

Across State Lines: Rural Grocery Policy in Action

Center for Rural Affairs

A nonprofit organization

The Center for Rural Affairs stands up for small family farmers and ranchers, new business owners, and rural communities. For over 50 years, we have been the leading force engaging people to build a better rural future. The Center seeks to create opportunities for rural people to reduce poverty, build wealth, improve family self-sufficiency, engage across cultural divides, and expand local leadership. We seek to empower rural people to help themselves grow as a community and have a sense of agency.

Our mission

Establish strong rural communities, social and economic justice, environmental stewardship, and genuine opportunity for all while engaging people in decisions that affect the quality of their lives and the future of their communities.

CFRA Cont'd

- The Center for Rural Affairs was founded in 1973 by rural Nebraskans concerned about the loss of economic opportunity in agriculture and the decline of rural communities.
- Over its 50 years, the Center has grown its services across four states and expanded its services for small businesses, small and beginning farmers, and advocating for policy change.
- In 2024, the Center worked with lawmakers in Nebraska and Iowa to introduce legislation to support independent grocery stores in rural communities.

Prewrite, Origin Story, and Policy Development

- Idea origination
 - Blueprint for drafting legislation were modeled after other states with similar programs, and tailored to fit the needs and environment of each state.
 - Indiana, Illinois, Oklahoma, Minnesota, North Dakota



Legislative Strategy

- CFRA began working on legislation in the fall of 2023
- Bills continued to change each year



Initial Legislation

Iowa

- Expense categories
 - Capital improvements
 - Upgrades to utilities
 - Purchasing equipment
 - Technology upgrades
- Eligibility
 - 10 or fewer stores under store umbrella
- Funding
 - 1:1 match required
 - \$50k to \$500k grants
- Priority given to:
 - Underserved communities with low- or moderate-income residents
 - Accepts SNAP and WIC
 - Create or retain jobs

Nebraska

- Expense categories
 - Capital improvements
 - Upgrades to utilities
 - Purchasing equipment
 - Technology upgrades
 - Pre-development costs, including market studies and appraisals
 - Business planning technical assistance
- Eligibility
 - Registered and in good standing to do business in the State of Nebraska
 - Grocery store is currently domiciled in Nebraska
 - 25 or fewer FTE employees
- Priority given to:
 - Commitment to match at least one-half of total project costs
 - Underserved communities with low- or moderate-income residents
 - Accepts SNAP and WIC
 - Create or retain jobs

Legislative Structures

Iowa

- Bicameral (two chambers)
 - House of Representatives (100 members)
 - Senate (50 members)
- Biennium (two year) General Assembly
 - Odd numbered years (1st year) - 110 days
 - Even numbered years (2nd year) - 100 days
- Bills may be introduced throughout session
- Public hearings
 - Only for bills with scheduled subcommittees

Nebraska

- Unicameral with 49 legislators representing districts based on population
- Two-year cycle
 - Even numbered years- 60 day sessions
 - Odd numbered years- 90 day sessions
- All bills must be introduced in first 10 legislative days
- Every bill introduced receives public hearing before one of 14 standing committees

Iowa Legislation Comparison with Rural Innovation Grant Program

Legislation - HF 1032	Empower Rural Iowa: Rural Innovation Grant Program - Rural Grocery
<p>Expense categories</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Capital improvements ● Upgrades to utilities ● Purchasing equipment ● Professional services (accounting, etc.) ● Technology purchases or upgrades 	<p>Expense categories</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Technology upgrades <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Grocery lockers ○ Electronic shelf tags ● Adoption of new approaches to service delivery <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Online order platform ○ Home delivery system ○ Creative purchasing agreements
<p>Eligibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Authorized to do business in IA ● Any business model ● Ten (10) or fewer stores under ownership ● Capacity to implement and complete the project, demonstrates plan for sustainability ● 50% minimum of retail space designated to grocery; or 30% minimum of store revenues from grocery sales 	<p>Eligibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Authorized to do business in IA ● Small, independent chain operators with 10 or fewer stores ● Located in or benefit a community with <20,000 people and not sharing a common border with a city of >40,000 people or be in 1 of the 88 least populous counties ● Must have been in business for a minimum of 3 years
<p>Funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1:1 match (\$25,000:\$25,000) ● <\$100,000 ● \$1.25 million 	<p>Funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1:½ match (\$25,000:\$12,500) ● <\$25,000 ● \$200,000 available (split across 3 separate tracks)
<p>Priority given to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Located in least-populated communities ● Accepting SNAP and WIC ● Creating/retaining jobs ● Efforts to procure/offer local foods 	<p>Priority given to: (from rubric)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Aligning with Empower Rural Iowa Initiative ● Addressing food security and rural grocery service challenges through innovation and creativity

Nebraska Bill Comparisons

LB 1116 (2024)	LB 375 (2025)
<p>Expense categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-development costs, including market studies and appraisals • Capital improvements • Upgrades to utility infrastructure, including energy efficiency measures • Repair and maintenances of buildings and equipment • Business planning technical assistance • Upgrading technology 	<p>Expense categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical assistance to apply for federal funding opportunities • Technical assistance to transition from a sole proprietorship to multi-owner business model • Upgrading technology • Innovative wholesale purchasing power projects to enable cooperative purchasing between multiple businesses
<p>Eligibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registered and in good standing to do business in the State of Nebraska • Grocery store is currently domiciled in Nebraska • 25 or fewer FTE employees 	<p>Eligibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registered and in good standing to do business in the State of Nebraska • Grocery store is currently domiciled in Nebraska • Located in city of village with fewer than 40,000 residents or in one of the state's 90 least populated counties
<p>Priority given to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to match at least one-half of total project costs • Located in Low-Access census tracts and identified in USDA's Food Access Research Atlas, with first priority given to Low- and Moderate-Income census tracts • Creating/retaining jobs • Provide SNAP and WIC 	<p>Priority given to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to match at least one-half of total project costs • Provide SNAP and WIC • Ten or fewer locations in operation

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Stakeholder Engagement





THANK YOU!

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