of National Farm to School Network presented foundational information to bust the myths surrounding local food procurement for CNP, and shared options for paths to move forward with the process, both for growers and CNP providers.

Panelists for this session, local producers Ryan Pekarek and Mark Roh and food service directors Judy Poehlman from Wayne and Sharon Schaefer from Gretna, brought real stories forward about how local procurement works (or doesn’t work) in their situation. Two expert School Food Service Directors joined the panel, as well as a farmer and farmer/local food distributor. The panel discussed what considerations are critical for local procurement to work for all parties, successfully benefiting students, community and a local food system. Important issues brought to the table were: the value of serving local in schools, and the positive response from families, students and food service staff; the need for farmers to work with purchases that are consistent and reliable; and creating a school food culture that is built on relationships and respect for growers. One step forward at a time is instrumental when digging into local food procurement, and there is no doubt that growth will happen, shifting towards deeper investments in a food system that is supportive of local and culturally relevant to the community.

For more info, contact Ben McShane-Jewell at bmcshane-jewell2@unl.edu.

CAPNOTE PRESENTATION

ALENA PAISANO

Alena Paisano is the Program Manager with the National Farm to School Network. Alena’s work is focused on; supporting producers seeking to build farm to school relationships, and Native Communities seeking to expand and sustain farm to school activities as a strategy for advancing food sovereignty. Alena is a mother, water clan from Laguna Pueblo, a member of the San Carlos Apache Tribe, and lives in Santa Fe, NM. She is an experienced practitioner of Farm to School dedicated to the development of just and local food systems serving our youth, families and communities now and for future generations.

Alena presented on farm to school as many different shapes or sizes. Innovators nationally are reaping benefits from fitting the unique needs of individual districts and communities and leveraging any existing assets. Key to this conversation is a landscape that reaches beyond equality, and into equity and justice. Farm to school is a strategy that provides opportunities to address racial and social disparities in the existing food system, and there are distinct approaches to do so in all three core elements of farm to school: Procurement of Local Foods, School Gardens, and Education about food and farming. As a tribal member, Alena shared intimately about food carrying forward cultural identity and integrity, reaching far beyond needs for nutrition and survival. In fact, the connection to our local food systems will indeed revitalize our cultural connection and prosperity as healthy communities.
SPEAKER & PANELIST SPOTLIGHT

ARETHA BOEX

Aretha Boex is the Associate State Director for the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC). She provides primary direction, guidance and leadership for NBDC’s Small Business Development program and oversees the operational activities of seven centers across Nebraska. Aretha has extensive experience in small business consulting, process improvement and program management. She is a Certified Economic Development Finance Professional (EDFP) through the National Development Council and a Certified Global Business Professional (CGBP) through Nasbite International. She holds a Master of Business Administration and a Master of Science in Management Information Systems from the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

BRENDAN EVANS

Brendan Evans experience ranges from guiding wilderness canoe trips to System Admin. Brendan has worked with Research Associates helping businesses, organizations, and campaigns with data-based strategy, branding, digital media, and public relations. He has been recognized with an AMA Prism Award for the Libraries Are More Than Books campaign, Mayor’s Arts Awards for Lincoln is Music City, and recognized as a Co-Creator in Lincoln for founding events like Party in the Parks.

Brendan serves as the chair of the Leadership Lincoln Board of Directors, on the Program Committee and Nebraska of the Year Committee with Rotary #14, is a volunteer at the Southern Heights Food Forest, member of Crucible Club, coaches his son’s soccer team, and various other non-profit work.

JOE GAUBE

Joe Gaube is the supervisor of the Retail Food Program for the Douglas County Health Department.
TIMOTHY KERKHOVE

Timothy Kerkhove started as an environmental planner in the City of Omaha Planning Department in February of 2019 after graduating from Iowa State with Bachelor’s degrees in Global Resource Systems and Community & Regional Planning. In the past, Timothy has had food systems internships at City Sprouts in Omaha and 1000 Friends of Oregon in Portland, Oregon. Timothy is currently leading the creation of a community forest plan for the greater Omaha area.

MEGAN MCGUFFEY

Megan McGuffey is the executive director of Community Crops. She has served on the Nebraska Legislature’s Community Garden Task Force, the Lincoln-Lancaster County Food Policy Council, and the Local Foods Coordinating Council in Omaha, Nebraska. She recently served as the Food Systems Coordinator for Share Our Table, a food security coalition in the Omaha-Council Bluffs region and has co-authored food assessments for regional and statewide food policy organizations.

