

# Hub

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## Important not to become big, but great

Although those used to taking their goods to Farmers Markets often have a competitive mind-set, Travis says in his model everybody wins, and it takes ‘competition’ out of the picture.

“This kind of marketing is all about relationships. As farmers ourselves, we understand how best to represent you,” he said.

The LLC was created so that everyone would get recognition, not just Spence Farms. The farms retain their identity on the invoices and the packaging, for example.

“We work hard to make sure everyone is represented. We want to be fair. We buy from each of the small farms before we finish out an order with the big one that has other cus-

tomers, too,” Travis said.

They also ask them what they want to grow, and they want to know about their challenges.

“Some are challenged by time, others are challenged by space. Only certain crops grow well for us so we talk about what grows well on your farm. That comes back to plant and soil health,” Travis said.

One of their farmers, he said, was always plagued by late-season blight on his tomatoes.

“We were able to help him understand why that happened and how to mitigate it. We spend a lot of time doing that education piece,” he said.

“Most are challenged – briefly – by the routine of having to get us an invoice on time, but we want them to be business people,”

Travis added.

## Also on the table

One of the other table discussion groups was headed by Dave Bishop with PrairiErth Farm. Bishop’s family farm located near Atlanta grows 300 acres of organic fresh produce and livestock for the Bloomington area markets.

The discussion at his table concluded with a set goal of supplying OSF Hospital with fresh produce by July 1st of this year as an experimental pilot project.

Bishop is always looking for area farmers to help supply fresh produce to a larger market.

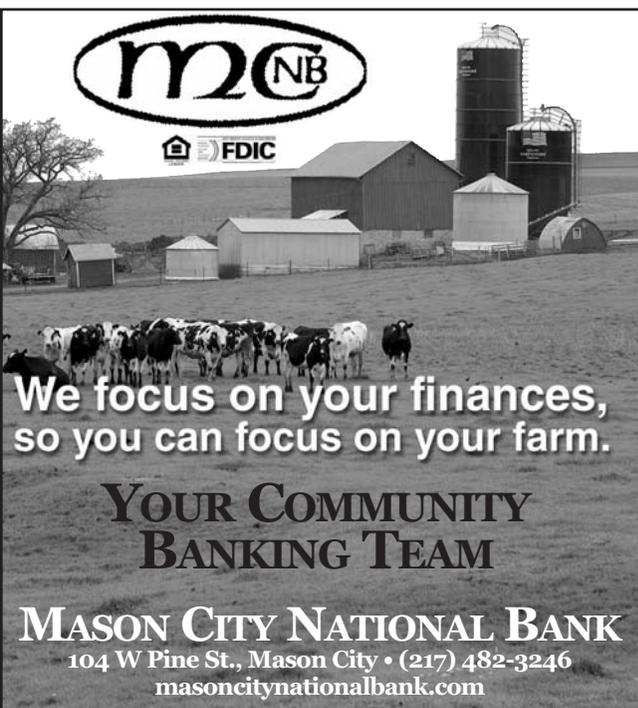
Another participant in the program was Sydney Sullivan who spoke about his success in developing the “Petersburg Poultry

Processing” facility in Petersburg and the niche markets that he has developed with specific consumers.

The take away from his presentation is that there are consumers with special needs and desires and producers can benefit by meeting the needs of these niche markets.

Meeting organizer Tory Dahlhoff, Director of Communications & Outreach and Rural Development Coordinator for Greater Peoria Economic Development Council, was not sure what outcomes to expect but was pleased with the interest in the event.

In the end, the group felt that there is a need to continue discussions including area farmers with those larger operations that are currently having success with providing produce to local market consumers.



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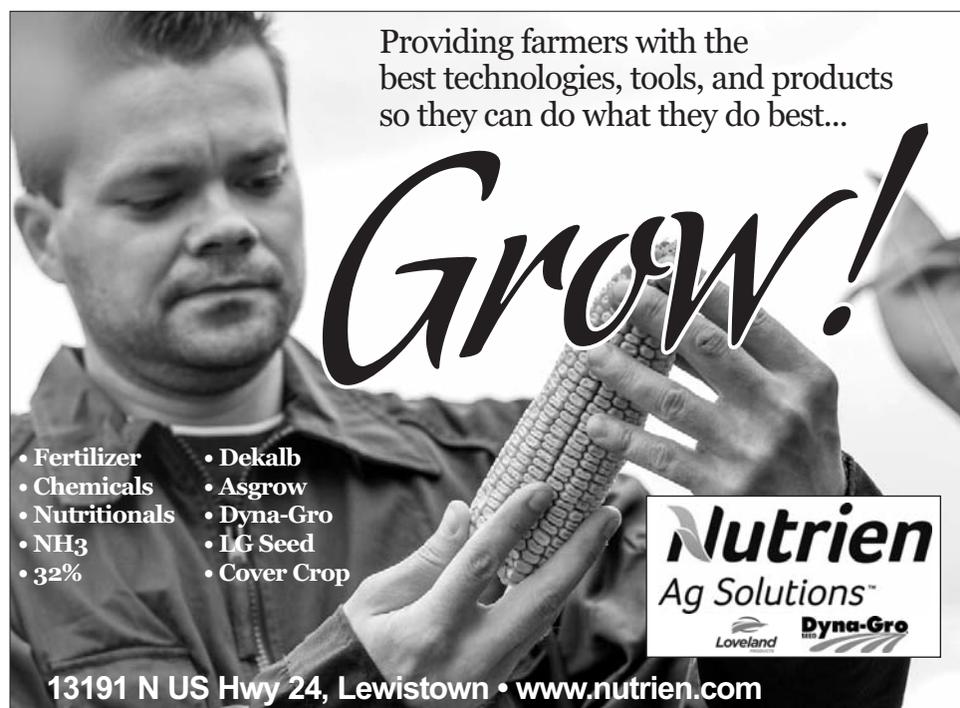
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Tory Dahlhoff, Rural Development Coordinator of the Greater Peoria Economic Development Council, primed the idea pump with presentations at the Manito Farm Forum from some farmers already doing exciting things and then allowed participants to break into groups to continue more in-depth discussions on the things that interested them the most.



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