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# The Iowa Food Policy Council: a case study

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**The Iowa Food Policy Council: A case study**

by

**John C. Dean**

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degrees of

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MASTER OF COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL PLANNING

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## ABSTRACT

While legislative and administrative decisions are made by government entities, food policy councils (FPCs) will often recommend and implement food policy decisions at the local and regional levels. When created, the Iowa Food Policy Council (IFPC) became the second state-wide FPC in existence. With Iowa being a leader in the production of corn, soybeans and pork for domestic consumption and export, the state's importance in the national-- as well global-- food production system cannot be underestimated (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2007). The Iowa Food Policy Council offered a voice for small-scale producers, food justice advocates, and others who represented an alternative to the typical commodity-dominated agricultural interests of Iowa. Through a single-case study methodology using in-depth interviews and content analysis, this analysis examines the challenges and opportunities experienced by the IFPC from its beginning to its collapse. The results of this research demonstrate the significance of establishing a legacy of convening that may continue without a formal structure. This research also questions why stakeholders become involved and, just as importantly, why they *stay* involved. Existing FPC literature does not include a single-case study methodology; this analysis will provide a foundation for future FPC research.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Food and farm policy is being discussed from the national level to local municipalities in an effort to address the many concerns affiliated with America's current food system. This food system has been described as "outsized, standardized, environmentally degrading, wasteful, unjust, unhealthy, placeless, disempowering" (Roberts, W. 2010, 18). Yet, opportunities exist in creating a more just and localized food system. Many of the concerns being addressed regarding the food system are focused on state and local issues and include increasing economic opportunities for small producers and battling the child obesity epidemic through an increase in healthy food access. Food policy, "which consists of the legislative and administrative decisions of state and local governments designed to influence the operation of the food and agricultural system and to create opportunities for farmers, marketers, and consumers," offers an avenue for creating change (Hamilton 2002, 418). One opportunity for legislative policy change is through the creation of a food policy council (FPC). FPCs are "institutions that can bring a broad array of people together to consider and respond to connections among diverse but interrelated facets of the food system" (Clancy et al. 2007, 121). As a medium for bringing a diversity of stakeholders to the same conversation, FPCs are essential to identifying areas of need within a region's food system. FPCs may work to strengthen the food system of cities, counties, and even national regions. Currently, there are approximately 193 food policy councils operating in North America (Winne 2012). This this thesis examines the challenges and opportunities of the Iowa Food Policy Council (IFPC), one of the most prominent state-level FPCs ever

created. While this research highlights the lessons learned of the IFPC, the final analysis of this research closely examines the legacy of the IFPC.

### ***History and Acts of FPCs***

FPCs exist to promote food policy. While legislative and administrative decisions are made by government entities, FPCs will often recommend, advise and implement food policy decisions at the local and regional levels. The first food policy council in North America was created in Knoxville, Tennessee in 1982. The idea of the Knoxville Food Policy Council came from a class project of community planning graduate students at the University of Tennessee (Haughton 1987). Shortly before hosting the 1982 World's Fair, the City of Knoxville began to realize the need for an improved local food distribution system in order to feed the influx of tourists along with residents. In an attempt at solving the concern, the graduate students, under the leadership of their professor, recommended policy changes to Knoxville's then-mayor. As a result of a student led community food assessment of the region, Knoxville's mayor "presented a resolution recommending the formation of a Food Policy Council" (Harper et al. 2009, 17). The council was then created by the Knoxville city government, and later formed a partnership between the city and Knox County. Today, the Knoxville/Knox County Food Policy Council is the oldest, and one of the most sustainable, FPCs in North America (Harper et al. 2009).

While Knoxville's FPCs history serves as an example for current councils throughout North America, it is important to understand that FPCs are certainly not constructed in a "one-size-fits all" approach. And many "councils" do not include the term policy in their title, opting instead for such terms as *coalition*, *food systems council*, *Farm to School* and

others (Schiff 2007). Due to the diversity of FPCs, there is not one definitive inventory of all FPCs in North America (Harper et al. 2009). Each municipal, regional and state FPC utilizes its own method of administration, funding and program development. Some FPCs are administered as government entities, while others are affiliated with academic institutions or operate as non-profit organizations, with funding coming from various sources, including grants and government funds. FPC activities and initiatives are just as varied as their leadership styles and funding sources. A few of the activities that many councils initiate include developing, coordinating and implementing “a food system policy linking economic development and social impacts with farming and urban issues,” reviewing and commenting “on proposed legislation and regulations that impact food and agriculture policy and security,” and making “recommendations to the executive and legislative branches of government on food and agriculture policy” (Roy 2003). There are many opportunities for direct impacts that FPCs may have on the policy of their respective municipalities and regions. For example, the Denver Food Policy Council, “collaborated to get commitments to health and wellness programming from 27 metro area mayors, including permitting farmers markets, community gardening and supporting the federal childhood nutrition act” (Harper et al. 2009, 22). Wisconsin’s Dane County even created a program to help fund locally produced food in the county’s correctional facilities and senior centers (Harper et al. 2009). The Iowa Food Policy Council is yet another example of a FPC that had a direct impact on the food and agricultural policies that it addressed.



### ***The Iowa Food Policy Council***

In 2000, the Iowa Food Policy Council (IFPC) was created through an executive order from then-Governor Tom Vilsack. The council was administrated by the Drake University Agricultural Law Center and received funding from federal grants. The IFPC was only the nation's second state-wide food policy council created, with the goal of operating as a "vehicle for networking, communication, [while] examining the Iowa food system and reporting to the Governor's office policy recommendations to improve the food system in Iowa, especially focused on food security issues and local food production" (Roberts and Tagtow 2010). The IFPC consisted of fifteen to twenty governor-appointed members who acted as ex-officio (non-voting) members, as well as up to eight voting members who each represented a different sector of Iowa's food system. These sectors included local producers, food processors, distributors, retailers, academia, and legal and policy experts. Two of the IFPC's biggest achievements included the 2003 publication of the *Hunger in Iowa Report* and "recognition by Congress for leadership and contributions in improving the operation of Iowa's food assistance programs" (Roberts and Tagtow 2010). Along with these accomplishments, the IFPC eventually created multiple task forces which focused on a variety of Iowa's food system concerns, including food security and health, institutional purchasing, and the promotion of local foods.

Perhaps most importantly, the IFPC offered a voice for small-scale producers, food justice advocates, and others who represented an alternative to the typical commodity-dominated agricultural interests of Iowa. With Iowa being a leader in the production of corn, soybeans and pork for domestic consumption and export, the state's importance in the national-- as well global-- food production system cannot be underestimated (U.S.

Department of Agriculture 2007). Primarily due to the importance of food and farm policy decisions in the state, the IFPC was a highly cited council in local and state food policy literature. Governor Vilsack issued three executive orders extending the work of the IFPC during his governorship. However with the change of governor in early 2007, the final executive order was not re-issued in an effort to continue the Council's work. The immediate question as this research began asked: *why* did the IFPC disband immediately following Governor Culver's election as governor? However, due to the temporary lifespan of an executive order, this research quickly turned towards examining the lessons that could be gleaned from the existence and subsequent demise of the Iowa Food Policy Council. However, as this research progressed, the initial question of why the IFPC disbanded was revised to ask whether or not the IFPC actually dissolved entirely. By thoroughly examining the structure and leadership of the IFPC, and especially the legacy of the council, valuable lessons may be identified which may provide a solid foundation for further research and perhaps serve as a guide for other state food policy councils.

### ***State FPCs***

While the first local food policy council in North America was created in 1982 in Knoxville, the first state-wide FPC was not implemented until 1997 in Connecticut. Today there are twenty-nine active FPCs at the state or provincial levels in North America. Based upon an extensive literature review, it is clear that more research is needed in determining specific reasons for the successes and failures of food policy councils. Because of the short history of FPCs, there is little available literature defining a "successful" FPC; however, the literature regarding local councils is growing. Yet, to date, there continues to be scant in-

depth knowledge of state food policy councils. Until recently many FPCs were still considered new organizations; and today there remains little research identifying traits of success for them to follow (Harper et al. 2009). While a case study of four cities' and one county's respective food policy councils has been conducted (Dahlberg 1994), there continues to be a lack of detailed research of recent state food policy councils. Though a few papers have built upon Dahlberg's foundation, including several comparative studies of FPCs, in-depth case study research remains minimal (Clancy 2007; Scherb et al. 2012; Schiff 2008). This paper seeks to fill this void by exploring in depth the fate of a typical state FPC.

### ***The Research***

For state food policy councils to succeed in the future, research must examine what succeeds and what does not work at the state level. The initial research question to be addressed was: what are the factors that led to the demise of the Iowa Food Policy Council? Due to the exploratory research approach, the beginning question was modified to reflect the research process. After initial interviews and analysis, the research question focused upon some of the lessons learned from the experience of the IFPC. By utilizing an in-depth single-case study to examine the opportunities and challenges of the IFPC, many shortcomings and strengths were identified that may further strengthen and develop other state food policy councils. Most importantly, the findings will help guide further research on food policy councils that may be generalized at multiple levels.

In order to closely examine the IFPC, it is important to identify the areas within FPC research that hinder and encourage the development of councils. Dahlberg (1994) offers the first example of a case study examining a set of FPCs. Dahlberg lays out areas that may lead

to the sustainability of a FPC, offering valuable information upon which the questions and analysis may focus. The following factors will be analyzed throughout this case study when examining the IFPC:

- Historical and political context
- The mandated role and powers given to the IFPC
- IFPC member composition
- Staff and budget support
- Overall program leadership and management

The research foci that Dahlberg (1994) highlights above act as a guide for conducting the research process here. By focusing on certain aspects of the council's development, the success and challenges of the IFPC's tenure will become clearer, offering findings that may be transferable to other state food policy councils throughout the United States.

While Dahlberg uses the above factors in comparing FPCs, the single-case study approach that this research utilizes does not leave room for such comparisons. Therefore, research findings will be compared to other FPCs as other case studies are conducted.

### ***What makes this case unique?***

Agriculture has long been a primary component of Iowa's culture, history and economy. According to the 2007 USDA Census, Iowa produces more corn and soy than any other state in the country. Due to the importance of conventional agriculture to Iowa's economy and, as importantly, to its political climate, the IFPC played a unique role compared to other state FPCs. In a state where local foods and small-scale agriculture are rarely acknowledged, the IFPC convened diverse stakeholders. The diversity of represented

agricultural interests created an opportunity to demonstrate to other states the potentially significant role that FPCs offered.

A second unique factor of the IFPC was the fact that it was created through an executive order. According to the Community Food Security Coalition, of North America's twenty-nine active state or provincial FPCs, less than one-third are government-sanctioned (Winne 2012). It is not detailed as to how many of these Councils are the result of executive orders. Due to the fact that the IFPC was created by executive order, the governor of Iowa played a key role in council's success or failure. Although it would be easy to conclude that the reasoning for the demise of the Council in 2006 was because of the change of governor, it is also shortsighted. Yet there are few clear reasons why the newly-elected governor chose not to renew the executive order in 2006. Because the reissuing of the executive order is a political concern it may be futile to focus on *why* the IFPC does not exist today. Therefore, the focus of this research is to identify the specific opportunities and challenges that faced this executive-ordered Council. Focusing on the identification of the successes and challenges that the Iowa Food Policy Council encountered throughout its six years of existence will allow other government organized councils to utilize the findings from this research.

Along with the uniqueness of executive orders, existing literature reveals that the Iowa Food Policy Council is the only state FPC to be administered by an academic institution. As a result, this research may lead to findings that are wholly unique to the IFPC itself, especially in terms of funding and administrative support. However, it is hoped that findings generated from this single-case study will add to the existing literature and research

regarding state FPCs. Because such a small amount of state-focused FPC literature exists, there is room for foundation-based research findings, which this single-case study will offer.

Another factor making the IFPC unique is that it is one of only two states (New York is the other), where a second FPC has been created (Harper et al. 2009). According to Roberts and Tagtow (2010), the Iowa Food Systems Council (IFSC) is an attempt at a “second-generation IFPC.” This is important because stakeholders involved in the original Council have also been involved in the creation and implementation of the IFSC. Perhaps the most important difference between the two FPCs is that the Iowa Food Systems Council operates as a member-based non-profit. This research will determine the significance of the relationship between the original IFPC, and the newly-formed IFSC. Results of this research may present lessons that directly impact the operations of the Iowa Food Systems Council.

## **CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

In this review of pertinent literature, it is important to identify a broad range of resources that covers the breadth of food policy councils, from organizational structures to governance and measurable outcomes. It is also important to identify alternative views of FPCs, while gaining an understanding of all relevant research and theories regarding food policy councils. The goal of the following literature review is to understand the current body of literature in an attempt to identify questions that need to be answered and resources that may help lead to supportive evidence as to the reason for the demise of the Iowa Food Policy Council in early 2007. In an effort to gain a broad perspective, five areas within food policy literature are examined in the review.

Understanding the roles and functions of various FPCs creates a foundation for all further research. Most importantly, one needs to understand what makes the Iowa Food Policy Council unique, while also offering resonance with other FPCs. If the existing literature demonstrates that the Iowa Food Policy Council is no different than other FPCs, then this literature may become less relevant. However, if the IFPC is clearly unique in its history and organizational development compared to other FPCs, the research findings will have an opportunity to fill an important void in the existing FPC literature, allowing for the research conclusions to become pertinent for future FPC research and literature.

Moving beyond FPCs, the research must demonstrate a solid understanding of the existing literature regarding food systems in general. Two primary questions that need to be asked when conducting this literature review include: what is a food system and what role do FPCs play in shaping that food system? With a solid understanding of food systems, it will become more apparent of the importance that FPCs hold in their vision and functions.

Community food security, which is often affiliated with fighting hunger and increasing healthy food choices for all, with a focus on low-income populations, is a primary factor in the development and functions of food-based grassroots organizations. However, it is important to understand whether FPCs are focused primarily on increasing food security for all, or is there another function or role that FPCs across the country are focused upon? Community food security concerns are often cited as reasons for needing food policy, yet is this the primary function of a FPC? Understanding community food security and its role within FPC development will help to further understand the structure and function of the IFPC.

As a community and regional planning student, this research will also examine the relationship between planning and FPCs. The importance of planning lies within its distinct function in organizational development, particularly regarding the governmental process. Because FPCs focus on the future of the food system(s), a planner's background and education may serve a vital function towards the success of FPCs. Therefore, this literature review will also identify the role of planners within the structure and context of FPC development.

Because the Iowa Food Policy Council operated at a state-wide level, literature must focus on state FPCs. For the development of this research, it is important to determine the prevalence of state-wide FPCs, and search for existing research that may lead to important questions to examine during this research process. As this research utilizes a single-case study approach, the findings must either contribute to existing literature, or lay a foundation for future state FPC research. Before conducting this research, the existence of state FPC



literature must be examined to determine where this research will be placed among existing state FPC research.

In order to develop a successful case study, case study observation and evaluation techniques must be examined among current research. Due to FPCs being fairly new in North America, as well as being unique among councils in general, FPC case study observation and evaluation techniques will be focused upon.