Megan earned her Master of Public Administration in 2013 and is currently a doctoral candidate at UNO School of Public Administration. Her research focuses on food and farm policy broadly and her dissertation looks at the role of food policy networks in the local government policy process.

RYAN PEKAREK

Pekarek’s Produce is owned and operated by Ryan and Katie Pekarek and their five children. Located near Dwight, NE, the farm grows a wide variety of vegetables and fruits for year-round sales that are marketed through retail farmer’s markets, wholesale to stores and restaurants, and several public schools and a university.
JUDY POEHLMAN

Judy Poehlman is the Food Service Director at Wayne Community Schools, and has been on staff in the kitchen for more than 36 years. Judy graduated from Wayne State College in Home Ec and History. She and her husband Rich raised their family on an acreage a mile north of the dairy farm where Judy grew up. She has been an active member with Nebraska School Nutrition Association, including serving as President; and is currently the legislative chair for NSNA.

SHARON SCHAEFER

Sharon Schaefer is the Director of Food and Nutrition Services for Gretna Public Schools. She has been a school nutrition advocate and participant in farm to school since 2010. She is an active member of The School Nutrition Association and earned the credentials of SNS (School Nutrition Specialist).

ELISABETH SMITH

Elisabeth Smith is a planner with the City of Omaha Planning Department. Lisa has been in Planning for 15 years, with the past five years involved in Food Systems Planning & Policy. Lisa is Co-chair of MAPA’s Heartland 2050 Local Foods Coordinating Council. She is the City’s Vacant Lot Garden Coordinator in addition to her work in Housing and Community Development Planning. Her work focuses on linking food systems planning with economic development, resilience, housing, and underserved populations, including Omaha Refugee and Native/Indigenous communities.

“THE NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES WERE INVALUABLE. LEARNING ABOUT WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING, PARTICULARLY THEIR SUCCESS STORIES, WAS FABULOUS.”
W. CECEL STEWARD

W. Cecil Steward, FAIA, is dean emeritus and emeritus professor of architecture and planning at the University of Nebraska College of Architecture. He is founder and President/CEO of the Joslyn Institute for Sustainable Communities. He was awarded the national Topaz Medallion for Excellence in Architectural Education, jointly, by the American Institute of Architects and the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture. He was elected to be the 68th President of the American Institute of Architects.

He earned his professional B. Arch. degree from Texas A&M University and his M.S. in Architecture from Columbia University after study at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in France. He was awarded the Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Drury College in Springfield, MO.

CARMELITA SULLY

Carmelita Sully is a member of the Sicangu Lakota Oyate (Rosebud Sioux Nation) on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota. She is the youngest of Claude and Rose Sully’s 15 children. Growing up, she learned that gardening was essential to feed her large family. The experience instilled in her the passion she still carries to garden and work with plants.

Carmelita earned her Bachelor of Science Degree in Environmental Science and received her Master Gardener Certificate as well. She currently works as the Community Gardens Director for Sinte Gleska University for the Rosebud Sioux Tribe. She is also involved in gardening classes, food preservation classes and garden tours for the University.

MARK ROH

Mark Roh has operated Abie Vegetable People since 2010 focusing on both conventional and Certified Organic vegetables as well as Certified Organic row crops. Mark is also the General Manager of Lone Tree Foods. Lone Tree Foods is a for profit food hub that has been connecting local farms with restaurant, grocery, and institutional buyers since 2014. With distribution focused on the Omaha and Lincoln areas, Lone Tree is dedicated to growing the reach of local foods in Nebraska.
ANTHONY WARRIOR

Anthony Warrior’s name is Ma-te-yi-ma-pe-to. He is an active member of the Little Axe Little River Ceremonial ground of the Shawnee and the chef and owner of Warriors’ Palate Catering and Consultation. Anthony has been in the Food and Beverage industry for 25 years and is a self-taught chef. During his tenure, he traveled to 48 of the 50 United States, China and the Philippines, focusing efforts towards educating/motivating the youth and community leaders to embrace culture and tradition.

