

Local Food and Agriculture Recommendations

Guide to Johnson County Unified Development Ordinance Updates Presented by Johnson County Food Policy Council



What is the UDO?

The Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) is the combined codes for Johnson County, including the zoning code, which dictates legal uses and development opportunities for property in unincorporated areas of Johnson County.

How does the UDO relate to Food and Agriculture in Johnson County?

In the current code (UDO), farmers on less than 40 acres face increased challenges than farmers on larger parcels of land, and all farmers have limited options to invite community members out to farms for agricultural experiences or "agritourism." **Farmers have the potential to grow more food for our region and supportive zoning policies make it possible.**

Why now? Why you?

The zoning code (UDO) is being updated to reflect the priorities identified in the Johnson County Board of Supervisors' 2018 Comprehensive Plan, including, **"expanding the availability of local food across the county"** and **"promot[ing] and support[ing] local food and small farm operations."** The Board of Supervisors will hold a public hearing to gather community response in the upcoming months, date TBD. Drafts of the updated UDO show progress supported by the Food Policy Council.

The Johnson County Food Policy Council recommended changes to the UDO that will **reduce barriers for beginning and small-scale local food farmers** and **allow more opportunities for farmers to market their crops and community members to engage with agriculture.**

Issue #1: Ag-Exemption should be available for local farmers with less than 40 acres.

Farmers growing food on less than 40 acres do not have the same opportunities and resources as farmers who own over 40 acres in Johnson County. A process for farmers growing food on 39 or less acres to become ag-exempt will create a more equitable agricultural landscape in Johnson County.

Current Barriers for Farmers

- Farmers on less than 40 acres have limited opportunity to build a home or develop important farm infrastructure. (Farmers on 40 acres or more are considered ag-exempt and do not have these challenges).
- Farming is a seasonal profession, consisting of long hours, often 7 days a week. Not being able to live on the farm is a hardship for farmers.
- Not being able to provide housing for farm workers is a challenge for small-scale farmers. (Farmers that have 40 acres or more are able to build a second house on their land for family or workers).

The Potential

- More farmers growing food for our community with sustainable practices
- Real economic impact and rural job creation as agriculture is diversified in the county
- More equitable options to choose farming as a career in Johnson County without depending on off-farm income or land inheritance

We support a UDO that includes a pathway for small-scale farmers to achieve ag-exemption.

- Expand ag-exemption to smaller size parcels of agriculture land through a fair application process
- Support and encourage more farmers to live in Johnson County and grow food for our community

Issue #2: Agritourism enterprises need zoning regulations that allow for innovation and creativity on farms in the unincorporated areas of the county.

Agritourism is the nexus where agriculture and tourism meet to provide consumers with educational and cultural experiences on working farms. Agritourism allows farmers to diversify their enterprise and income by sharing their farm with members of the community. As fewer people farm, more people are disconnected from the way food is grown--agritourism is a way to connect farmers, food, and eaters.

Current Barriers for Farmers

Most agritourism enterprises in Johnson County are required to apply for and receive annual conditional use permits. The permits are not permanent, only allow for limited operation, and increase the level of risk for new investments.

The Potential

- More opportunities for farmers to market their direct-to-consumer crops
- Agritourism activities on working farms, which could include: educational activities, local food markets, orchards, cideries, harvest festivals, farm-to-table restaurants and cooking classes, bakeries & more
- More predictability and economic security for farmers diversifying their land-based business

We support the drafted Agritourism and Direct-to-Consumer Marketing Opportunities:

Continue allowing on-site engagement and direct-to-consumer sales of agricultural products

YES- Allow farm tours, farm stands, You-pick operations, Community Supported Agriculture

Expand opportunities to host agriculture events

YES- Increase amount of allowable events and expand the number of people allowed at each event

YES- Allow flexibility for the "Seasonal Agricultural Events Permit"

Increase stability for agritourism enterprises and agricultural events

YES- Creation of new 'Agritourism Zoning District'

YES- Option to allow permits for recurring, annual events to be granted for more than one year

YES- Addition of 'Home Industry' long-term permit for on-site business

The Johnson County Food Policy Council envisions Johnson County becoming an agritourism destination and thriving local food economy through supportive policies.

The Board of Supervisors decides through a vote to approve any changes to the UDO. There will be a Public Hearing at the Planning and Zoning Commission Meeting on Tuesday, November 12 at 5:30 PM. The Planning and Zoning Commission will make a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors. After receiving a recommendation, the Board of Supervisors will schedule a Public Hearing to listen and gather feedback before voting, date TBD.

What is the Johnson County Food Policy Council?

The purpose of the Food Policy Council (FPC) is to improve dialogue and discussion and provide necessary advice on food and agriculture issues to the county, municipalities, community boards, local agencies, nongovernmental organizations, businesses and other interested groups.

Questions about the Food Policy Council or local food and agriculture in Johnson County?

Contact Ilsa DeWald, Johnson County Local Foods Coordinator, idewald@co.johnson.ia.us (319) 688-5840