### ***Food Policy Councils***

The definition of a food policy council is determined by each individual council, depending on their respective objectives and the region they serve. The existing FPC literature highlights the “not one size fits all” approach when examining FPCs (Schiff 2007). Many definitions and functions are described by FPCs themselves through a search of related literature. Many definitions of food policy councils emphasize the need for a holistic approach. Based on this holistic approach, most FPC definitions reviewed in the literature focus on a collaborative nature, creating a forum for various sectors or representatives of the food system to come together (Fiser 2006; Harper et al. 2009). An example of this collaborative definition is given by Clancy et al. (2007): “FPCs are institutions that can bring a broad array of people together to consider and respond to connections among diverse but interrelated facets of the food system” (121). Some definitions, such as one given by a past FPC director Wayne Roberts (Roberts, W. 2010), are more focused on the specific groups involved in policy councils: FPCs “support the health and well-being of farms and farmers, fisheries and fisher folk, hunters and gatherers and their ecosystems, as well as all the people, processes and environments engaged in regulating, processing, transporting, preparing,

serving, eating, and disposing of food as it wends its way along the product life cycle and through the cycle of life” (174). Other definitions, however, focus on the FPC’s role in representing low-income or previously unrepresented populations (Allen 2004; Feenstra 1997). For example, Zodrow (2005) explains that FPCs are “an officially sanctioned body comprised of stakeholders from various segments of the food system. FPCs are innovative collaborations between citizens and government officials which give voice to the concerns and interests of many who have long been under-served by agricultural institutions.” It is clear that a linking component of all FPC definitions is the collaborative nature of the council, a function that strengthens the food system that the respective FPC is targeting.

### ***Defining a “Food System”***

To begin this research, the term “food system” must be operationalized to determine why a food policy council is needed. In examining the existing FPC literature, food systems are defined in many ways and contexts. Pothukuchi and Kaufman (2000) define food systems as “the chain of activities connecting food production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management, as well as all the associated regulatory institutions and activities” (113). Yet other terms have been used to describe the food system. The term “food shed” is defined as “a locally based, self-resilient food system that works with, rather than against, the ecology of the region” (Allen 2004, 146). The food shed concept is useful in understanding the context of FPCs because of the geographical nature of a FPCs work, considered one of the primary traits of a successful food policy council (Dahlberg 1994). Another useful term in the context of food policy councils is the “local food economy.” Feenstra (1997) describes a sustainable food system as benefiting and promoting a local food

economy. She describes local food economies as “rooted in particular places, aim to be economically viable for farmers, use ecologically sound production and distribution practices, and enhance social equity and democracy for all members of the community” (28). The local food economy shares the regional values of a “food shed,” while also incorporating the holistic values of defining a food system as a collaborative “chain of activities” as stated by Pothukuchi and Kaufman (2000). It is important to recognize the complexities of the term “food system” before considering the role of food policy councils. The many definitions and perceived roles of food policy councils are due to the diverse amount of conceptualizations of the term “food system.”

### ***Food Policy***

In evaluating the goals and outcomes of the IFPC’s actions, the term “food policy” must be understood. Food policy is defined throughout FPC literature, with lengthy discussions tying food policy and FPCs. Hamilton (2002), Harper et al. (2009) and Schiff (2007) offer more thorough examinations of the role of food policy in relation to FPCs. Harper et al. (9) simply defines food policy as “any policy that addresses, shapes or regulates the food system,” while Hamilton links the role of legislative decisions to food systems changes through a medium, often a FPC (418). While the term food policy is often mentioned, much of the discussion is targeted towards the role of FPCs making food policy recommendations. However, the goal of this literature review is not to identify the literature that focuses on food policy, as it is more focused on councils as they relate to food policy.

Perhaps just as important as describing the term “food policy” is determining what makes a council distinct, vis-a-vis, a “coalition” or “network” (Joseph 1997). Schiff (2008)

highlights this difference, as she notes that a “food policy council may be different from a typical coalition, where members are expected to represent an organization’s or interest group’s point of view, and where members often have to delay decisions until they can go back to their sponsoring organization for an okay” (209-10). There exists a plethora of literature examining food system-related coalition development (Butterfross et al. 1993; Foster-Fishman et al. 2001; Schiff 2007), much of which is transferable to council development, as the focus on collaboration is emphasized (Butterfross et al. 1993). However, there is some agreement that the primary difference between coalitions and councils within food systems’ literature is the policy aspect of the council (Joseph), whether the term “policy” is used in the name or not. Food policy is often affiliated with government decisions, leading to the large amount of literature connecting food policy councils to government bodies. Much of the literature, especially in the early stages of FPC literature, emphasizes the role of a council as a sanctioned body of government (Dahlberg 1994; Hamilton 2002; Joseph 2007). Joseph notes that “an FPC differs from a network or a coalition in that it is typically sanctioned by either city or county government” (23). Recently, however, much of the literature has made the distinction between “council” and other terms less clear. Some literature recognizes the diversity of bodies associated with FPCs. Zodrow (2003), for example, mentions that, at minimum, councils need “support” from government bodies (49). Most of the FPC literature within the last five years discusses the various methods by which councils may exist, whether as government entities, non-profits, or “hybrid” organizations (Clancy et al. 2007; Fiser 2006; Harper et al. 2009; Schiff 2008).

### ***Community Food Security***

Community food security (CFS) is often cited as a primary reason for the creation of a FPC (Allen 2004; Anderson and Cook 1999; Joseph 1997; Zodrow 2005). However, there are varying observations on the outcome of incorporating community food security as a primary focus of a food policy council's objectives (Dahlberg 1994). As noted, most FPC literature discusses the holistic collaboration of various sectors represented in the food system. Much of the interest in FPCs stems from an increasing awareness of food security issues (Dahlberg 1994; Haughton 1987; Zodrow 2005). Yet, literature has also questioned the role of FPCs in confronting food security (Anderson and Cook 1999; Dahlberg 1994). Just as the FPC literature focuses on the need for collaboration, there seems to be a supportive consensus among recent FPC literature stressing the need for diversity within projects, either in addition to or aside from CFS (Allen 2007; Boron 2003; Fiser 2006; Harper et al. 2009; Schiff 2007, 2008).

### ***Planning within Food Systems***

The importance that community planners play in building a strong local food economy is emphasized throughout FPC literature, even from the very beginning. Examining FPCs in 1987, Haughton highlights the importance of planners within the food system, noting that "food policy is the responsibility of planners, both public and private" (183). Because community planners implement policy from a local land-use level to a broad regional level, it is important to understand the specific roles that community planners play in food policy council development and implementation. Gaining a more thorough understanding of the role, and possible importance, that planners have in councils may help

to create questions to build upon when further researching the history of the Iowa Food Policy Council. Pothukuchi's "Community and Regional Food Planning: Building Institutional Support in the United States" (2009) makes the case for the role of planners in a successful food policy council. Much of the article discusses the importance of a broad stakeholder presence as part of a council's make-up, including at the state level, where those with knowledge of land-use and community development must be included (361). In an earlier article, Pothukuchi and Kaufman (1999) examine the way planners may become more involved within food systems' development. After conducting interviews with planning agencies and departments, Pothukuchi and Kaufman identify three sources where planners may make a direct impact on developing the food system: the creation of a city department of food, the city planning department, and a food policy council. Earlier, Pothukuchi and Kaufman (1991) note the direct importance of planning within food systems development as "a planning perspective can be used to better understand the local food system and address community food security objectives" (221). Building upon Pothukuchi and Kaufman's research, Clancy (2004) asks more directly why planners do not play a bigger role in developing food systems. Clancy determines that many of the reasons are due to the fact that planning departments and agencies focus on more traditional topics not related to food. However, Clancy also makes the clear point that because of a planner's role in comprehensive planning, it is important to "lobby governments to develop comprehensive plans at the state level that would include food elements" (437).

Many of the primary and most cited sources of FPC literature (Boron, 2003; Dahlberg 1997; Schiff 2008) make note of the importance of planners in the development of food systems, especially involving planners, within FPCs. Many of these references are linked to

the context of collaboration among various stakeholders within FPCs. Broad representation across all representative “sectors” is a common theme for the success of FPCs throughout all crucial examinations of food policy councils (Clancy et al. 2007, 136). It is clear from examining the current literature regarding FPCs that diversity within collaboration should include planners if a FPC is due for success. Understanding this relationship between planners and policy councils may be important in identifying possible strengths and weaknesses of councils, specifically the Iowa Food Policy Council.

### *State FPCs*

While literature examining FPCs has increased in recent years, there continues to be scant research pertaining to state-wide food policy councils in particular. Because the first state FPC was created in 1997, most existing FPC literature focuses on local councils (Hamilton 2002, 446). With the creation of numerous state food policy councils in the last ten years, recent literature has included more analyses of state FPCs (Boron 2003; Clancy et al. 2007; Fiser 2006; Harper et al. 2009; Schiff 2007, 2008). Harper et al. (2009) offers a recent analysis of successes and failures of some state FPCs, including the Iowa Food Policy Council (40). However, Harper et al.’s analysis is quick to dismiss the Council’s disengagement as due to the change of governor, without further examination. Going more in-depth, Clancy et al. (2007) offer a comparison between the Iowa and Connecticut state FPCs. In an effort similar to Dahlberg’s, Clancy et al. (2007) compare the two councils based upon such activities as legislation, policy, programs, research, and education, yet do not offer any significant conclusions regarding the differences between the two state FPCs (131).

While some literature notes the organizational diversity of state food policy councils, much of the state-level, and local, FPC literature focuses on government-initiated policy (Hamilton 2002). The most cited journal article that pertains specifically to state food policy councils is Hamilton's "Putting a Face on Our Food: How State and Local Food Policies Can Promote the New Agriculture" (2002). Hamilton claims that "a food policy council is an officially sanctioned body of representatives from various segments of a state or local food system-- consumers, farmers, grocers, chefs, food processors, distributors, hunger advocates, educators, government, and consumers- in a common discussion to examine how the local food system works" (443). Although Hamilton notes the collaborative approach of FPCs, it is important to acknowledge his emphasis of an "officially sanctioned" council, which embodies many FPCs, including the Iowa Food Policy Council.

### ***Case Study Evaluations***

There is currently a limited amount of literature exemplifying case study evaluations regarding food policy councils. Because of the short history of most FPCs, many sources examine and broadly compare the experiences of multiple FPCs (Hamilton 2002, 446); yet literature has yet to closely examine a specific council or offer an in-depth multi-case study approach (Boron 2003; Clancy et al. 2007; Harper et al. 2009; Schiff 2007, 2008). The most prominent multi-case study is Dahlberg's "Food Policy Councils: The Experience of Five Cities and One County" (1994). By closely examining five municipal food policy councils and one county food policy council, Dahlberg offers an example of measuring 'successes' and 'failures' of FPCs. Dahlberg emphasizes the individual nature of food policy councils and the "no one size fits all" mantra of all critical FPC literature. In his research. Dahlberg



determines eight factors leading to the success of FPCs, including paid-staff, funding, mandated roles and powers, and the historical context of each FPC, among others (Dahlberg 1994). Dahlberg concludes that a degree of formalization and formal institutionalization are important factors in sustaining a successful council, while organizational linkages also play an important role in food policy council success. While Dahlberg does not include state food policy councils in his analysis, his research methods may be transferable in studying the Iowa Food Policy Council. Haughton (1987) examines the history of the first food policy council in Knoxville, however does not critically examine the council. Instead Haughton offers a thorough history of the council, with a perspective towards its future. Both Fiser (2006) and Roberts (2010) offer an insider's perspective of a FPC. As an intern for the Chicago Food Policy Council, Fiser (2006) relates his experience with the Chicago FPC, but he does not critically evaluate the "successes" or "failures" of the Chicago FPC. Fiser's primary focus in his research is on the current literature and interviews of outside FPCs. The most insightful analysis examining the inner workings of a FPC is described by the past manager of the Toronto Food Policy Council, Wayne Roberts (Roberts 2010). Roberts details his experience as the director of the Toronto Food Policy Council, one of the most successful food policy councils in North America (Harper et al. 2010). Although Roberts examines the Toronto Food Policy Council in a similar manner as Haughton (1987) and Fiser (2006), Roberts' primary objective is not to critically analyze the work of the council. Instead, Roberts aims to simply showcase an example of organizational traits and policy initiatives of an existing FPC. In a review of existing case studies, only Dahlberg (1994) offers a true case study approach in examining food policy councils. In all literature involving FPCs, it is clear that there is a lack of a retrospective examination of a failed FPC. Although multiple FPCs have

failed in the last two decades (Harper et al. 2009), the reasons have not been thoroughly examined. The goal of this single-case study examining the IFPC is to fill the gap of case study research in the existing literature.

There is limited literature regarding how to clearly evaluate food policy councils in particular; however, one article does offer a thorough example. “Local food policy coalitions: Evaluation issues as seen by academics, project organizers, and funders” offers the most extensive technique in identifying ways to evaluate food policy councils (Webb et al. 1998). While the councils being evaluated are local councils, the techniques may be generalized to the state level for the evaluation of the IFPC. The most important aspect of the article is the evaluation method used. The authors used qualitative methods, identifying twenty-four “key informants,” or stakeholders. Webb et al. (1998) identified stakeholders as “individuals who had experience with local food policy coalitions” (68). The authors used “formal and informal networks” to identify the initial contacts, followed by using snowball sampling techniques to complete the set of twenty-four interviews. Yet, due to time limitations, the authors only interviewed academics, project organizers, and funders, excluding “food policy councils, coalition members, and local government officials” (68). Telephone interviews were conducted using open-ended questions to gain in-depth perspectives from the informants. These interviews lasted between fifteen minutes and an hour, depending on whether the interviewee was an academic, organizer, or funder. Many of the results mirror the conclusions of other FPC-related research-- as especially noted in Dahlberg’s findings-- that funding and organizational structure play primary roles in sustaining food policy councils. Perhaps the most interesting set of interviews were with the funders, as this is a neglected stakeholder group that will need to be tapped for future

research. However, with the authors neglecting to interview other stakeholders, including coalition members and government officials, the findings of the study were limited. For many state-administered councils (including the IFPC), government officials are the funders and will need to be interviewed to gain the most thorough and useful research findings.

In examining the existing literature, a single-case study examining a particular food policy council was not found. While multi-case study approaches (Clancy et al. 2007; Dahlberg 1994) offer comparisons of FPCs of various organizational structures, there continues to be a lack of thorough knowledge of how one FPC has operated and existed before abruptly disbanding. The Iowa Food Policy Council offers a unique case study, in which the research findings will fill an important void within existing FPC literature.

## CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

As this case study examines the incidents and history of the IFPC, an inductive research design approach was utilized. Before any conclusions could be made, extensive data gathering, recording, and organizing of relevant information was completed. To best accomplish a thorough single-case study, two primary observation techniques were used: in-depth interviews and content analysis of relevant texts, documents and media coverage. These observation methods are elaborated below:

### *In-depth Interviews*

In-depth interviews were the primary method for collecting data. Interviews were conducted with relevant IFPC stakeholders. Interviews were either face-to-face or by telephone and were recorded. A list of all 2005 IFPC “members and special advisors” can be found archived at the Drake University Agricultural Law Center. Interviewing began by focusing on stakeholders who had a leadership role within the Council, beginning with the 2005 IFPC list of members. After the first two interviews, purposive snowball sampling led to further stakeholders being interviewed. Purposive snowballing begins with a small set of cases, and then spreads out based upon the established links to the initial cases (Neuman 2011, 269). Snowball sampling is effective because many IFPC stakeholders were involved as governor-appointed members of the council, while others were involved as special members or only as task force members, and thus might not be listed as “members or special advisors,” and therefore overlooked as initial targets for interviews. Snowball sampling also revealed academics and funders, among other non-members, that helped lead to further research questions to be addressed. Interviewees included those representing various

governmental departments, academic interests, and the private food service industry, allowing for a diverse interviewee set. The following table indicates the diversity of interviewees included in this research, with each interviewee categorized by the organization that they represented at the time they were appointed as members of the IFPC:

Affiliated with the administrative university	2
Represented a private organization / business	3
Held a position within state government	3
Farmer	1
Represented the state university	1

Lasting from as little as thirty minutes, to over an hour, the in-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format, allowing for both open and closed-ended questions and discussion. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed throughout the process, allowing for an opportunity to determine potential themes prior to the end of the interview process. As potential themes became apparent throughout the interviewing process, the researcher determined that saturation had been reached after ten interviews. Due to the request of one interviewee, nine of the interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The initial focus of the interview questions attempted to identify the factors that led to the demise of the IFPC, while also finding out what lessons may be learned from the effects of these factors. Because one answer may lead to an unforeseen follow-up inquiry, interview questions were flexible and allowed to flow with the discussion. Yet, a standard set of questions was used in all interviews:

- Q1: Tell me about your role with the Iowa Food Policy Council.
- Q2: Were you an appointed member of the IFPC at the time of its creation in 2000?
- Q3: What is your interest in Iowa's food system?

- Q4: Why were you appointed as a member of the IFPC?
- Q5: For how long were you an appointed member of the IFPC?
- Q6: Were you a member of the IFPC in 2006, when Governor Culver was elected?
- Q7: What were you hoping to accomplish as a member of the IFPC?
- Q8: What factors do you feel led to the Iowa Food Policy Council's disbandment in 2006?

The above questions were created to allow for diversity in the answers and information that was gathered. As potential themes such as the role of non-government members within the Council became apparent throughout the interviews, the direction of the research was slightly modified to focus more on the lessons learned than factors that led to the IFPC's demise. The background and knowledge of the individual interviewees also helped to direct each specific interview. As narrative details are not included in written documents or secondary data sources, interview results were the primary foundation for this research, with other research content, such as meeting minutes, offering a source for triangulation.

The coding of the results was completed throughout the process, beginning immediately after the first interview was transcribed. As the primary measuring tool, coding was a three-step process. Open coding was used for the initial coding process, allowing code labels to be assigned for specific themes (Neuman 2011, 512). The initial themes identified include communication, organizational structure, and governmental leadership. These initial themes then led to axial coding for further examining. Axial coding allowed for the themes to further develop, and was particularly focused on identifying specific themes within the initial open coding results. Finally selective coding was utilized to identify the most specific and relevant themes from the coded research. The findings presented in chapter four of this

document are the final results of the selective coding process. The unit of analysis is the Iowa Food Policy Council, at the organizational level. Therefore, sub-units of analyses are based upon the defined themes that were found during the coding process (i.e. structure, accomplishments, advocacy, etc.).

An important consideration when conducting interviews is when to conclude the research. As saturation was reached, the interviews concluded. Not only was saturation determined when much of the same information that was discussed in the first few interviews began to be repeated among interviews six, seven, eight and so forth, but saturation became evident when it was determined that the interviewees represented the full range of interests of the IFPC. This diversity is represented in the table on page 24. Each interview was transcribed soon after its completion, allowing for the initial open coding process to begin after the first transcription, continuing as an ongoing process while interviews were being conducted.

### ***Content Analysis***

The Iowa Food Policy Council produced many documents, both official and public, that were analyzed to help further develop the research findings. These documents include past meeting minutes, public statements and releases, and government reports. Gatekeepers were identified to gain access to pertinent documents. Minutes from meetings and other documents were analyzed similarly to the transcribed interviews, by coding for specific themes. The content analysis process allowed for new information and themes not identified through in-depth interviews to be incorporated into the findings. Content analysis was completed before, along with, and after the completion of interviews as an effort to verify

what was being discovered during the interview process. While conducting the content analysis portion of this research, some important findings were identified that were not highlighted during the interviews. These findings are included in this research, and occasionally required follow-up discussions with IFPC stakeholders.

The purpose of incorporating content analysis into the research design is two-fold. First, content analysis helps to verify the results of interviews through triangulation. In addition, content analysis raised important research questions that needed to be further addressed in the interviews. For example, content analysis provided evidence that some members of the Council were adamant that a sustainability plan be put into place to prolong the IFPC's existence with the election of a new governor. This evidence became a primary component of the interview analysis, as a form of triangulation. As a result, content analysis offered valuable information as interviews were being conducted, while also helping to verify what was being discovered throughout the process.

### ***Validity***

Validity was addressed through a variety of methods. After transcribing, triangulation was used to address internal validity. For example, if an interviewee mentions a public event as a keystone event in the history of the IFPC, content analysis was implemented to determine the validity of the interviewee's observation. Therefore, council documents and other relevant content of the same time period were examined to verify the claim that the event had a major impact on the organization.

Member validation was also included as a means of establishing internal validity. Using the same example as mentioned above, if a member mentions a keystone event in the



history of the Iowa Food Policy Council, then other interviewed members must verify the other interviewee's claim to demonstrate validity.

In discussing the history of the IFPC with interviewees, it was imperative to discuss only topics specific to the IFPC. Perhaps as a result of the open-ended interview process, participants often discussed current events and existing organizations that were unrelated to the research; therefore only those specific topics that pertain to the IFPC were accounted for in the coding and research. A method for determining a topic's value to the IFPC was, again, through member and document validation. If a claim lacked validation, than it was deemed unimportant to the outcome of this research. As a way to ensure the confidentiality of both the IFPC and the researcher, unique qualifiers were used to identify interviewees. In an effort to increase the privacy of the researcher, the investigator only represented the efforts of the research being conducted. Therefore, any outside activities that the researcher was involved with at the time of interviewees was not revealed during the interviewing process.

Yet one more method to establish validity came through the help of another researcher. After the initial open coding process was completed, a fellow researcher coded three (33%) of the transcripts. Afterwards, the other second researcher completed the coding of the three transcripts, and then met with the primary researcher to discuss the themes that they each identified. After discussion, both researchers agreed upon the initial themes that were found. This process ensured validity in the coding and finding-development process.

As previously mentioned, it was a challenging to generalize the results of this research outside of this particular single-case study. Once again, the goal of this research is to form a base for further research in the development and sustainability of food policy councils. Therefore, the most efficient way to test for external validity will be through

replicating the findings in other similar state food systems councils. Because this single-case study is focused on a specific FPC, this research will offer a theory in which other case studies will be able to further replicate and improve-upon (Yin 2003, 37). As further research is conducted, the external validity of the results will be further developed, and perhaps another similar case study will be performed verifying the results of this research.

### ***Ethical, Personal and Methodological Issues***

Perhaps the most pressing ethical issue pertaining to this research is the fact that the researcher is a member of the board of the Iowa Food Systems Council (IFSC). While being a board member offers extraordinary access to content and stakeholders involved in the IFPC, there are some ethical barriers to consider. It was important to not jeopardize the work of the IFSC during the interview process. It is possible that some stakeholders regret a second council being formed, particularly as a non-profit, and would take the opportunity of an interview to attempt to criticize the actions of the IFSC. Careful interview techniques were utilized in an effort to address this ethical issue during the research process. Some interview techniques used to combat this ethical concern include relying on an interview script and being careful to not disclose personal and professional work outside of this research.

Interviewing government officials can be a burdensome process. Not only are government officials often difficult to access, they are careful about what they disclose regarding government operations. Prior to the interview process, it was uncertain how politically-divisive the IFPC actually was. At times, keeping political views within the boundaries of this research made the analysis difficult. This research was particularly

mindful of the political wariness of many government position-holders. Therefore, the interviews were flexible to address only questions that were appropriate to the respective interviewee.

Finally, in an effort to generalize the results to a broad audience of both state and local food policy councils of various structures and sizes, this research showcases the Iowa Food Policy Council as an example of *one* state food policy council. A major challenge was taking the specific results of what happened in Iowa and offering the challenges experienced as a guide for other councils. Because the IFPC is closely affiliated with one administration, in one state, results must go beyond the particular nuances of Iowa's governmental system. Building upon the extensive literature review and history of FPC research allows for the comparison of various FPCs and offers a "best practices" guide that can be built upon the specific results in Iowa.

### ***Research Adjustments***

Some important adjustments were made during the research process. The primary adjustment was the research question. Although the question of *why* the IFPC disbanded is still important, and of primary significance, the emphasis of the interview questions became more focused towards challenges and opportunities that the Council faced during its existence. The reason for this adjustment is primarily due to the available content during the research, as well as interviewee responses. The researcher determined that focusing on the challenges and opportunities of the Council would offer the reader a more thorough understanding of the Council itself. Most importantly, by focusing on challenges and accomplishments during the Council's existence allowed for the initial question to be

answered, while identifying findings that may be more efficiently generalized to other Councils at the state level.

Another adjustment came as initial themes that were potentially of primary significance became secondary as the research process developed. Two secondary themes include funding and national influence upon the Council. For example, most FPC literature identifies funding as barrier to council development. However, as the findings demonstrate, funding did not seem to be a major hindrance to the functions of the IFPC. Although a few of the interviewees did mention funding as a potential cause of concern for the Council, funding was not validated using the triangulation methods described above.

One other potential theme among Council documents and interviewee descriptions is the IFPC's relationship with national FPC organizations. At least one national organization that works in developing FPCs was cited as having a tenuous relationship with the IFPC; however this tension between the IFPC and the national organization lacks significance as it was not cited by many interviewees, nor often documented in the content, to directly affect the outcome of this research.

Finally, an important adjustment that occurred towards the end of the research process was the inclusion of the Iowa Food Systems Council in the in-depth interviews. Each of the first four interviewees offered significant evidence that the development of the IFSC was potentially an important outcome of the Iowa Food Policy Council itself. Therefore, the IFSC was emphasized often towards the end of the interview cycle. In fact, one interviewee was included specifically because of their knowledge of the IFSC's development and organizational process, lending an important perspective when reviewing the history and outcomes of the Iowa Food Policy Council.

## CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

The data analysis process led to several key findings. The findings presented in this chapter are included under the following themes: construction and structure, tension, the feel good and the do good, and the political sustainability of the IFPC. These themes were determined by the coding process, which allowed findings to emerge before being placed into representative themes. To understand the context of the findings, it is important to first thoroughly describe the history, structure and leadership of the IFPC.

### *The creation of the Iowa Food Policy Council*

According to Executive Order 16 (2000), the purpose of the IFPC was to “advise [the governor’s] office on all aspects of the food production system in Iowa.” The primary “aspects of the food production,” as described in the executive order, included connecting local agricultural producers with local buyers, determining “barriers that limit the access of hungry consumers to available food stocks,” creating “innovative local food system activities” and “strategies to link consumers to a growing local food production infrastructure,” among others. The principal output of the IFPC was in the form of an annual set of recommendations that were directly sent to the governor’s office. Along with these recommendations, Executive Order 16 expected a series of reports that outlined Iowa’s food system.

Initially, the IFPC comprised of (Executive Order 16, 2000):

15-20 members appointed by the governor. Representatives from the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, the Iowa Department of Economic Development, and Iowa’s health and human services agencies shall be appointed to serve as ex-officio members on the Council. The Council’s voting membership shall consist of representatives from the following areas of the state’s local food production system:

1. local producers also engaged in direct marketing;
2. local food processors;
3. local food distributors;
4. local food retailers;
5. cooperative extension representatives;
6. urban agriculture and education representatives;
7. agricultural policy and legal experts; and
8. hunger prevention and food security experts.

The above group of stakeholders and representatives were to meet on a quarterly basis, with meetings being hosted throughout the state of Iowa.

An important factor of any FPC is funding. The initial Executive Order 16 (2000) is open as to the sources of funding of the IFPC:

The Council will receive administrative support from the Agricultural Law Center at Drake University. All research, policy development, and publication activities will be coordinated by the Council through Drake University. Funding to support the Council's activities will be received by the Council through private donations, state and federal grant assistance, and institutional support from Drake University.

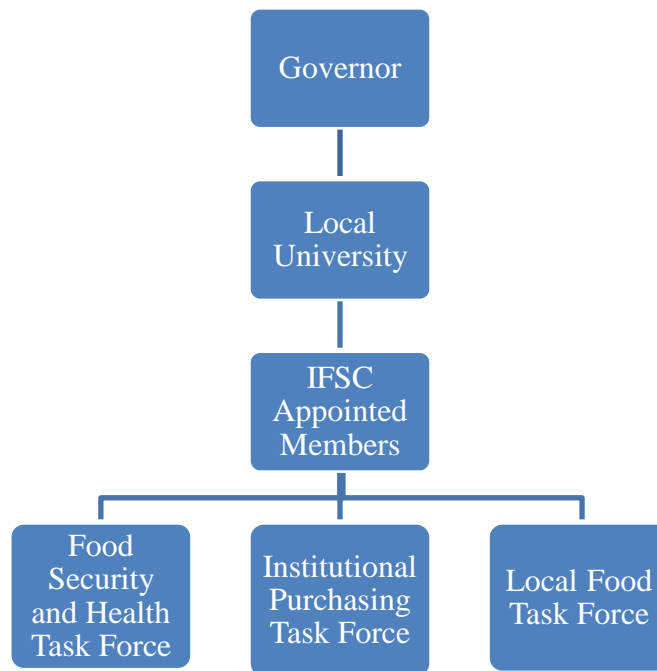
Although the initial executive order seemed to lay out a strong structural plan, the complexion of the Council changed throughout its existence. Based upon interviews, it appeared that the Chair's relationship with the governor resulted in modifications to the Council's structure. These recommendations were made directly by the Chair to the governor, as the Chair had immediate supervision over the actions and direction of the Council itself. Perhaps the most important change was the inclusion of task forces within the structure:

The Council shall create two "inter-agency task forces," composed of representatives from various state agencies, to recommend improvements in state activities as they relate to food security and the promotion of Iowa grown food products. Each task force shall report its findings and conclusion to the Council before the Council submits its final report to this office for review (Executive Order 19, 2001).

These task forces, which grew to three by 2003, operated as the outreach agencies of the Council. The primary objective of the task forces was to recommend specific policies to the Council, which then recommended them to the governor. Therefore, task forces operated as somewhat autonomous entities. It is common for FPCs to include task forces in their structure, and these task forces are often charged with particular objectives (Harper et al. 2009). The IFPC's task forces were no different. Importantly it was possible for stakeholders to participate directly in the leadership of the task forces, yet not be governor-appointed members of the Council itself (Interview 9).

