



## Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative Year Two Planning Activities Final Report

### 1. Summarize the past year's key accomplishments and progress. Explain any changes that have been made in any goals, objectives, strategies, or activities.

#### Moving from Planning to Action

- **Development of Core Values, Vision, NE Iowa Core Theory of Success, Strategies, Tactics, and Suggested Activities.** Established the essential goals for the Community Action Plan. Process involved input and assessment data collected from county planning teams, regional Work Groups, Organizational Partners and the Regional Leadership Team during meetings held between August and December 2008.
- **January – April 2009 – Request For Activities Process Implemented** – Strategy to invite and engage community members in activating the regional vision for Food and Fitness. 52 RFA's submitted with over \$1.1 million in requests. Three-quarters of the proposals addressed two or more of the three key strategies.
- **Youth, minority and underserved project liaisons engage new partners**
  - FFI formed partnerships with Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation (serving low-income populations), WIC representatives, and Storks Nest (working with teen mothers).
  - Youth Teams formed in 11 school districts, each with their own coaches. Over 110 youth involved.
  - ISU Extension led "Cooking healthy meals in a Hurry" led by Cindy Baumgartner, ISU Extension Nutrition and Health Specialist.
  - Five youth attend WKKF Networking Conference in Detroit and five youth attend WKKF Networking Conference in San Antonio.
  - Four underserved target communities identified and each were allocated \$1000 to engage community members in discussion to learn more about their vision for the FFI in their

communities. The communities of Elma, Postville, Oelwein and Waukon were selected because of the high number of students receiving free or reduced lunches.

- Cici Mueller, a Postville School educator, connected with youth groups, after school groups, and youth gardening to reach low-income youth and families, including Latino families.
  - FFI formed a partnership with the Postville Diversity Council and provided Multi-Cultural training.
  - In Postville, ISU Extension provided nutrition newsletters branded with the FFI logo and vision, distributed Buy Fresh Buy Local listings of producer products, and recipes sent home with K – 3<sup>rd</sup> graders to their families.
  - Family Fun nights were held in Postville, Waukon, and Oelwein in partnership with after-school programs and Helping Services for Northeast Iowa (serving low-income families in the same five FFI counties). Programs focused on games, fun activities, and healthy snacks. Healthy meal placemats & coloring pages with FFI logo were take-home items.
- **Regional Work Groups were activated to gather data and provide input to Strategies, Tactics, Policy Targets and Request For Activities to be included in the NE Iowa FFI Community Action Plan.** Participants included:
    1. **Vision:** represents all nine Regional Work Groups; participated in Systems Thinking Conference and developed the NE Iowa Theory for Success model; provide leadership to the Work Groups.
    2. **Youth Work Group:** two youth representatives from five school district in the region, a school superintendent, an ISU Extension Youth Development Specialist and the FFI Youth Engagement Coordinator.
    3. **Community Health:** liaisons from Iowa Department of Public Health, five county public health offices, regional dietitians, regional WIC coordinator, hospital nurses. Led by Vision Work Group members with nursing and hospital foundation backgrounds.
    4. **Northeast Iowa Food and Farm (NIFF) Coalition:** regional producers, CSA coordinator, agribusiness leaders, economic development directors, Northeast Iowa Community College, Luther College, etc. Led by Vision Work Group members with ISU Extension Allamakee County Director.
    5. **Schools:** 14 of 18 school districts have sent 1-2 representatives from Administration, teachers from the high school, middle school and elementary school levels, coaches, school nurses, food service staff, school board members, parents, etc. Sessions led by Vision Work Group members - School Principal/Food Service Coordinator, ISU Extension Nutrition & Health Specialist and Co-Conveners.
    6. **Built Environment:** city engineer, city parks & recreation director, trail activists, superintendent, county conservationist, food producer, and led by Vision Work Group member employed by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources as the Fayette County Park Ranger.
    7. **Inclusive Team:** Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation nurse, WIC coordinator, ISU Extension Financial Management Specialist, ISU Extension Allamakee County Director, community representatives from four target communities of Elma, Waukon, Oelwein and Postville.

8. **Human and Financial Resource:** regional team members from all five counties serve on this Work Group along with the Co-Conveners and the Administrator. Requests for funding are submitted to this Work Group and they make recommendations to allocate funds to the Regional Team. This Work Group also assists the Co-Conveners in making recommendations regarding contracts for positions hired by the FFI, including a Technical Writer, a Youth Coordinator, ISU Extension Winneshiek County Director as a Co-Convener and Luther College employee as a Co-Convener and Health Liaison.
9. **Communications:** community activist, county Supervisor, hospital foundation director, youth. Led by ISU Extension External Relations Specialist.