SUSAN WHITFIELD

Susan Whitfield serves as project manager (PM) with No More Empty Pots since May 2010. She holds a MPA from University of Nebraska at Omaha and a BS from University of Arizona. She assists in development of innovative and collaborative development efforts focused on No More Empty Pots’ development strategies to build a regional food system that fosters economic resilience and sustainable food system. As PM she is responsible for providing guidance and support to NMEP’s overall strategic, tactical, and operational direction for planning, analyzing, designing, developing, and evaluating initiatives.
SLIDO HIGHLIGHTS

THE SUMMIT WILL POSITIVELY IMPACT THEIR WORK IN THE NEBRASKA FOOD SYSTEM

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE LOCALLY PRODUCED FOOD ITEM?

sweets corn

HOW WILL TODAY’S SUMMIT CHANGE OR IMPROVE YOUR WORK IN THE FOOD SYSTEM?

Reaching out to new contacts and forming partnerships

Continue inviting native and people of color to share their stories

Awareness of more organizations and resources

I have a better understanding of farm to school and my role in helping to bring the key decision makers together

Knowing who’s doing the work! New partnership opportunities, etc.

I feel better equipped to talk to other about the food system

Connected with other organizations doing similar work
POST-EVALUATION IMPACT SUMMARY

The post-summit survey was available via online survey software (Qualtrics) with three reminders sent to summit attendees (n=147). The response rate for the survey was 51% (n=75). Forty percent of respondents had attended the inaugural summit held in 2019. Approximately 42% said they had follow-up conversations with people met at the summit, with an additional 38% planning to have follow-up communications.

About 96% said they were going to share information from the event with others, with over 720 additional people potentially being reached via summit attendees. Examples provided included co-workers, colleagues, students, commodity groups, staff, partner organizations, and social media. Respondents agreed to strongly agreed about the following regarding their experiences with the event:

- 90% Overall found the event satisfactory
- 84% Liked the summit structure
- 53% Thought the materials were of high quality
- 96% Speakers motivated them to think about topics and how it applied to their work
- 90% Learned something worthwhile
- 73% Will make changes or improvements to their work
- 73% The event built confidence in implementing food systems work
In an effort to gauge needs for trainings and other professional development opportunities, respondents were asked to answer the following questions about themselves. Respondents agreed to strongly agreed about the following below, indicating there may be more needs for training around building skills for coalition development and confidence in working with communities to develop food systems.

| 100% | I understand the importance of inclusion and building trust |
| 97%  | I understand my own personal values and how they connect to my work |
| 72%  | I have a professional development plan |
| 83%  | I am equipped with skills to facilitate conversations effectively |
| 69%  | I understand how to create and use a logic model |
| 81%  | I understand how to create and use a plan of work |
| 69%  | I have tools to conduct evaluation - for programs, projects, and systems change |
| 73%  | I have skills for facilitating conversations around topics of systems change |
| 46%  | I have skills for coalition development |
| 71%  | I can support partners in food system development |
| 74%  | I understand what is involved in a community food system |
| 59%  | I am confident in my work with communities to develop food systems |
ATTENDEES

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Erik White
DHHS State Unit on Aging
Susan Whitfield
No More Empty Pots
Vanessa Wielenga
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Nancy Williams
NE Extension
Audrey Woita
No More Empty Pots
Donna Woudenberg
Joslyn Institute for Sustainable Communities

Y
Leo Yankton
Lakota Artist
Tammy Yarmon
Omaha Public Schools

Z
Wesleyon Zollicoffer
No More Empty Pots
ORGANIZATIONS IN ATTENDANCE

ARIZONA
National Farm to School Network

IOWA
Lutheran Family Services

SOUTH DAKOTA
Sinte Gleska University

OUTSIDE STATES IN ATTENDANCE

NE Beef Council
Grand Island Public Schools
Ravenna Chamber of Commerce
Nutt Family Country Market
THANK YOU TO OUR TOUR LOCATIONS

No More Empty Pots
Whispering Roots
Growing, Feeding, Educating

THANK YOU TO OUR SPEAKER SPONSORS

Center for Rural Affairs
District & Nebraska Farmers Union
Permaculture

THANK YOU TO OUR EXHIBITORS AND SPEAKERS

Center for Rural Affairs
EFNEP NEP Nutrition Education Program
Nebraska Food Council
Nebraska Department of Education
Nebraskans for Peace
Nebraska Food Council

THANK YOU TO OUR PLANNING COMMITTEE AND PARTNERS

Center for Rural Affairs
Children's Hospital & Medical Center
CHI Health
Nebraska Department of Education
Nebraska Food Council
Share Our Table
N Extension