Research indicates that each member of the Council was a member of at least one task force. However, only three interviewees specifically cited the role, or importance, of the task forces. Even so, IFPC documentation suggests that these task forces played an important role in accomplishing the IFPC's mission. Minutes from task force meetings indicate specific task force projects, the results of which would later be reported to the Council itself. Minutes from one task force meeting clearly demonstrated the task forces' autonomous roles by discussing the "scope of work for the Council within the context of the institutional purchasing task force work" (IFPC Institutional Task Force Meeting Agenda, March 11, 2012). These task forces were charged with recommending changes to particular food system sectors to the Council's appointed members. Evidence shows that while task forces were formed to focus upon single aspects of Iowa's food system, their recommendations were wide-ranging. By far, the most cited task force focused upon Food Security (and later Health was added to this group's title). This research revealed that the task forces' member composition fluctuated, and not only that the task forces operated autonomously within the structure of the IFPC, but they also worked independently from one

another. Due to the flexible and independent function of the task forces, the composition of the task forces was not closely examined in this research. The result of the task forces' operations within the structure of the Iowa Food Policy Council will be further analyzed in the following chapters. The following graphic below details the structure of the Council with the inclusion of the task forces:



During the IFPC's lifespan, the governor reissued the initial executive order on three occasions, the final being in 2004 (Executive Order 38). The Council's existence, as well as its structure and accountability, relied upon these executive orders. The following findings are developed based upon the Council's structure, dictated by these orders.

### *Analytical themes*

The findings are discussed within the context of four analytic categories, or themes, which emerged throughout the process. The following themes were developed after the specific findings had been recognized within documents and the narrative accounts, then



placed into categories that reflected the context and structure of each finding. The following four themes emerged as the most essential to this research:

*Theme one:* construction and structure

*Theme two:* tension

*Theme three:* the feel good and the do good

*Theme four:* political sustainability of the Iowa Food Policy Council

In presenting these findings, extensive narrative accounts are utilized to offer the reader a vivid picture of the experiences that each interviewee encountered as a stakeholder within the Iowa Food Policy Council. Detailed quotations, taken from interview transcripts, are used to demonstrate the richness of the content within each finding. These narrative descriptions are enhanced with the secondary data included in this research. Council documents, especially internal reviews and governmental orders, are particularly relevant to this chapter. Finally, the findings presented in this chapter reflect the open dialogue of each interview, enhancing the themes by providing a more intimate account of the experiences of each interviewee.

Importantly, the following themes are presented in this chapter as an outline so that the reader is able to fully analyze each finding as they read through the chapter. A more thorough, and final, analysis of each finding will be presented in the following chapter.

### ***Construction and Structure***

I think one of the most important aspects of a food policy council is to convene people who never talk to each other. They work in silos (1; 3).

Potentially the most relevant underlying factor within the findings is the structure of the Iowa Food Policy Council and how the Council's form affected its outcome and

accomplishments. Each interviewee discussed the structure of the Council, particularly in reference to the leadership or the Council's strong connection to the state government. The structure of the organization plays a key role when interviewees reflect upon their experience and often is a catalyst for further analysis, especially in terms of tension and output. Before discussing the findings regarding structure, it is important to determine how the Council was created and who was a candidate to be a member of the Council. In this research, the term "construction" relates to how the council was created and the decisions that went into the composition of the IFPC. "Structure," refers to the results of this construction. Although most of the interviewees were appointed, or asked to be a part of the Council, one interviewee reflected upon the construction the Iowa Food Policy Council:

What happened then during the Spring of, the Winter of [inaudible]... and I had, it seemed like, a meeting every other week, or whatever, with [x] as we were working through the identity of who was going to be on the Council, both in terms of what the Executive Order would say as to the kind of categories, and the fact that they weren't necessarily going to be slotted; you know, it wasn't going to be the farm bureau gets one, and the [Iowa Farmers Union] gets one-- you know the typical-- but it was going to be designated around Ag., we'll have people from the grocery industry, and we'll have people from, you know, the university, and we'll have people who are growers and people who are consumers, you know, the more generalized categories, but then also thinking about, okay, who are those people going to be? You know, we needed somebody from the restaurant and hospitality industry, and so [x], who was the Executive Director, we needed somebody from the grocer industry, and so [x], who was head of the Iowa Grocer's Association, and we needed somebody from labor, and so there was a labor appointee, who never came, never participated, and we never had much luck ever getting labor involved. Um, and so then we went, you know, back and forth... because it was both questions of, you know, gender balance and diversity, and geographical balance, and people who were not necessarily their friends, but you know, people who they, okay, is there any reason to believe they're interested in this, and, you know, will they participate? I don't think the Council; the Council wasn't subject to formal gender or party balance requirements like the Board of Regents or other statutorily-created commissions. But we were subject to the open meetings law (2; 2- 3).

The assembly of the Council serves as an important foundation for the analysis of all further findings, regardless of the theme in which they are placed.

### *Forum for diverse interaction*

As evidenced by the above remarks, there was clearly an attempt to construct a forum representing the many facets of Iowa's food system. The function of a diverse forum is described by Harper et al. (2009):

A diverse array of actors, organizations and even movements work on food issues, including food security and anti-hunger advocates, environmentalists, family farmers, farm workers unions, consumer groups, nutritionists and local restaurant and retail businesses and food workers. Each of these tends to pursue their own objectives independently through various strategies and approaches. Thus, despite the collective breadth of their activities, their political power tends to be fragmented. Food Policy Councils were often cited as a potential forum for dialogue among the diverse actors working on food issues (19).

Perhaps the most important word when describing food policy councils is “diversity,” as the term seems to be a primary component to the success and composure of all food policy councils. While diversity is often associated with race and class, when interviewees discuss the role of diversity, it is most often in terms of stakeholders representing the broad state-wide food system. Each interviewee mentioned the importance of diversity (or lack of) when describing the composition of the Council. Examples of these comments include:

To me, the biggest strength of the Iowa Food Policy Councils was its diversity (5; 8).

A food policy council was a bigger and different tent than just an agricultural tent (2; 2).

From my perspective, my opinion was... a greater sense of awareness, [and] a coming together of different minds, under Iowa food. I mean that, in itself, um, was a great accomplishment because people from all sorts of, you know, school systems, all the state departments, producers, religious organizations, um, the university (4; 7).

As an outcome of this diversity, interviewees mentioned the simple act of convening stakeholders from throughout Iowa as an accomplishment in itself:

But I would say one other thing we accomplished is that we got to know people all around Iowa who had common interests in food policy, and we got to know, particularly for me, we got to know what state agencies were doing. Um, what food, and, you know, nutrition, and hunger, and food security, and these issues, and I had no idea, so I learned an awful lot about what others were doing (8; 3).

And they [IFPC meetings] were very engaging because I got to be involved with a lot of different disciplines, um, Catholic Charities was a part of it, I've seen some producers, um, just a whole variety, a lot of academics; we had government show up, um, somebody from Harkin's office came a couple times (4; 1).

### *Forum for state government*

While diversity may have been an objective for the convening of stakeholders, interviewees reflected upon the convening of state government officials as the most dramatic result of the Council:

So we had our very first meeting of these, all the people that would have been in the food access and Health Work Group, and there were people there, somebody said, get this line, she said to somebody, just when he introduced himself, she says, "Oh, I've never met you, you write my check every week, I've never met you before!" (1; 3).

In fact, it is clear that the convening of state government officials was a priority in constructing the forum:

The Secretary sent the letters to the department heads saying, you know, you need to designate somebody to be the person, and, you know, it made sense, I mean we had the person from the Department of Education who ran the school programs, boom. And so, um, um, so we had good people, to the extent that we got people to participate because there were some agencies that weren't, just weren't on the bit, in the same way that others were. Um, and you know it, it, so that one, that one success, or that thing that I would point to, one of the real values of a council, and still, I, there's no reason why the council couldn't exist today, or still be doing that function, I think some of the state agency personal really miss there being that type of opportunity (2; 4).

The communication between stakeholders within state government is a common finding throughout the interview process. Each participant mentioned the intimate engagement between those who worked within state government departments or agencies, either as advisors or as employees. Due to the emphasis on convening state agency and department officials, the IFPC's role was clearly focused on state government concerns:

If you had to identify what is the most important success of the... maybe to readers or observers they might not think that's much of a success, but it was creating a forum and a place where people who worked throughout state government (2; 4).

The things where we were most successful on... where we actually dug into some state agency coordination... so alignment of goals within agencies. That was probably where the food policy council functions best (6; 9).

There was a lot more communication between them [state departments] than they ever had before (5; 4).

### *Who was missed?*

As mentioned above, concerning diversity within the context of the IFPC, diversity was not determined by race or class; rather, diversity reflected the inclusion of a variety of departments, food systems sectors, or political affiliations that extend beyond race and class. While diversity was a primary goal of each executive order directing the IFPC, convening all the diverse stakeholders was no easy task. Although most interviewees focused on the diversity of the Council, four of the ten interviewees noted the struggles-- and even lack of diversity-- within the Council itself:

“There is a variety of stakeholders represented, but it seems like the focus is state government reps rather than a larger section of stakeholders” (2003-2004 Iowa Food Policy Council Evaluation, 2004).

We had the buy-in of the state agency people, the civilians, the rest of us? Well, that kind of ebbed and flowed (2; 6).

In particular, there was a concern among some Council members that agriculture, and specifically “main stream,” or conventional agriculture, was underrepresented:

I was probably the only one on the Council that really represented main stream Ag. (6; 1).

We need a few more farmers participating in the Council (*2003-2004 Iowa Food Policy Council Evaluation*, 2004).

And while state government was a focus of this diversity, not all departments participated in the IFPC’s meetings and operations:

The Department of Economic Development, their participation was, you know, it wasn’t clear that that they were interested in playing ball. I think they maybe were threatened by the Council, because the saw their role as being economic development, and to the extent that the Council was involved in trying to, create more opportunities around food and agriculture, in the, it wasn’t, they didn’t necessarily... strike me as seeing the Council as a resource or an opportunity to help and kind of magnify their work (2; 4).

### *The effects of structure on creating a forum*

While most state food policy councils are concerned about many elements of organization and structure, the IFPC was in a unique position to move past those worries and focus on substantive issues:

Well yeah, I think, I think that having an executive order like that brings a lot of advantages. One is, is, even though you, you as a group create a strategic plan, still at the same time, you’re not worried about sustainability, you’re not worried about fundraising, you’re not worried about, you know, all these other things, and, and you can go ahead and focus specifically on the tasks at hand. You don’t waste a lot of, well, I don’t want to say waste a lot of time, but you don’t spend a lot of time on those other issues (5; 7- 8).

However as each interviewee reflected upon the importance of diversity and communication within the Council, a common finding was that the structure and the top-

down leadership of the Council may have had a profound effect on the forum for communication that the Council provided:

At the time I did not realize the hierarchy and chain of command, and chain of communication, perhaps, and how my representation would have had on any impact on the Council, that was not clear, that was not clear. But my role was more of a network and communication role within a task force (9; 5).

Yet the executive order's mandate to create a FPC-- still a new organizational concept at the time-- brought about some confusion that otherwise may have been avoided:

Well, I would say one thing is that different agencies, state agencies, and different people came from different approaches, and so sometimes it took some, a while to understand what different people were thinking, and where they were coming from, and, um, you know, to try to find common ground, with, to find common, common goals, and so on. There was a certain amount of that, I think (8; 4).

If you read the executive order, it's pretty general. And, you know, the list of appointed people was to... try to be as representative of as many food system sectors as possible. But one of the inherent challenges in bringing that diversity of folks together is that you're all on different levels as to food policy concepts, um, a council concept, much less a state-level food policy council. And so, you've got, um, various learning curves with the people that are brought to the table (9; 5).

The tension that this structure may have created, especially in terms of communication and diversity, will be further discussed in the following theme.

### *Structure and the resulting output*

Each interviewee noted the important political connection between the governor and the Council. This relationship created an immediate outlet for the Council's accomplishments: the governor. Although one may view the governor as an ideal ear for an organization's recommendations, most interviewees focused upon the challenges this affiliation presented for the Council's ability to produce results:

I think that probably something that was probably a problem throughout, is um, getting, especially later on, is getting attention for the activities and getting, like the

governor's attention for example, an um, and the legislatures' maximum attention, the goal that we had come up with to try to get some results from what the Council had put forward (8; 4).

Their charge was to make recommendations only to the governor. And so that really limited who was going to even see their recommendations, or who could even implement their recommendations (9; 8).

The charge was to make recommendations to the governor, so that was an audience of one (9; 5).

There is evidence that some members of the IFPC were proponents of a change in the governance structure of the Council, primarily for the reason of improving the outcome of the Council's work:

There were those that wanted it to go to the legislature... but when you have a council that was appointed by the governor... top administrative agenda design, what's the output (6; 9)?

In an IFPC internal review from 2004, one IFPC member suggested that the governance of the Council be revised:

I strongly believe that the council needs to become permanent and not an act of the governor. We need to work at funding a statewide food system coordinator (*2003-2004 Iowa Food Policy Evaluation*, 2004).

It is clear from the preceding quotations that the construction and structure of the organization, as determined by the executive order, resonates with Council stakeholders. The make-up of the Council, with a focus on diversity and state government, allowed for an efficient mechanism to recommend changes to the governor in an effort to improve Iowa's food system; however, the Council's structure may have also helped to create tension, both within and outside of the Council's boundaries.



## ***Tension***

Well, one [challenge] was define mission. It really, you know, just internally it never quite knew what its mission was (6; 9).

Each respondent mentioned some form of tension within the Council, whether the tension came from within the Council itself or from outside the Council. Although the structure, as well as the governance, of the Council was primary to this tension, other elements played a role in creating tension, including politics. As discussed in the literature review, such tension is common among FPCs; however, the unique nature of the Iowa Food Policy Council often amplified the tension within the organization.

The following findings within this theme will highlight the challenges expressed by stakeholders within the Council from a variety of perspectives, including leaders, appointed Council members, and task-force members. However, each interviewee's perspective of tension varied according to the role they had within the IFPC; for example, communication was cited as a challenge by a few interviewees who held specific roles within the IFPC and became a tension within the IFPC. Therefore, while each interviewee has their own idea of the tension that may have constrained the Council, the findings presented in this chapter highlight the most common constraints mentioned.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that the findings presented under this theme are the results of challenges, barriers and/or conflicts that created tension within the IFPC. Some of the challenges discussed here formed significant barriers to the work of the Council; however much of the tension highlighted in this research represents specific, and sometimes personal challenges that resonate with interviewees, yet may not have completely disrupted

the work of the Council itself. Most importantly, tension is what seemed to resonate most among interviewees and other Council members.

### *Top-down leadership*

As a result of the uniqueness of the Council, both in structure and governance, much of the criticism from within the Council focused upon the leadership structure referred to in Executive Order 16 (2000): “All research, policy development, and publication activities will be coordinated by the Council through Drake University” (2). This implicit leadership structure created tension among Council stakeholders:

I think part of it was that when you look at who led it, um, you know, the person that led it was, I think, a strong leader (5; 8).

I think [x] had a strong leadership on the Council. Of course, [x] had his own ideas of agriculture (3; 5).

As a result of such strong leadership, some interviewees noted the lack of opportunity for expanded leadership within the Council itself. In fact, opportunities for bottom-up leadership opportunities were cited as few and far between:

[The Council needs a] more participatory process rather than reports that are sometimes long and boring (2003-2004 Iowa Food Policy Council Evaluation, 2004).

Many times this year, it felt as though [x] was the only person who knew what the direction and next steps of the council would be- and that we members of the council were not supposed to know or care, but just follow along (2003-2004 Iowa Food Policy Council Evaluation, 2004).

