




Transfarmation

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Resources for Ringgold County, Iowa



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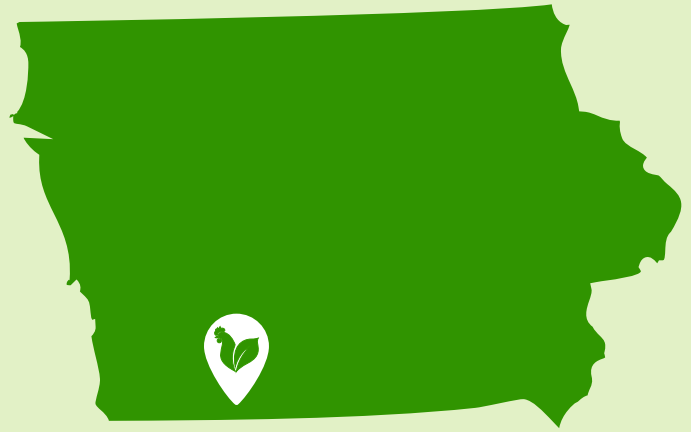
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Resources for Ringgold County, Iowa

This report was prepared for a farmer in Ringgold County, Iowa, who is interested in transitioning from hog farming to growing specialty crops, including microgreens, strawberries, specialty mushrooms, and lettuce, possibly using hydroponic systems. It provides general resources, feedback collected from buyers in the area both with this farmer in mind and as part of the Transformation™ Des Moines market analysis, details of some local farmers markets, and a survey of the competitive landscape.



General Resources

[Great Plains Growers Conference](#): This January 2025 conference and trade show in St. Joseph, Missouri, will include a greenhouse/hydroponics track that may provide useful insights to this farmer.

USDA Regional Food Business Center, Heartland

- 🌱 We contacted this business center via the “Contact Us” form on their website and received a response from the small farms program manager at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach in less than one hour.
- 🌱 This contact noted that the farmer would have access to larger markets in the **Omaha-Council Bluffs** and **Des Moines** metro areas. Ringgold County is served by both the **Iowa Food Cooperative** and **Farm Table Delivery food hubs**, which aggregate products into wholesale markets.
- 🌱 The contact noted that **Hy-Vee** purchases from local growers, but such arrangements and agreements are made at the store level, so relationships with each store’s produce manager are important. Larger volumes may be required to get into a Hy-Vee distribution center.
- 🌱 The contact said that a few growers in the Des Moines area use hydroponic systems or cultivate microgreens. **Clayton Farms** and **515 Farms** grow mixed greens and some produce hydroponically. **Camp Creek Organic Produce** also supplies the Des Moines area with microgreens, as does **Ray Family Farms**.

The [Iowa Food Hub Directory](#) does not list Ringgold County in their service area.

Potential Buyers

Iowa Food Cooperative (IFC)

- 🌱 This is a year-round online market in the greater Des Moines area and was initially contacted for our Des Moines market analysis. We emailed the organization directly to gain insight into whether hydroponic vegetables and microgreens would be of interest in the Des Moines market.
- 🌱 Their response indicated that a market for hydroponic vegetables exists in the area, especially off-season vegetables.
- 🌱 Multiple small grocers support local producers.
- 🌱 The farmer should consider establishing delivery logistics for the area to make the time and travel costs worth the investment. Collaborating with other small producers to share delivery from week to week may be possible. IFC may be able to assist in making these connections.
- 🌱 The IFC contact is open to being connected with the farmer to discuss becoming a vendor to IFC and facilitate introductions to other producers in the area who may be interested in cooperating.

Farm Table Delivery

- 🍃 Located in Harlan, Iowa, this organization sells food from local producers wholesale to schools, foodservice companies, restaurants, food pantries, and other food hubs and has a direct-to-consumer business.
- 🍃 We contacted their executive director via email and invited her to schedule a meeting with the Transformation business engagement specialist to share more about their organization and discuss opportunities to work with this farmer. She responded quickly and scheduled a meeting within seven business days.
- 🍃 The following items were discussed in the meeting:
 - Farm Table Delivery serves western Iowa and eastern Nebraska and moves food into eastern Iowa. They source from operations west of I-35 and in the Des Moines area.
 - They do sell microgreens and would like to sell more.
 - Year-round produce is a particularly interesting prospect for this organization.
 - Farm Table Delivery coordinates with five other food hubs in Iowa, primarily east of I-35.
 - They have a warehouse in Des Moines that they pick up from on Wednesdays.
 - Product can be delivered to them in Harlan.
 - **They run a route to the Diagonal Community School District in Ringgold County and may be able to do a pickup there. They may charge an associated fee.**
 - Farm Table Delivery does not require GAP or organic certification.
 - Vendors are required to follow all cottage food and food safety regulations associated with their specific product, including water tests.
 - Farm Table Delivery may visit farms they work with.
 - The organization has no volume minimum and looks at each farm's crop plan to determine fit for their produce.
 - They currently sell hydroponic lettuce (root attached) from [Beaver Creek Produce](#).
 - Their customers seem to prefer soil-grown produce but also just need produce year-round.
 - Leafy greens (as opposed to heads of lettuce) year-round would be helpful, especially spinach, arugula, Swiss chard, and kale.
 - They have a restaurant customer that would take tomatoes year-round and another customer that would take all hot peppers available.
 - They recommended that this farmer look at Jorge's Organics (now out of business) to see what they were doing and what could be learned from their operation.
 - They are interested in finding a producer who could sell them a wholesale subscription box (CSA style) of mixed produce. This could be aggregated from other farmers but would need to be preboxed.
 - They advised against pursuing direct-to-consumer sales because of the amount of work and unpredictability involved.