#### **Major Learning Events:**

- March 2008 – Visions Inc. led two workshops - one to the Inclusive Team where the focus was how partner with existing organizations or entities in a community to build the capacity for advocacy work around FFI issues. This was attended by 11 people. The second workshop was to Regional Team representatives and the Postville Diversity Council. This presentation focused on the nine dimensions of diversity and advocacy skills when in a position of power to advocate for those without power. 18 people attended.
- June 2008 - WKKF Networking conference in Detroit, MI with 20 people attending to learn about food system work, built environment work and policy and system change.
- September 2008 – Pyramid Communications consultants led series of messaging workshops with Regional Work Groups; created key message points for FFI and explained 5 M's of communications. One presentation was to the Regional Team and Organizational Partners in Elkader, Iowa with 18 attending and one to Regional Team and Communications Work Group in Decorah, Iowa with 24 attending
- September 2008 – Hosted three farm tours where producers and consumers could learn more about food production, over 130 people attended.
- October 2008 – Invited to meet with Dan Christensen, Senator Harkin's staffer, to explain process of Systems Change of FFI movement.
- November 2008 – Systems Thinking Conference in Boston attended by 10 members of the Vision Group
- December 2008 – Community Foundations dinner held by FFI to begin partnership with county Community Foundations and explain work of FFI.
- December 2008 – ISU Extension and the FFI members hosted a State Legislative coffee to inform them of current FFI work.
- December 2008 – Luther College hosted a meeting with food producers to talk about increasing their local food purchases.
- February 2009 – Over 50 people attended the Women Adding Value to Agriculture Conference and learned about farm business management, value-added agriculture and personal development issues.
- February 2009 – Spoke to Five-County Supervisors meeting; highlighted partnership opportunities with FFI.
- March 2009 – WKKF Networking conference in San Antonio, Texas with 20 members attending.

- March 2009 – ISU Extension hosted “Chasing the Carrot,” a day long food producers conference with 70 attendees.
- March 2009 – FFI collaborated with Seed Saver’s Exchange and Pepperfield Project to hold a Beginning Gardening workshop attended by 14 community members in Decorah, Iowa.
- March 2009 – Two Local Food Breakfasts were hosted to connect local food producers and food buyers from schools, colleges, grocery stores and restaurants.
- March 2009 – National Farm to Cafeteria Conference in Portland, Oregon; 3 attended.
- March 2009 – Presented at the Marketing and Food Systems Workshop hosted by the Leopold Center; over 250 attended.

### **County Planning Meetings and Webcasts**

Co-conveners and organizational partners prepared meeting agendas and learning resources, including pre-recorded webcasts. County planning teams and key partners met monthly as learning communities to increase their understanding of environmental and policy systems changes.

#### **Discussion Topics**

- March 2008 Webcast: Building a Local Food System, Part 3: Planning Our Future
- April 2008 Discussion Topic – NE Iowa FFI’s Vision
- May 2008 County Specific powerpoint presentation by IDPH- Public Health Presentation
- July 2008 Webcast: Policy & System Change (high speed connection required)
- August 2008 Webcast: NE IA Theory of Change Model (high speed connection required)
- September 2008 Discussion Topic - Community Action Plan: Review Proposed Strategies
- October 2008 Webcast: Sharing the Vision
- November 2008 Discussion Topic Community Action Plan: Reviewing the Draft Tactics
- January 2009 Webcast: Rising Energy and Food Prices: Effects on Families
- February 2009 Discussion Topic - Request for Activities (RFA) Process & Score Sheet
- March 2009 Discussion Topic - Policy Targets for RFAs
- April 2009 Discussion Topic – Proposed Organizational Structure to implement our Community Action Planning

### **Major Accomplishments in Year Two**

**14 School Districts meet to discuss local foods and active living:** School districts in our five counties learned it could be possible to plan together as a region to change the food and fitness environments in our schools. Administrators from 14 of the 18 local school districts agreed to send representatives to participate in a Regional School Planning Team to explore options for getting more local healthy foods and increased physical activity into the daily routines of youth and their families. Schools realized if they collaborate together they may be able to purchase food together, share ideas that work, and connect with community resources through the NE Food and Fitness network. The NE Iowa FFI is excited because through this collaboration we could start to help the school system change their system so children and their families can have access to healthier food options and more opportunity for physical activity and play.

**Youth Engagement Coordinator Hired:** Youth engagement has been a key component of FFI from the start. A Youth Engagement Coordinator was hired in August 2008 to guide this component. This past

fall school-based Food & Fitness youth teams started forming. Five teams are up and running, and six more are forming. On April 1, 2009, the youth held a student conference. 111 youth attended from throughout the five county region. These youths' actions are leading to system change in our schools. Some youth surveyed students and families on food choices available at School Concession Stands. People responded they not only wanted healthier options, but were willing to pay more. Youth have shared the survey results, along with research-based information on the rising obesity rates of children with their local booster clubs. In one district, the booster club is now working to put healthier food options on their menu.