I think [x] decided at some point it wasn't democratic enough... being as representative as it might have been perceived as being (7; 7).

However, strong leadership was also cited as a strength of the Council:

Well, uh, I was one of those who appreciated the leadership of [x], of the food policy council. And [x] had a key role to play in, um, in being closely connected to the

governor, uh, but it wasn't always, I mean I'm not sure that, like the women, I'm not sure, like [x], was always happy with the food policy council (7; 7).

A food policy is kind of power to correct people, and we wanted to put our people, you know, my gosh, you know, the Farm Bureau may be on the food policy council, or the food industry may be on, you know, [local university], you folks take such a top-down, you know, dictatorial approach (2; 8).

The lack of a “democratic” setting for some interviewees led the research onto another important finding: the inability of IFPC members to advocate for personal and Council-wide efforts.

### *Advocacy within the IFPC*

Perhaps as a result of the strong leadership, as well as being a governor's council, IFPC interviewees were not offered an opportunity or space to advocate or take a personal position on behalf of the Council:

We're not a freestanding body; we're an advisory body to the governor (2; 3).

The council was limited by its make-up, as a policy developer... because the state agency people couldn't really have a position (6; 3).

As the role of the Iowa Food Policy Council became clearer to those who participated within the Council, a few interviewees expressed a desire to advocate that was not acted upon during their time with the Council:

It was the governor's council, I mean it was an advisory council to him, right, it wasn't, and that issue came up in the future then, as we went forward, you know, we'd get requests, oh so can the Council write a letter of support for 'X', or what can the Council sign off on to, that supports 'Y'. And my view was, well, not really. I mean, we're not a freestanding body, we're an advisory body to the governor, the governor doesn't need to wake up and read a news story about how the Iowa Food Policy Council has endorsed X and Y and said, 'Well, the hell, why didn't somebody tell me about this?' You know, it could've recommended to me that we do this, but you know, you're not your own, own body (2; 3).

Somewhere I read where [the Chair] made a statement about not needing advocates on a FPC. I was shocked. The only way to come to a consensus on action items is to have all the voices heard. This statement is very troublesome (*2003-2004 Iowa Food Policy Council Evaluation*, 2004).

Based upon the above quotations, there is evidence that some IFPC members were unhappy with the political association that accompanied the Council's activities. Although some saw the benefit of being directed by the governor and the local university, others felt aggrieved with the constraints created by the political connection of the IFPC.

### *Business interests within the IFPC*

Along with finding that the IFPC members may have felt constrained by the political structure of the IFPC, business leaders involved in the IFPC and others representing elements outside of state government also felt challenged in operating within the boundaries of the Iowa Food Policy Council. A common issue cited by interviewees outside of state government was the unique role of private enterprise within the IFPC:

I'd walk away with sometimes, you know, we'd pat each other on the back because we got food through the welfare system... From a business guy, that I know where all that money comes from, that's not a great accomplishment as far as I'm concerned, okay? So that's really political, so there's two sides of that. I'm on the conservative side of life, so I would walk away from that saying, 'Okay, you've got to make sure you stay away from the political aspect of it, okay, and concentrate, at least in my mind, on the local grown product and getting it into the marketplace, okay? And um, because it is wholesome, there's a health issue, a nutrition issue, you know, people that need food, if that makes sense, um, so all in all, it was always kind of interesting, sometimes I'd walk away, thinking 'oh, my God' but for the most part, I would say 85% of the time, it was a, for me, a learning and good experience (4; 4).

If there was some tension within the Council, it's, we looked at it and said, 'Okay, these, some of these are pretty good ideas, let's run with them in the private sector,' there, there were members of the Council, 'Well, no, we want the state to fund it, or whatever,' and we're going, 'Well' (6; 5).

Although this research included two stakeholders who represented private businesses, there is evidence that the private sector was neglected or misrepresented on some level within the IFPC. One interviewee mentioned the simple abhorrence that some IFPC members held for one specific private interest:

Oh, there was definitely a difference in opinion of people, that, that they almost detest the fact that we have a [national meat processor] in the state (6; 6).

### *Autonomy*

Although not every interviewee was involved in one of the Council's task forces, each member referred to the task forces as a primary component of the structure, and work, of the greater Council. Evidence from the interviews highlights the communicative autonomy that the task forces operated under within the Council:

I believe the task forces' work is a more democratic and sharing manner than the Council itself (2003-2004 *Iowa Food Policy Council Evaluation*, 2004).

There was not communication between the Council and the task-force, it was almost as if the task-force operated autonomously (9; 3).

The above quotation came from a task force member who was not an appointed member of the Council itself. Because task forces brought in stakeholders with specific expertise, the task forces were often comprised of mostly non-appointed members of the Council (Interviewee 4). Although many of the IFPC meetings were said to be open, it seemed that the majority of task force members were not aware of the greater Council activities. Therefore, this structure often led to a rift of communication between task force members and the Council they were serving:

The task-force members questioned what was going on because it was never clearly communicated to task-force members as to the status of the Council, the status of the

Governor's office... Executive Order... was a little bit of confusion for many months as to what, what the next steps were (9; 6).

The autonomous nature of the task forces demonstrates the clear communication and leadership style that the Council operated under. That participants might become leaders within the task forces, yet feel cut-off from the decisions of the Council, indicates a gap within the leadership that the Council may have never overcome. This challenge proved to be an important part of the final analysis of the Council.

Beyond the challenge of communicating between task forces and the Council itself, dialogue within the Council towards the end of Governor Vilsack's second term was certainly minimal. Particularly striking is that the discontinuation of the Council was always a possibility due to the IFPC's reliance upon an executive order.

### *Tension at the end?*

"Petering out" is a term used to describe the discontinuation of the Iowa Food Policy Council. Evidence indicates a lack of communication toward the end of 2006 and early 2007. According to interviewees, the demise of the Council led to confusion among Council members:

Once it kind of disbanded... uh, it was kind of fragmented, but I tried to stay in touch with [x] (4; 3).

We weren't meeting as often, um, not as many e-mails, um, less opportunity to network and communicate with other task force members (9; 3).

You know, the Governor was out of it and we were waiting to stay tuned. [x] was back over here working, and, and that was pretty much how it petered out (2; 11).

Interestingly, interviewees did not discuss a sustainability plan for the future of the Council. There seemed to have been a sense among interviewees that they were simply

working on Council activities until they were told not to. Only in the internal reviews from IFPC members is there evidence that those within the Council saw the need for a long-term goal of the Council beyond the governor's term. In fact, only one Council member, in 2004, suggested that the IFPC, "begin to create a 3-5 year plan for the continuation of the Council should the Governor step down." (2003-2004 Iowa Food Policy Council Evaluation, 2004). Generally, interviewees seemed unclear, and even tense, when discussing the inevitable, yet seemingly abrupt, end of the Council.

*What was the end goal and why did it matter?*

There is evidence that the lack of communication and action to extend the IFPC's operations beyond Governor Vilsack's final term was due to the absence of a defined goal or reason for the existence of the IFPC. Five of the nine recorded interviews noted the lack of a clear goal or objective for the Council to achieve:

Well our goal was to try to, you know, I was one of these people that was: 'goals and vision, and those things, are important to me.' They weren't to [x]... so the whole Council never had those kinds of things (1; 7).

While some interviewees and members seemed pleased with the idea of convening a forum or bringing together stakeholders, other interviewees seemed uneasy when discussing the tangible role of the IFPC. As one can detect from the following quotations, there is strong evidence that tension arose among multiple participants from this lack of a clear goal or function:

That was my thing that was frustrating about it... there was never an end target or an end goal that was clear (4; 7).

Although many interviewees were satisfied with bringing stakeholders together to discuss food systems issues as a primary goal in itself, there were others who felt that

creating such a forum was not a tangible enough result (this is especially true among those who did not represent state government agencies). Beyond the tension it may have created among a portion of IFPC members, the objective(s) of the IFPC is a major component of other findings throughout this research, including some that will be discussed in further detail in the pages below.

### ***The Feel Good and the Do Good***

It's kind of a like a feel-good thing, okay. Alright so we all feel good, where does it get you? You know, at the end of the day, maybe we feel good, but did we do anything for anybody (4; 7)?

As demonstrated by the preceding quote, many interviewees referred to the notion of 'feeling good' as a result of participating within the Iowa Food Policy Council. In fact, many of the interviewees did not focus upon the tangible accomplishments, or lack thereof, when reflecting upon their own experiences. Rather, interviewees shared a sense of personal pride, as well as accomplishments, which resulted from their participation in the Council. While the tangible accomplishments of the IFPC will be discussed within this theme, I will also highlight the personal *feeling* of accomplishment that the stakeholders shared when discussing their experiences.

Throughout the interviewing process, each of the interviewees noted some form of accomplishment that they felt as a member of the IFPC, while also noting the accomplishments of the Iowa Food Policy Council as a whole. The idea of *the feel good and the do good* is related to the sense of accomplishment that each participant felt, even though these accomplishments were often the result of a traditionally non-measurable gain, such as increased knowledge or enthusiasm. While the literature does discuss measuring the



“successes” of FPCs, no agreed-upon measurement criteria exists to efficiently compare and rate the accomplishments of food policy councils. The following findings represent this quandary through the context of both ‘feel good’ and ‘do good’ accomplishments.

Interviews were the primary source for evaluating the sense of accomplishment that participants felt. However, documents and other materials are included in this research to determine the most tangible results of the Council. The most important element of participant discussion is the focus upon the usefulness of the IFPC. This importance is often associated with the Council producing tangible outcomes that may be analyzed.

### *The Council did offer some real outcomes*

Before critiquing the IFPC, it is important to acknowledge the accomplishments of the Council, as a whole. Multiple accomplishments have determined the ‘success’ of the Council, especially to those not involved in the Council’s activities. However, many of the measurable successes of the IFPC were only cited by interviewees in passing, and often only mentioned when specifically asked about the success of the Council:

The promotion of local foods and the streaming of the food stamp application I think were the two highlights of the Council’s success (9; 10).

The main thing I’d say we accomplished was put out a list of recommendations to the governor, or prioritizing what the state could do (8; 3).

Yet, one interviewee mentioned the potential need to legitimize the Council by supporting its own ideas and, in this case, funding:

Part of the reason we did that [manage the regional Buy Fresh/Buy Local chapter] was, well, let’s put our money where our mouth is (2; 13).

However, some interviewees noted that they were confused on the specific achievements by the IFPC:

I'm a little vague on recalling what [was] achieved and so on, I think that, um, there were some things, well, I, I can't really say, others can do a better job saying what things were done and what things that were not done (8; 1).

But what you're going to get I never figured out (4; 5).

Interviewees often signaled a sense of accomplishment, yet also were at a loss to explain the achievements of the Council itself. Much of this contradiction is a result of feeling accomplished by simply attending meetings and meeting others, while also questioning the final outcome of those meetings. The contradiction of pride and accomplishment will be discussed further, both in this and the following chapters.

### *Pride and accolades*

As the second state-wide FPC to be created, interviewees expressed a sense of pride that was associated with being a member of a Council that often received national attention and praise. The affiliation with the governor and the national attention (perhaps the latter because of the former) were the primary elements of this feeling of importance and pride. This finding is discussed in three parts, all of which influenced the sense of pride that the Council members experienced: the affiliation that the Council held with the governor's office, the sense of uniqueness and trendsetting, and the national prominence that the Council received due to the previous two factors.

There is no doubt that Council members felt pride in knowing that they were a part of a 'governor's' council. The notion that Governor Vilsack and the Council's leadership had wanted them to serve on the Council is primary to determining the strong participation that the Council experienced from throughout Iowa's food system:

It made us all feel better, our time was worthwhile being there (3; 6).

In fact I was shocked when I was called by somebody from the state, you know, go through that interviewing process (4; 1).

I mean it was an executive order; it was fancy smancy, man. Yeah, I had to fill out an application to be trustworthy enough to [join the Council], it was high-tech, ha, I mean I shouldn't have ever done that; it's something to tell my grandkids (4; 10).

To be honest, Farm Bureau, and the major commodity groups, we still meet, regularly, we probably don't either need the baggage and, or the distraction that comes by having a bunch of minor players at the table. And I don't say derogatorily, it's just that, if, depending on what you're trying to accomplish, when we need them we'll go, to be honest, when we need to deal with sheep industry issues, we'll bring the sheep people in, but I don't need to necessarily sit through an organization that's wanting to be directed by sheep producers, and the, you know, when we interact, we got a, we got a good relationship with sheep, we got a relationship with turkey, and etcetera, and when we need to interact, we interact, um, we don't, we don't need a, uh, quote a forum, to be brought to the table. Some of them probably do (6; 12).

The above quote demonstrates that being associated with the governor and other state-wide stakeholders holds sway over even the most significant of commodity interests. Perhaps gaining the support of Iowa's commodity interests helped to make the IFPC unique in a way many FPCs may not be. The potential correlation between commodity interests and FPCs will be discussed further in the following chapter.

The uniqueness and newness of the Council was often mentioned as being associated with serving on the IFPC:

We weren't just duplicating what other groups could do (6; 4).

I mean, uh, it was one of the earlier food policy councils at the state-level, and I think the community food security coalition, which is an advocate of food policy councils, looked to the Iowa Food Policy Council as a model of what, what uh, what could happen in terms of, uh, of, food policy at the state level (7; 5).

This uniqueness certainly helped to bring attention and awareness to the Council:

We had meetings that had two hundred or three hundred people at them, I mean, I thought that that level of, of attention was pretty significant (7; 5).

Eventually, the IFPC reached a level of prominence that few FPCs have reached. From national awards to personal acknowledgement, the Council experienced a successful run on many levels:

We got a Congressional Hunger, um, Award, for that work, or the Department of Human Services did (9; 4).

I was on workshops for food policy councils because I was on the Iowa Food Policy Council (7; 5).

However, as mentioned previously, this trendsetting manifested itself into something that became much broader beyond just the boundaries of Iowa:

We had people in from around the country [to talk about] about food policy councils, Governor Vilsack was the keynote speaker, and he offered, he said, and at that time he was the Chair of the Democratic National Governor's Association, and he said, 'Anybody here who wants me to write a letter to their governor, telling him why they should create a food policy council, let me know. You know, I'll do that.' And God, here's a governor, and he was, you know, fairly at that time even, well known. And a number of people got in touch with us and said, yeah we want him to write a letter, and he did (2; 8).

Highlighting the Council's achievements demonstrates the successful run that the IFPC had in its six-plus years of engagement. However, discussing the impressions with Council members through interviews, in addition to reviewing IFPC documents, offers a broader window into the achievements of the Council.

### *Lasting personal impressions*

Each of the participants interviewed expressed a personal connection to the Council. Each of the interviewees was grateful to have been a part of it, and most seem to hold fond memories of their time with the Council. Each participant holds their own memories, and most important to this research, perspective, of their experience as a member. There are certain issues that each interviewee shared when reflecting upon their own experience.

Although only mentioned once, the term “camaraderie” is a term that many Council members seem to share as part of their experience:

But when the emphasis was taken off, but again, then you know, the [x’s] of the world were a part of it, I was part of it, I got back on it, um, [x’s] still part of it, um she is there now, um, so that camaraderie is still there, and I think, because everybody that’s involved in it really wants to see Iowa product taken to the marketplace, and we’re not alone in it (4; 10).