Lamoni Produce Auction

- 🍃 This produce auction is located 35 miles from Ringgold County and has sales on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday during peak season (July–August). Outside peak season, they have one or two sales per week. The auction opens for the season in mid to late April and runs through October. A 10% commission is charged on sales.
- 🍃 We emailed to see whether their auction would have a market for hydroponic vegetables and microgreens and received a response from their produce auction office manager the next day.
- 🍃 Lamoni has not worked with hydroponic produce or microgreens to date so was unable to speak to the market for those products.
- 🍃 Their current buyers are interested in soil-raised products, but Lamoni seeks to bring in new buyers, so they're interested in offering a wider variety of options to fill the need.
- 🍃 Overall, Lamoni is open to working with a grower of hydroponic vegetables and microgreens.

Gateway Market

This Des Moines grocer and cafe responded to our market analysis survey and said they were in need of butter lettuce, red Boston lettuce, romaine, and interesting varieties of common produce items. They prefer organic produce but will make an exception for local farmers.

Court Avenue Restaurant & Brewing

This Des Moines restaurant and bar responded to our market analysis survey and said they were in need of lettuce (salad mix, romaine, leaf, or iceberg), tomatoes (grape, slicer), and onions (any).

Farmers Markets

We recommend that this farmer attend area farmers markets to understand traffic (and therefore potential volume), competition, and pricing. Markets include the following:

CRESTON FARMERS MARKET, CRESTON, IOWA

Mondays, 4–6:30 p.m.

Operates June through September

20 miles from Ringgold County

STUART FARMERS MARKET, STUART, IOWA

Wednesdays, 4:30–6:30 p.m.

Operates from the end of May to mid-October

53 miles from Ringgold County

BEAVERDALE FARMERS MARKET, DES MOINES

Tuesdays, 4–7 p.m.

Operates June through mid-September

90 miles from Ringgold County

DOWNTOWN FARMERS MARKET, DES MOINES

Saturdays, 7 a.m. to noon (starts at 8 a.m. in October)

Operates May through October

90 miles from Ringgold County

Ray Family Farms sells here (see below).

TREYNOR FARMERS MARKET, TREYNOR, IOWA

Tuesdays, 5–7 p.m.

Operates mid-May through early August and has a fall market in late September

95 miles from Ringgold County

AVOCA MAIN STREET FARMERS MARKET, AVOCA, IOWA

Wednesdays, 5–7 p.m.

Operates June through September

100 miles from Ringgold County

UPTOWN ANKENY FARMERS MARKET, ANKENY, IOWA

Saturdays, 8 a.m. to noon

Operates mid-May to late September

100 miles from Ringgold County

RIVER CITY FARMERS MARKET, COUNCIL BLUFFS, IOWA

Saturdays, 9 a.m. to noon

Operates June through August

112 miles from Ringgold County





Competition

The area growers below focus on hydroponics and microgreens.

Clayton Farms

This restaurant in Ames has an in-house hydroponic farm. Their sales channels include these:

- Farmers market
- Store
- Restaurant
- On-farm sales stand
- Online

515 Farms

This indoor urban farm serves the Des Moines area. They grow herbs, microgreens, edible flowers, and mushrooms.

Camp Creek Organic Produce

This organic farm in Kalona, Iowa, boasts 40 acres of diversified vegetable production, including soil-based sprouts and microgreens. They grow year-round and are GAP-certified. They sell to Farm Table Delivery, operate a food hub and a CSA, and distribute produce to Iowa schools.

Ray Family Farms

This farm in Derby, Iowa, specializes in hydroponic microgreens and edible flowers and serves the Des Moines area and central and southern Iowa. They offer a CSA and are a vendor at the Des Moines Downtown Farmers Market. According to their Facebook page, they also work with area chefs, sell via the Iowa Food Cooperative, and offer a grow-at-home hydroponic microgreens kit.

Beaver Creek Produce

Located in Berkley, Iowa, this farm grows hydroponic microgreens, lettuce, kale, arugula, and herbs year-round, as well as multiple varieties of tomatoes.