

Local and Regional Foods Conference was large success

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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Photo By: Mercadez Whitehead

The Alton Area Business Development Association held an “Opportunities in Local and Regional Foods Conference” this week at Lewis and Clark Community College and it was a significant success.

The conference was lead by Ron Tanner of AABDA and said it was as successful as could be and greatly exceeded his expectations. The conference was held in the Trimpe Advanced Technology Center at LCCC.

“It was beyond our expectations,” Tanner said. “We had hoped for a good cross section of different sectors and I think we had that. Farming is such a different trade. People are passionate and emotional and each feel very different about it compared to traditional business interests.”

Tanner pointed out that every community’s makeup is different when it comes to local food, resources, interests, assets and objectives.

“Local food producers have to take what they have and make something out of it,” he said. “We are trying to understand how to support producers and build something from it.”

Tanner said he hopes that eventually these kinds of conferences could be held on a regular basis.

Event speakers were Dr. Linda Chapman and Dr. Dale Chapman of Lewis and Clark Community College, Cynthia Haskins of the Illinois Farm Bureau, the keynote speaker; Colleen Callahan of the USDA; Catherine Neville of Feast Magazine, Jason Hall of the St. Louis Regional Chamber, Ralph Pfremmer of Trailnet, Frank Miles of Madison County Township; Patrick McKeehan of SBDU/SIUE; Nora Feuquay and Jennifer Russell of the University of Illinois Exntension, Amy Marcoot of Marcoot Jersey Creamery and Lauren Pattan of Old Bakery Beer Company.

Tanner said he was impressed by Haskins remarks at the conference and said he has been captivated every time he has watched her speak.

A large collaboration was represented at the conference from Lewis and Clark Community College, to Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville, St. Charles, St. Louis, Illinois state representatives and other metropolitan Illinois and Missouri reps.

David Fingerhut, who helped Tanner coordinate the event and is also on the AABDA board with Tanner and a business partner, said the organization has a symbol of seeds and he thought the conference was fitting.

“Everybody here was talking about how we can collaborate on things that relate to local foods, cheese, meat, and more,” he said. “Our mission is to enhance all the various components of business. Some of our speakers gave us a bigger picture, while others brought it down to the local level.”

Dan Jansen, was one of the USDA representatives at the conference. He said he felt the conference was good for the USDA because it allowed them to talk about programs they have and answer questions.

“Like anything else, our programs are broad and we see which way we can help,” he said. “We discussed our value added development grants and taking an agricultural project and taking it up to the next level. An example is if you have milk and want to make cheese with your business.”

Tanner said overall, this food conference was one of his best professional experiences ever.

“We had all interests coming together from watermelon growers, pork producers, cheese makers and just people who like to garden in the room,” he said.





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