And this same interviewee felt a sense of sadness when the Council disengaged:

I was kind-of sad when it disbanded (4; 1).

An interesting component among the personal impressions is that often the focus was more on the immeasurable qualities of the Council (i.e. communication, engagement), rather than the tangible outcomes. Although the role of convening a forum has already been highlighted, one interviewee clearly demonstrates a sentiment that seems to be shared among Council members:

And I think it was, from what I gathered, and, um, from pretty much the people that I interacted with on the Council, I think they felt the same way, that at the end you saw some things that got, some regulations that got fixed, and some things that got addressed, and we felt like we, we, you know, there were some positives (5; 7).

And finally, one interviewee sums up exactly what other interviewees and documents provide evidence for:

Do I think I wasted my time being a part of the food policy council? The answer’s “no.” It was, it was time well spent (6; 13).

Interestingly, however, one interviewee mentions an important element in this research. It seems that there continues to be a vague sense of why some of the participants were actually at the meetings. Although it is clear that some participants felt satisfaction in engaging in the Council, others sound unsure:

Yeah, that's going to be tough from memory, but I think, uh, it was a mandate from, uh, Governor Vilsack, to, um, to better the supply food chain of local product, and um, to enhance that, I don't want to say movement, but, or an, enhance that mindset, um, it was something that was probably like a feel good kind of thing to do. So the governor got on the bandwagon, and said, okay, we're going to put this Council together and see what they can come up with (4; 5).

Yet this same interviewee credits their time with the Council as important to a directional change in their own career path:

Now I'm going a whole new different direction, and it's been, it could be a study into itself (4; 7).

Although only one interviewee mentioned the IFPC as a catalyst for personal and professional change, it is important to recognize the lasting effect that the Council had on Iowa's food system landscape. One extremely important repercussion was the creation of the Iowa Food Systems Council in 2010.

### *Catalyst for a new state food policy council*

Perhaps the most lasting achievement of the IFPC was to create a network of food system advocates throughout the state. While nine of the interviewees mentioned the new Iowa Food Systems Council, the comments varied widely. At least one IFPC stakeholder criticized the structure and role of the newer FPC, and another interviewee was mostly unaware of the IFSC's existence. Yet much of the conversation regarding the IFSC discussed the foundation laid by the Iowa Food Policy Council, allowing for the new council to exist, regardless of the structure:

I think in retrospect, for the last ten years, twelve years now, if it had not been for the original council, this second generation council wouldn't be at the place that they're at right now. So, um, we really would be back at square one if that first food policy council did not exist. I mean it kind of was a, it was the foundation, really, you know, gave a chance to explore the functions of a state-level food policy council, gave the opportunity to really critically examine, um, the role, the functionality, the, the

administrative, the governance, and I think if we hadn't taken that time between 2008 and 2010 to really have that exploration time, that we wouldn't be where we are today (9; 10).

Now the rejuvenated council can have, it has a certain amount of legitimacy because of the history... but I think just the fact that we've had a history, and, and people might be willing to participate, and but, so there's sort of a little, a certain amount, of, of momentum created by the previous council that was picked up by the new council (8; 4-5).

The engagement of specific stakeholders, who otherwise would not have been together, continued due to the IFPC's foundation:

But, um, so, but when the emphasis was taken off, but again, then you know, the [x's] of the world were a part of it, I was part of it, I got back on it, um, [x is] still part of it, um she is there now, um, so that camaraderie is still there, and I think, because everybody that's involved in it really wants to see Iowa product taken to the marketplace, and we're not alone in it, um, you know every state has their own movements, I'm sure, some more than others (4; 11).

And not only did the original Council create a foundation for the new Food Systems Council to move forward, the IFSC allowed for the work of the original Council to continue:

But those are more, they were just starting in the early 2000's, they would have been the things that we would have done these last five years, actually those are some things we'll do more with the Food Policy Council now, or the Food Systems Council, is work on, you know, those kinds of things (1; 8).

The direction of the organization and structure of the new Food Systems Council is due, primarily, to the experience of the original Iowa Food Policy Council. The structural difference will be discussed further in the following theme, which focuses upon the political connection that the IFPC carried with it. Although this political connection has been stressed previously in this chapter, it nonetheless deserves further study.

### ***Political Sustainability of the Iowa Food Policy Council***

There is kind of an average life expectancy, hopefully that's increasing you know, as food policy councils become more integrated into infrastructures, whether it's city or

county government, or you know, whether it's within state-level non-profits, whatever that is, I think they're slowly getting more integrated in the infrastructure, and a little bit more mainstream. So hopefully that will increase their shelf life (9; 11).

A primary theme discussed among interviewees was the political relationship between the Council, especially within its leadership, and the governor. As highlighted throughout this chapter, this strong governmental relationship offered a sense of pride and uniqueness among Council participants, in addition to creating an imbedded outlet for the Council's recommendations. However, the existence of the Council was forever linked to the leadership of Governor Vilsack.

In an era when food policy councils were not common at any level or in any region, the IFPC created its own format, following its own lead. And especially in a state dominated by commodity interests, an executive order seems to be the most efficient way in creating a FPC. At the same time, there are definite sustainability concerns with any executive order. Participants within the Council, both during their participation and reflecting back, often cited the precarious lifeline between the Council's work and the sustainability of an executive order. While most interviewees did not mention the "life expectancy" of the Council as a burden during their participation, many of the participants reflected upon this distinctive element of the Council's existence.

### *Personal and political relationships*

Above all else, the Council owed its existence to the strong political and personal relationship between the governor and the Chair of the IFPC. This relationship was acknowledged by each interviewee, with most viewing this relationship as a positive element



to the Council, both in terms of spurring much-needed government engagement, as well as having a “voice”:

I think that was a good part of it, I think, just to have somebody represented there that Vilsack would always send from the office was good (3; 6).

I think that’s probably also one of its frustrations, was, it was not, it, it really didn’t have a lobbying voice, or a policy implementation voice of its own, except to the degree that [x] wanted to push for it. And it was the relationship of [x] to Governor Vilsack that enabled that (6; 3).

In fact, this same interviewee stressed again, further in the interview, the personal relationship between the leadership of the Council and the governor:

[x’s] relationship as a personal relationship with Governor Vilsack that [x] did not necessarily have with Governor Culver (6; 11).

And, in fact, this relationship has continued, even beyond the work of the Council:

I think [x] had a good relationship with Governor Vilsack, in fact, I think what he was doing, is what I had heard, when Governor Vilsack took over as Secretary of Agriculture, I think he was doing some consulting for him, so I think they did, um, were involved [together] (3; 6).

This personal relationship was even more important due to the structure of the executive order. Most interviewees, when discussing the end of the Council’s activities, mentioned the importance of this personal relationship and its relationship to the executive order.

### *The politics of an executive order*

Not only did the executive order provide a unique relationship between the Council and the governor, it also implemented a lifeline for the Council, as one interviewee simply stated: “the Council lasted for the period of time there was the support the structure for it” (2; 14). When a new governor came into office in early 2007, the possibility of a fourth

executive order continuing the Iowa Food Policy Council became a serious question mark. As interviewees reflected upon the pending end of the Council, each noted the political ramification of the executive order and the connection between the past political leadership and the functions of the Iowa Food Policy Council:

I think it was mainly because the new governor, it wasn't really part of his strong agenda items, so that's why it disbanded (3; 8).

Um, but there were suspicions that she, um, didn't necessarily regard the Council as having any validity... and so when Governor Culver came into office, Patty Judge was the Lieutenant Governor, and um, some do suspect that because of her lack of connection or engagement with the first food policy council, or her perceptions that that first food policy council, may have been a barrier in getting Governor Culver to reissue an executive order (9; 5).

Based on the above quote, it is clear that both personal and political connections are imperative in the issuing of an executive order. However obvious this sounds, it still resonates with many interviewees. Yet there continued to be real efforts in reinstating the IFPC through the new governor's office:

And I know did, um, we talked to our Director of the Department of Public Health, Tom Newton at the time, and said it would be really nice to have another governor's food policy council, um, and I'm sure he brought that forward, but nothing ever happened. So I would guess it wasn't an interest of Culver. And I know a couple of people, [x], for example, went to the governor's office and talked to them and asked them about the food policy council. The interest just wasn't there (3; 6).

No matter what happened when a new governor took office, there seemed to be a sense among the Council, or at least among the leadership, that the Council would last only as long as was warranted, taking advantage of the opportunity it had:

Well, process is fine, but at the end of the day, hell, if you wanna get something done... you know, if the governor says let's create one, once you... you know, you want to be afraid of how, what it may do, or do you actually want to try to, to seize the opportunity (2; 8)?

Interestingly, there was a lack of discussion among Council interviewees about the “structure” that supported the IFPC and, therefore, led to its demise. The seeming lack of urgency among participants, and especially interviewees, indicates a much greater focus on the convening of stakeholders within the Council, rather than creating a sustainability plan.

*The Council members’ thoughts on the possible time frame*

Although not often mentioned by interviewees, there remains strong evidence, both in conversations and IFPC documents, that Council members were aware of the built-in time frame that resulted from the executive order:

Begin to create a 3-5 year plan for the continuation of the Council should the Governor step down (2003-2004 Iowa Food Policy Council Evaluation, 2004)

Yet there seems to be no evidence that a continuation plan was discussed among members of the Council. Most of the conversations focused upon accomplishments within a time frame, rather than focusing on long-range plans:

There may have been that, that feeling, that we’re here only for the short term, and so perhaps not seeing longevity in a state-level council. That may have impacted that (9; 10).

You know, you know, I’m not going to tell you that the Council should have lasted forever, okay? The Council lasted for the period of time there was the support the structure for it. Would we be better having one today, yeah I think so (2; 14).

Whatever sentiment the interviewees expressed during discussions, the political connection between the governor’s office and the existence of the Council was enough to warrant serious consideration during the organization of the new Iowa Food Systems Council. Although this research examines the Iowa Food Policy Council, it is impossible to examine the role and share the story of the IFPC without also comparing the early experience of the Food Systems Council.

*Politics dictated the form and structure of the IFSC*

All but one of the interviewees mentioned the new Iowa Food Systems Council relative to the original Iowa Food Policy Council. A consensus among interviewees, and supported by stakeholder documents, is that the experience of the Iowa Food Policy Council, including its construction, structure, and political involvement, played an important role in the strategic development of the Iowa Food Systems Council. It is also important to note that four of the ten interviewees were involved in leadership positions within the IFSC at the time of interviews (in addition to the researcher's own leadership involvement). When considering this examination, note that only a few interviewees were prompted to discuss both of the Councils and only as appropriate. Although most interviewees did not mention the differences between the original Policy Council and the newer Systems Council, it is clear that the IFSC was structured as a response to the political concerns that the IFPC experienced:

A committee was assembled to analyze the challenges and opportunities of various governance structures and present findings to stakeholders. Stakeholders decided that a member-based non-profit (501(c)(3) governance structure would provide the greatest opportunities for carrying out the mission and vision (*2003-2004 Iowa Food Policy Council Evaluation*, 2004).

This one [IFSC] does not depend on the governor's office, so (3; 6).

Non-profits have greater flexibility in advocacy, and have greater opportunities to secure diverse funding. Whereas those under an executive order have limited access to funds because it would be a conflict of interest... for a governor's council to be applying for state funds from another agency (9; 9).

While most interviewees view the IFSC as a continuation of the original Food Policy Council, at least one interviewee vehemently disagrees that the two FPCs have similar roles:

Whatever you may call your group, it's not a food policy council in the sense that there's not government buy-in to it, it's essentially a non-governmental lobbying, or

you know, organization that, I don't want to say it's posing as a food policy council, but their different. You folks can say whatever you want, you know, you don't have to be responsible, but at the same time you can't get state agency personal necessarily to participate (2; 3).

Based upon the quote above, the political foundation that the IFPC is associated with may be seen as both a benefit and a challenge in a number of ways. The following chapter will further examine the political significance of the Council.

## CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

The findings from this research reveal the challenges and opportunities that the Iowa Food Policy Council experienced during its existence. In the previous chapter, each finding was categorized according to the theme that it belonged to. The objective of this chapter is to elaborate upon the major findings, which will be utilized to draw conclusions and identify future research opportunities. Conclusions, recommendations and future research will be presented in the following chapter.

In examining findings, it is important for the reader to understand that one must embrace the “not one size fits all” approach in comparing FPCs at different levels and in various regions (Schiff 2007). The findings presented here are clearly unique to the Iowa Food Policy Council, yet as this chapter makes clear, the analysis reveals issues that are applicable to other FPCs. The IFPC allows for an examination of a FPC that may have faced similar challenges and opportunities as other FPCs throughout North America. Therefore the following discussion will be unique to the Iowa Food Policy Council, yet transferable to other FPCs of various regions and sizes.

### *Construction and Structure*

According to interviewees, the composition of the Iowa Food Policy Council is often cited as the most important asset and fault of the IFPC. The clearest outcome determined by the structure of the IFPC is the top-down approach that the Council developed. The Chair of the Council, a representative of the local university that administered the IFPC, was placed into this position of leadership through the first executive order in 2000:

The Council will receive administrative support from the Agricultural Law Center at Drake University. All research, policy development, and publication activities will be coordinated by the Council through Drake University (Executive Order 16, 2000).

While the outcomes of such a leadership structure will be discussed later, there are related factors that this leadership approach decisively affected. Because the Iowa Food Policy Council is the product of a succession of executive orders, the ‘diversity’ of the Council is the product of a governmental perspective. Diversity was often mentioned as a goal, and even a by-product, of the IFPC’s structure. Most literature citing diversity highlights the significance of hosting a forum for stakeholders; however previous researchers have determined the importance of establishing diversity *within* a Council’s structure as the most valued:

The unique perspectives of all council members can yield creative solutions, ones that might not have happened but for their collaboration. The more diverse the group is, the more opportunities exist (Borron 2003, 4).

The complexion of the IFPC offers a unique perspective on the term, ‘diversity’. Literature has focused on the potential role that FPCs may offer in creating a holistic environment.

This sentiment is succinctly detailed by Harper et al. (2009):

Nevertheless, FPCs have a unique quality within this wide array of activists, advocates and practitioners: they create democratic spaces for convergence in diversity (48).

An important finding is that the diversity of the Council was directed within a specific spectrum. While Harper et al. (2009) and other literature has determined that FPC diversity comprises of “activists, advocates and practitioners” (7), there is little evidence of activism or advocacy within the Iowa Food Policy Council. Clearly, the diversity within the IFPC only included those that fit the criteria to become a member of the Council.

Other traditional methods of determining diversity seemed to lack importance in constructing a ‘diverse’ Council within Iowa. The idea of diversity among IFPC members reflects this governmental-centric view. Harper et al. (2009) briefly discusses the role that diversity plays within a government-focused FPC, and especially the conflicting role of diversity within this political setting:

Some FPCs housed in government are connected to a particular department, which in some cases seems to have skewed their focus toward one area of the food system. Business interests—even local businesses—are frequently absent from initial FPC formation and are then not actively recruited later on (37).

While business interests and other diverse elements seemed to be well-represented within the Council, race, class and gender seemed to be neglected. The first executive order states that only representatives from each of Iowa’s food system sectors shall be represented, offering an extremely politically-tilted view of diversity (Executive Order 16, 2000). An important remark by one interviewee indicates that the IFPC was not subject to “formal gender or party balance,” but did adhere to open meeting requirements (2; 3). Respect for political diversity did not cross into gender, class and race boundaries.

While this diversity is certainly politically-oriented, could the IFPC have been more productive with a greater emphasis on focusing on class, race and gender equality? Allen (2004) argues for an increase in such diversity:

It is self-evident that decision-making groups with a narrow range of participants can address only a narrow range of issues and options. Individual perspectives, which arise out of differences in socioeconomic background and day-to-day experiences, play a pivotal role in what decision makers see as problems and solutions (147).

One may argue that Council members, for the most part, were satisfied with the diversity represented within the Council. FPCs are often viewed as bastions of diversity within the food system, yet it is important to reflect upon the context of such diversity. As interviewees



often mentioned, the political ties of the Council allowed for a diverse mix of food system interests that was mandated from the Governor's office. The Iowa Food Policy Council established a forum that represented the political diversity of food system interests, yet this diversity was consistent with whom the IFPC represented. There is no evidence that the Council was intended to be diverse along the lines of race or gender. Those issues aside, in the context of the IFPC's structure, the diversity of business members and governmental officials represented on the council was nevertheless an impressive achievement.

The diversity of the IFPC represents another facet of the Council: the constricting structure of the organization. There were clearly members that felt that this structure challenged the efficiency of the Council in reaching a diverse range of advocates, as well as allowing for an efficient communication mechanism, both internally and publically. The communication within the Council, from the task forces to those who attended Council meetings, seemed to be strained. The structure of the IFPC, with a focus on task forces, offers an interesting study into itself. There is limited research as to the exact roles of task forces within FPCs, especially regarding the function within the Council, and the support from the greater FPC. While each task force had its own mission within the IFPC, task forces were not a common talking point among interviewees. Only two interviewees thoroughly discussed their work on a task force, and most were only vaguely familiar with the task force that they participated with. However, it must be noted that many of the most tangible accomplishments of the IFPC came as a result of the Food Security Task Force (later known as the Food Security and Health Task Force). For example, in working to streamline the food stamp application, as well as for its "successful effort working with the state government and the legislature to exempt the value of one motor vehicle in determining

eligibility for food stamps,” the Food Security Task Force received a national Congressional Hunger Award in 2004 (Harkin 2004). Although this award brought recognition to the IFPC, only those who were involved in the Food Security Task Force seemed to recollect this accomplishment. Interviewees indicated that the relationship between the task forces and the Council itself never seemed to fully develop. As an outreach mechanism for the IFPC, the task forces included individuals who were not members of the Council itself. However, there is significant evidence that the task forces operated autonomously within the structure of the Council. The importance of this relationship will be further discussed in the following theme.

### ***Tension***

Of all the themes, perhaps tension seems the most ambiguous. The term refers to the internal, and sometimes, external conflict within the IFPC organization. This research found that tension arose due to a variety of causes, including conflicting goals, a lack of communication and various leadership styles. Tension, or conflict, has been analyzed often within FPCs. Literature examining FPCs cite a variety of potential conflicts facing councils, including funding, role definition and promotion of a FPC’s cause. Much of the existing FPC literature often associates tension with challenges. In a broad study, Harper et al. (2009) found the primary challenges facing FPCs to be:

- Achieving and working with diverse membership and continuances
- Working in complex political climates
- Designing an effective organizational structure
- Obtaining adequate funding
- Balancing focus between policy and program work and between structural and narrow foci
- Measuring and evaluating a council’s impact (37).

Many of the above challenges are echoed throughout FPC literature (Borron 2003; Haughton 1987; Schiff 2008). However, interviews and IFPC literature suggest a set of narrow challenges faced the Council, most of which were internally-driven. In leading into the following discussion, it is important to note that this research focuses upon the tension within the IFPC that resulted from the common challenges faced by the Council itself. Many of the challenges confronting the Iowa Food Policy Council are discussed throughout this research; however the tension that interviewees highlight is of most significance in this discussion.

Of the above challenges, working within complex political climates and achieving diversity within its members seem to resonate most with the IFPC's experience. However, leadership, which is not listed above, was mentioned most often as a primary cause of tension within the Council. A lack of 'advocacy,' aligned with 'strong leadership,' or even a 'dictatorial' approach, seemed to be the most forthcoming cause of tension during the IFPC's existence. In Clancy et al.'s study (2007), the IFPC is cited as the only council where a chair was delegated without consent, or a vote, by council members. Because the IFPC's existence depended upon two leaders, the governor and the Chair, the goals of the Council often seemed fixed to the political context that surrounded the IFPC. As a result, the IFPC offered a narrow focus that seemed to conflict with some of the members of the Council. As interviewees highlighted, the results were sometimes "long and boring" and even "not democratic enough." It is common in FPC research to focus upon the democratic and open environment that FPCs often offer:

"There is no prescriptive formula for what precisely an FPC should do – democratic, community-based decision making should determine what each area's demands, limitations, and priorities are" (Fiser 2006, 19).

Democracy and the distribution of leadership are often considered hallmarks of FPC development, and the IFPC is no exception to this rule. Although most of those interviewed were not highly critical of the democratic process within the Council, the negative sentiment that did arise focused upon the apparent inability for some members to advocate for a cause within the framework of the IFPC. Literature has demonstrated that advocacy is often associated with the work of FPCs:

The promise of Food Policy Councils resides in their potential to bring about positive change by bringing advocates and practitioners together through an integration of food policy spaces with local food system places. Indeed, Food Policy Councils are gaining popularity precisely because they allow citizens to influence food policy and implement food projects in the communities where they live (Harper et al. 2009, 45).

In a similar way that the IFPC approached diversity, the question of advocacy must be placed into the context of the political environment in which the Council existed. It is important to understand that advocacy in the sense of FPCs is a broadly-used term. Of course, the IFPC did advocate for certain concerns within Iowa's food system. However, what was advocated for was only within the boundaries of the Council's politically-focused mission. In other words, those who felt constrained when attempting to advocate, were only constrained by the confines of the Iowa Food Policy Council. This tension also potentially arose because those hoping the IFPC would offer a forum for their own advocacy may have been disappointed. In discussions with interviewees, a primary talking point is that the leadership of the Council was incredibly strong. Therefore, it is possible that some on the Council simply had different goals for their work than the Chair or others did. Because the IFPC was a governmental organization, it is clear that those inherent boundaries must be

followed. The sentiment that some of the more advocate-minded members of the IFPC felt is common among government-embedded FPCs:

In contrast, suggestions of Interviewees 9A and 9B indicate that formal association with government may restrict the ability of these organizations to propose changes to government structures and policy. In other words, it may be difficult to “to operate within a system and at the same time propose alternatives to that system” (Interviewee 9B) (Schiff 2008, 216).

Clearly there were some within Iowa who were supportive of a more advocacy-driven FPC at the state-level. However, as both this research and previous literature suggests, it is difficult to advocate for a political change while confined in political reality. Therefore the inherent challenge that many Council members faced, especially those representing interests outside state government, was finding a way to recommend policies that matched the goals of the IFPC. Interestingly, for many interviewees the challenge of recommending relevant policies was less important than convening, so this tension did not seem to undermine the IFPC.

Another important factor that led to tension within the IFPC involves the communication structure of the organization. The fact that the task forces seemed to operate autonomously highlights a significant challenge that the IFPC faced. Never did interviewees mention the ability for those not appointed to the Council to be involved in the decision-making process of the IFPC. Public involvement in FPCs is often cited as a challenge (and important) for FPCs. Fiser (2008) notes:

There are issues of accountability and democratic participation which become more apparent at the state level, however. It is more difficult to individual citizens to participate on the state level, if only due to transit times to meetings, nearly all state FPCs are appointed by the governor and have a prescribed membership structure, and state policy usually has a less apparent impact on urban or neighborhood activities than does local legislation (30).

As Fiser (2008) highlights above, the concerns and challenges of a state-level FPC are unique in their scope. Because this research only interviewed those involved with the Council, it is difficult to comment on the importance of public participation and communication within the Council. Although the IFPC did host an annual conference, which was well attended and received, connecting to non-members was not emphasized by interviewees, including participants on the task forces who were not appointed members. While meetings were public, there is no evidence that public participation occurred; in fact meeting minutes demonstrate a clear lack of outside participation. The lack of public participation in the Council's activities and decision-making likely reflects the structure of the IFPC: the strong leadership approach of the Council and the political nature of the Council may not have offered a space for active public participation.

Four of the ten interviewees spoke specifically of the challenges of reaching out to all food system sectors across the state; however this tension may be best approached by examining the structure and leadership of the Council. Because states operate through a specific level of government, they are often constrained due to a variety of political factors. As Fiser (2008) notes, state-level FPC may not allow for the same democratic process, especially in terms of advocacy, that local councils strive for. The fact that state-level councils may encounter inherent challenges that FPCs of smaller regional scales may not experience offers evidence supporting the necessity to have a stronger leadership structure in place that works efficiently within the political confines of state government and policies.

Many interviewees emphasized the communication struggles created by the structure of the IFPC. However, the communication difficulties of the IFPC may have been

exacerbated due to the relative newness of the Council. The struggle to communicate in a newly-formed FPC is highlighted by Borron (2003):

With a diverse council comes many challenges, however. Members may know little about each other's areas of expertise and also vary on their ideas of what constitutes food security. If some members have been assigned to the council, without necessarily joining out of interest, the need to establish good communication is even greater (5).

Interviewees often addressed the difficulties of deliberating upon a topic that few at the time ever had an opportunity to formally discuss. The inexperience of convening around food system concerns may have led participants to feel the need to advocate for specific roles within the food system. Inexperience may also have led to a lack of communication between those that saw the role of the IFPC in different frames. The communication concerns within FPCs that Borron (2003) mentions manifests itself in the structure of the Council. Nowhere is there evidence that a serious effort occurred at the beginning of the Council's existence to address the concerns over (a lack of) internal communication. The struggle for internal communication became most pronounced towards the end of Governor Vilsack's term, as each interviewee described inefficient communication between leadership and members as to the future of the Council. The interviews suggest that it is unclear whether the Chair or any of the other leaders on the Council were serious about continuing its work after Vilsack left office. Interviewees never even mentioned that they were aware when exactly the Council would cease its operations.

### ***The Feel Good and the Do Good***

Existing literature highlights the many accomplishments of the Iowa Food Policy Council. Various studies (Borron 2003; Clancy et al. 2007; Harper et al. 2009) briefly

describe their own vision of the IFPC's success. According to Borron (2003), by 2003 the IFPC accomplished the following:

- Presented recommendations to the governor's office on improving Iowa's food system
- Succeeded in convincing the governor to create two inter-agency task forces to assist the Council in food security and promotion of Iowa-grown products
- Will assist in evaluating the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Pilot Program, which is funding by a \$560,000 USDA grant
- The Chair received a \$200,000 grant from the USDA Risk Management Agency to support the development of the Iowa and Connecticut food policy councils and the creation of food policy councils in North Carolina and Utah.
- Co-sponsored the Iowa Food Policy Conference
- Developed an on-line county-based directory of farmer's markets and fruit and vegetable producers (23).

Clearly the above successes are noteworthy on their own. Even in the beginning, the IFPC offers a significant amount of marked success. Therefore it is not surprising that existing literature often cites the IFPC as a fairly accomplished food policy council. Yet much like focusing on the tension within the Council, the importance of such tangible accomplishments seems to be secondary to the idea of convening and the *personal* feeling of success for participants. The successes most discussed seem to reflect the pride of being a part of the Council itself. As a result, feeling good about convening, working with the Governor's office and even enhancing one's own business interests are seen as examples of accomplishments that resonate most among the Council members during interviews.

A primary component of a FPC is education. In the context of FPCs, education refers to:

The meeting of communication of ideas and exchange of information. It is targeting on the members of Food Policy Councils, the stakeholder of the food system, and the public. The internal education is fulfilled by exchange between the different members and involving of external speakers. The external public is reached through brochures and leaflets (e.g. food guides) and through hosting conferences and events (Stierand 2012, 71).



Important to this “feel good” process is the education of each member of the Council, especially as stakeholders throughout the state came together to discuss food systems for the first time. Interviewees often noted that their participation in the Council, whether through meetings or external activities, such as implementing food system ideas into their own workplaces, was fueled by an educational component. As a result of their participation in the Council, one interviewee exclaimed, “now I’m going in a whole new different direction” with their own professional work (Interviewee 4; 7). And the IFPC is not alone in education having a lasting impact on the members of a FPC, as noted in by Schiff (2008):

Another interviewee felt that the enduring legacy of connections and shift from conventional to food systems perspectives among participants was the most significant result and achievement of the group. This interviewee also indicated food policy council meetings as a crucial point for educational and communication activities (220).

The interviews indicate that without a forum to discuss and educate one another about the food system, many of the interviewees would not be pursuing food system work today, whether with the Iowa Food Systems Council, another organization, or their own professional and personal outlets. Thus, the internal education of the members was important to the development of the IFPC. According to meeting minutes, this education took the form of on-farm visits, meeting presentations and annual FPC conferences. One IFPC interviewee excitedly discussed their ability to meet a local winery in Eastern Iowa, while also proclaiming that some of the Board meetings were even held on the premises of their own business (4). This learning process certainly adds to the personal feeling of accomplishment that interviewees described; however the personal satisfaction extends beyond the acquiring of knowledge.

Perhaps as a result of this focus on internal education, there seems to be a sense of ‘camaraderie’ that members exhibited as a result of their participation on the Council.

Harper et al. (2009), Roberts, W. (2010) and Schiff (2008) specifically address the role of bringing together “disparate” voices within the food system:

Networking is central to the food policy council concept in that the role of networker allows the FPC to draw connections between disparate stakeholders in the food system. As articulated by Interviewee 9A, “The goal is to create a system out of which people can communicate their ideas, talk to each other.” Interviewee 12 indicated that information exchange and the networks created among members through the operation of the FPC was one of the most valuable and lasting legacies of the organization (Schiff 2008, 216).

As interviewees discussed the disbandment of the IFPC, many suggested a sense of despair that the Council no longer existed to offer the forum to “network” and convene. This demonstrates the importance of the *immeasurable* accomplishment; that is, the creation of a sense of ‘camaraderie’ within FPCs, as food system concerns continue to be underrepresented in conversations at various political levels (Stierand 2012). Because the IFPC no longer exists, its accomplishments become more profound in the years following its departure from the state’s political landscape. The network that the IFPC created must be viewed as an integral component of the lasting ‘legacy’ of the Council. Although the implications of the Council’s existence will be more thoroughly discussed at the conclusion of this research, it is impossible to describe the network, or ‘camaraderie’ created by the IFPC without mentioning the networking among members as a remarkable and lasting accomplishment of the Council itself.

When discussing the network created by the IFPC, the new Iowa Food Systems Council was often mentioned. It is clear from the interviews that the new IFSC offers a

similar forum for networking and continues a feeling of ‘camaraderie’ among food systems advocates that did not exist at the state-level without the Iowa Food Policy Council.

### ***Political Sustainability of the Iowa Food Policy Council***

There is little existing literature examining the lifespan of a FPC. Although Dahlberg’s (1994) broad examination of FPCs includes some focus on defunct councils, and Harper et al. (2009) discusses the ceasing of councils briefly, there continues to be little discussion on how a FPC may be measured years after the organization’s expiration. Accordingly, it may be easy for one to glance over ‘failed’ FPCs, considering them relics and not appropriate for study. However past IFPC members would disagree with the assessment that the IFPC ‘failed’ because it ceased its operations after Governor Vilsack left office. As with any organization, to measure the real impact of a FPC, one must analyze the ‘legacy,’ or lasting effects, of a council.

Therefore an important question that arose during the research is whether the Iowa Food Policy Council would have accomplished what it did without the political relationship that enacted it. As highlighted earlier, there are many ways in which a FPC may be organized. And there is certainly not a consensus among the literature as to the most efficient model for a FPC to follow:

In general, there are three models of organizing the relation between a Food Policy Council and the government: a government organization, a non-government organization and a hybrid model, each with specific benefits and drawbacks (Stierand 2012; 72).

However, the IFPC certainly exhibits many of the benefits of a government-sanctioned FPC, as Stierand (2012) later describes:

A council which is organized as a government organization has the largest legitimacy within the city and its administration. Such an organization from is seen as a strong indication for a commitment in the field of food. A government organization can also avoid competitions with NGOs about funding” (72).

The literature on FPCs also highlights many of the challenges of government organized councils, including the inability to advocate, as well as the lifeline associated with a political administration (Harper et al. 2009; Schiff 2007). However there is evidence that Council members were disconnected to these drawbacks. Although a few of the interviewees (notably 2 and 9) mentioned in detail both the benefits and challenges of the Council’s relationship with the governor’s office, this issue did not emerge as a major theme within this research. Clearly the most important challenge in the IFPC’s case is that that the final executive order would not be reissued. The consensus among interviewees is that the Council disbanded with little or no precautions taken by leadership to continue its formal existence prior to Governor Vilsack’s departure in 2007. In fact, evidence suggests that the IFPC was in a solid position up until the governor’s departure, with little warning that the final executive order would not be reissued. Although there may be many theories as to why the Council did not take a more preemptive approach to solidify the Council’s existence beyond the governor’s final term, it is worth noting that interviewees seemed to be content with the Council’s lifespan and accomplishments.

Although few shared recollections about the events immediately preceding the disbandment of the IFPC, most interviewees did discuss the importance of the Council’s relationship with the governor. This relationship was important to interviewees in a number of ways, including: gaining recognition for the Council among statewide-stakeholders, gaining national recognition, and offering an objective that Council members felt

comfortable with. The primary objective of the Council, to offer an annual set of recommendations to the governor, offered immediate accountability and a clear mission that other FPCs often lack (Schiff 2008). This political accountability resonated among interviewees, as the Council seemed to serve an important purpose that other organizations sometimes lack. Yet beyond offering the Council an immediate audience for their recommendations, the leadership that the governor provided (albeit in name-only) allowed the IFPC to create the diverse forum that so many of the interviewees cherish. In the debate on whether FPCs shall be directly associated with government entities, Clancy et al. (2007) highlight an important factor regarding FPCs:

Not surprisingly, councils whose membership includes specific government agencies and departments or that have a particular city councilor or county commissioner on the council report more collaboration and effective interaction with those agencies than councils that have no formal government representatives (133).

While there are clearly benefits and challenges to each method of FPC development, the fact remains that the IFPC had a timeframe in which it existed, based upon a number of specific actors, including those at the local university and in the governor's office. Although it is possible that this timeframe constricted the Council's ability to produce accomplishments, it is clear that this IFSC's effective collaboration with a variety of networks was profound, even in its short lifespan.

With the greatest accomplishment perhaps being the creation of a networking medium around food systems, the lasting legacy of the IFPC may be the Iowa Food Systems Council. Or more accurately, how the Iowa Food Systems Council has been created and structured. As one interviewee described, there were significant discussions as to the most effective method in creating a food policy council. This discussion was based significantly

upon the experience of the IFPC. Stakeholders involved in the state-wide discussion to continue the work of the IFPC examined the many options that FPC structures may take on (Roberts and Tagtow 2010). With the new governor in 2007 seemingly unreceptive to the reissuing of the final executive order, there seemed to be no way in continuing the IFPC as it was under Governor Vilsack. With the political ties too risky, and the demise of the Iowa Food Policy Council fresh in mind, the new Iowa Food Systems Council was formed as a non-profit organization, with no direct connections to the governor's office.

In the wake of the creation of the Iowa Food Systems Council, it is tempting to conclude that many stakeholders who participated with the IFPC would prefer the new state-wide food systems group to operate as a non-governmental entity. It is also easy to suggest that political circumstances led to the ceasing of the IFPC's operations. However the political sustainability of the IFPC runs far deeper than Iowa's executive office. Literature often glances over the Council's ties to government, yet the IFPC's political connection seemed to consist of a complicated network of actors which only aligned for the IFPC to exist, and potentially succeed, under specific circumstances. It may also be noted that some Council members only participated as part of the council, at least initially, due to the perceived significance of the IFPC's connection to the governor's office. In fact one interviewee cited the importance of the governor's leadership in the involvement of the interviewee's own conventional agricultural organization (Interview 5). Therefore, there is clear evidence that the IFPC's political relationship, and the circumstances that allowed this relationship to develop, created an environment for the networking of such diverse food system interests.

## CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS

This research demonstrates that the clearest role of a FPC is bringing together stakeholders from throughout a food system to share knowledge and resources. The Iowa Food Policy Council exemplifies this role of convergence as well as any FPC does today. The goal of this research is to establish a foundation for examining other FPCs through single-case studies. As FPCs become more prominent throughout North America, there will continue to be a demand for “best practices” among FPCs. The findings presented here offer a path for developing a better understanding of such practices.

### *Review of Findings*

Due to the extensive literature examining the structure and role of FPCs, it is first necessary to determine what the true function of the IFPC actually was. The Council’s role in recommending policies to the governor is clear. Yet, the function, and reasoning for, each member’s involvement in the Council remains vague. As interviewees noted throughout, coming together to discuss the food system was invaluable. However, the IFPC remains an entity directly tied to two stakeholders: the governor and the Council’s Chair. This research indicates that this relationship stifled the amount of advocacy within the organization, as well as dictated the amount of communication from a top-down approach. As FPCs may be established through multiple methods, it may be appropriate to ask two specific questions: did the IFPC accomplish all it could within the structure provided and could it have accomplished more without this relationship?

With a goal of creating a set of recommendations for the governor’s office, the IFPC operated efficiently as a *policy* council. Although there is little evidence that these

recommendations were ever implemented, the fact that the food stamp application process became more efficient due to the recommendation of the Council is an example of a policy change that may not have occurred without the Council's work.

To justify the existence of an executive order to create a FPC, there are clear indications that in the state of Iowa, the only 'legs' that can offer support to a food policy council are through a specific political relationship. Throughout the research, there were no indications of a continuation plan after Governor Vilsack's final term. However, in 2006 a bill was introduced into the Iowa Legislature to establish an "Iowa food policy council within the office of the governor" (State of Iowa 2006, 2). This bill, introduced by Senator Hatch, borrowed language from each of the executive orders in creating the structure of the proposed council. Most importantly, this bill would have created a permanent food policy council within state government. Yet this bill, by all indications, was not seriously considered by Iowa policymakers. In other words, there were no 'legs' under the bill. Just as important as the introduction of this bill is the reaction of the IFPC's leadership. There seemed to be little communication between the Senator introducing the bill and the Council itself. In fact, according to one stakeholder, "We didn't know anything about the bill until a lobbyist called our attention to it" (IFPC stakeholder, August 29, 2012, email message to author). Because interviewees did not highlight this extremely important event in Iowa's FPC history, the only conclusion that can be made regarding the history of this bill is speculative.

An important factor to consider when analyzing the history of Senate File 2332 is that it was introduced while Governor Vilsack was in office. Even so, the bill made little progress on the Senate floor. This inaction suggests that there was little interest in continuing



IFPC beyond Governor Vilsack's departure. Therefore, it may be concluded that the only 'legs' that the IFPC had under it were the unique relationship between the governor and the Council's Chair. By all accounts, the Chair understood that the Council was bound by this relationship. Therefore, in Iowa, it may be concluded that, even with such a friendly environment, it would have been difficult to create a sustainable government-sanctioned FPC. The IFPC operated at its best in the limited circumstance that was provided for it. It is impossible to judge its accomplishments in comparison to another structure or FPC due to this unique relationship.

In examining the role of advocacy, the task forces, and other elements that many FPCs include, it appears that the Council was primarily the result of two stakeholders and their view of what a Council is. From the assembly of Council members to the recommendations to the governor, the IFPC operated in a confined environment. While the strong leadership provided an opportunity for stakeholders to convene, this leadership also resulted in a somewhat narrow-minded council that some participants felt hindered their role, and jeopardized the sustainability of the Council. While the Chair and governor's relationship was clearly the reason for the Council's existence, it also alienated some members and led to the current structure of the new food systems council (which may be argued is a continuation of the work begun by the IFPC). Therefore, it may not be a stretch to say that the IFPC was primarily both the Chair and governor's council.

Although the Council may have stifled some participants, it is important to recognize the lasting role that the IFPC has had in Iowa. Perhaps the most important question to ask is whether it was worth it for the Iowa Food Policy Council to exist only for six-plus years. Although the IFPC demonstrates a clear record of accomplishments, it is perhaps the

momentum that the IFPC created for which it may be most recognized. The existence through a top-down relationship allowed the Council to create an environment in which food system stakeholders have continued to engage in a visioning process, something that did not occur prior to the existence of the IFPC. It will never be known if this platform for dialogue would have occurred without the IFPC having been created.

The findings presented here reveal that advocacy is an important component for many food system stakeholders, yet not all FPCs offer an opportunity for advocates. This is especially true for government-sanctioned FPCs. Yet, would it have been possible for Iowa to host two FPCs concurrently, with one offering a space for advocates? One interviewee clearly thinks not:

There wouldn't have been the two councils at the same time. I mean there was, the [Iowa Food Systems Council] wouldn't have been formed if the Food Policy Council was still in existence (2; 14).

The end of this statement may be the most relevant to this research. Is a government-sanctioned FPC's role to focus upon specific tasks, and not necessarily advocacy, as a non-profit may? Clearly non-profits are more flexible in their objectives than a government-sanctioned organization. This research revealed a desire for activism and advocacy within FPCs, but the IFPC did not meet that need. Would the IFPC have continued to serve the interests of Iowa's food system stakeholders if it had continued in the same form? It is extremely difficult, as the IFPC experience suggests, to incorporate advocacy and activism within a government-sanctioned organization. However, government organizations have advantages that non-profits are not afforded. Therefore, it may have been possible, and perhaps still could be, for Iowa to host two state-wide FPCs, with one focusing on policy and the other on advocacy. Although there would be member crossover between the two

organizations, their goals and roles would be different. Existing literature has not identified any state with two FPCs operating concurrently.

### ***Research Implications and Recommendations***

The implications of this research are broad in scope. The discussion and recommendations presented in this chapter are considerations that all FPCs must contemplate. Although there are clear constraints in generalizing single-case study findings, the lessons that can be learned from examining the Iowa Food Policy Council are numerous. The primary recommendations and implications of this research focus upon the leadership, communication, role, and continuation of the IFPC. Each of these implications may be generalized to other FPCs at various levels.

While a top-down structure was important for the IFPC to exist at the time it did, the leadership stifled some members of the Council. With the leadership of the Council dictating the communication, role, and sustainability of the Council, it is recommended here that leadership must remain fluid. Creating more opportunities for leadership may have increased member participation and communication among the Council.

The communication within the IFPC seemed to be severely constrained throughout the existence of the organization, particularly at the end of the governor's final term and between the task forces and the Council itself. While the lack of communication regarding the continuation of the Council is primarily the result of leadership, the autonomous nature of the task forces correlates with the structure of the IFPC. Although designated task force leaders were members of the Council, there remained room for increased communication and participation between those participating in the task forces and the Council. Implementing a

more open communication network, such as the inclusion of more task force members in the meetings, would address these concerns.

The role of the Iowa Food Policy Council is one that may never be fully appreciated. Although recommendations are the stated purpose of the Council, the true legacy of the Council is the continued dialogue between Iowa's food systems' stakeholders. One must acknowledge that bringing together stakeholders, no matter what the guise, to discuss food systems concerns may have a lasting effect that goes moves beyond any tangible "accomplishment." Prior to this research, the IFPC's effect on its participants was unknown. The role of convening should not be understated and is invaluable in evaluating the long-term success of a FPC.

The role of a FPC must be carefully analyzed. Clancy et al. (2007) claims that, "the ideal situation for a FPC is to be tied to a government department" (139). There are many considerations to make before determining that a government-sanctioned FPC is the most efficient method of convening stakeholders. Although being tied to government, in certain circumstances, may be sustainable for the long-term health of the FPC, it could also neglect those who view FPCs as a method to advocate for particular elements of a food system.

Finally, the sustainability of the organization may be secured through various means, whether through embedding the FPC into government or garnering long-term funding as a non-profit. However, FPCs must acknowledge where their 'legs' are, and how to best maintain momentum. The IFPC's foundation was based upon the relationship between the Council Chair and the governor. Many government-sanctioned FPCs rely upon similar relationships, and it is clear that these relationships are not lasting. However, the continuation of a FPC does not have to be structural. The Iowa case indicates that convening

may continue after a FPC ceases its formal operations. The most valuable lesson of the Iowa Food Policy Council is that the enthusiasm and discussion never waned after the governor left office; only the structure collapsed. Whether it be a non-profit or a government entity, it is important to emphasize the role of convening, as food policy changes may occur through a variety of organizational structures.

### ***Future Research***

This project points to many possibilities for future research. Several pertinent questions have already been discussed. One question deserving more investigation concerns a FPC's impact on convening food systems stakeholders. Although stories are often shared among FPC literature, the act of convening remains unmeasured. Future research will need to efficiently measure the convening of stakeholders, as well as determine whether this measurement may help build recognition of FPCs as potential government-sanctioned bodies. Room remains for research examining the long-term "legacy" of convening and, as a result, perhaps the most important function of a FPC remains unrecognized.

For food policy councils to develop in the future, effective leadership structures will need to be identified. Research must determine how leadership is best developed, especially within the confines of government. Shall leadership be implemented in a top-down structure? Or is the leadership structure of FPCs more effective in a bottom-up manner, with revolving chairs? Fully understanding FPC leadership styles and structures will help to lead more sustainable councils into the future.

Yet, another question that remains unanswered is defining the role of advocacy within a government-sanctioned FPC. FPCs will naturally attract those who question government

policies, and FPCs must be able to channel such enthusiasm. Research must determine if FPCs can focus upon state policy concerns and meet the desires of traditional advocates at the same time.

Most importantly, there continues to be a need for single-case study approaches to examine the challenges and opportunities of FPCs. This research will not be productive unless other case studies validate the findings presented here. As more FPCs arise throughout North America, the amount of past councils will also increase. For FPCs to be most effective in the future, research is needed to determine how past councils folded and how others reached success.

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