**Mini-grants encouraged food growers:** Partnering with the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, the Iowa Community Vitality Center and local organizations, one of the FFI work groups, the Northeast Iowa Food and Farm Coalition, awarded \$10,485 in \$250 mini-grants to 34 local agriculture and food entrepreneurs to initiate or expand local food production and businesses. In two years, this has leveraged over \$745,965 in food and fiber infrastructure and resources for the region. By tracking just 4-5 institutions in the past two years, there has been an increase of more than \$377,595 in local food purchases.

**Farm to School Project:** The Leopold Center approved a \$30,000 two-year grant to FFI to begin a "Farm to School" project. The project will build connections between local food producers and distributors to educational institutions, identify barriers to purchasing local foods, and assist with a year-long school menu that utilizes local foods.

**Northeast Iowa Funders Network established:** In April 2009 a collaboration of leaders, community foundation representatives, and others came together to build a common vision and better align the efforts of the five county foundations.

**Northeast Iowa Resource Conservation and Development (RC & D) Safe Routes to School was funded due to partnership with FFI.** The RC & D received a \$78,000 grant to coordinate a Safe Routes to School project. They are working with 12 school districts to identify safe routes, barriers on walking routes, and strategies for improving safe walkable routes to schools.

**Walkable Bikable Communities** Chris Seeger, Iowa State University landscape architecture department, and Iowa State students worked with youth and community members to identify interesting places to walk, how many steps for segments, and finding routes without barriers. Four communities were mapped.

**Barrier mapping** Youth and adult volunteers in Postville and Waukon walked the sidewalks and identified barriers for walkable routes. This data, also mapped by Seeger, will be used to make a plan of priority areas to address.

**Extensive Use of Technology enhances FFI communication:** Work groups and individuals were connected via a highly developed website where all communications were posted. List serves, and Adobe Connect for web-teleconferencing also facilitate communication.

**Healthy Kids Healthy Communities invites FFI to make proposal:** FFI submitted a preliminary to proposal to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Healthy Kids Healthy Communities program. FFI was one of 140 out of 550 proposals invited to submit a full proposal. The proposal will partner with RWJ to identify environmental and policy changes designed to enhance active living in the FFI area.

**Partnerships with State and Regional Organizations:** FFI expanded partnership with Iowa Department of Public Health, Iowa State University, State Legislators, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowans Fit For Life, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission, Northeast Iowa Community Action, Helping Services for Northeast Iowa, and school districts, among others.

**Potential to develop Built Environment** – FFI has begun conversation with the Center for Transportation Research and Education (CTRE) about opportunities to build a regional trail plan around active transportation to schools and to work.

### **Recognition for Excellence**

- **Brenda Ranum** was recognized by ISU Extension for Visionary Leadership and ISU Extension’s Outstanding Leadership for her work with FFI
- **Teresa Wiemerslage** received an award from ISU Extension for Communication Excellence in webcasts and communications. The webcast on the Local Food System recently won the State Communications Award for Computer Generated Presentation.
- **Eric Nordschow** was recognized by ISU Extension for Outstanding Community Leadership and as a Friend of ISU Extension.

### **Policy Change**

Policy change is an important driver to improve our food system and built environments. Because of the increased discussions surrounding these issues, several policy changes have already occurred:

- **Policy Scan** – Consultant Susan Roberts developed a Policy Scan for FFI. The Policy Scan helped FFI members to identify policy targets that tied to their Strategies and Tactics, as well as who to work with at local, state, and national levels.
- **Public Health** was focused on assessments and now is focused on Community Health, messaging, and outreach.
- **The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship clarified the policy on the use of local food by institutions, including schools**, care centers and hospitals. Because of this change, many local institutional buyers are again buying fruits and vegetables at Farmer’s Markets or directly from local producers.
- **Sidewalks addressed:** Several local city councils are responding to information presented in county meetings by addressing sidewalk issues before the Community Action Phase commences.
- **Cattlemen’s Association Supports local food:** The Winneshiek County Cattlemen's Association took a proposal to the Iowa Cattlemen's Association to create a policy to support "further

research, development and engagement by the beef industry as local food systems and local processing grow to larger markets for our future.”

## **2. Describe factors or circumstances (positive and/or negative) within your environment affecting progress toward achieving goals either generally or as they relate to specific activities.**

- **Immigration Raid in Postville May 12, 2008.** One year after the raid the community of Postville, population 2,400, is still reeling from the impact of the raid on Agri-Processors meat processing facility, the largest employer in the county. Nearly 400 of the 1000 workers were arrested that day. This was the largest Immigration raid in US history to this time. The plant is currently running at partial capacity and is up for auction.
- **The Floods of June, 2008** affected the entire region. The worst direct flooding in our five counties occurred in Elkader where the Main Street and retail sector were flooded for a period of two days. Flooding impeded commerce across Iowa as transportation was re-directed to Minnesota and Missouri in order to get east – west across the state for a period of almost a week. Food producers experienced crop losses and difficulties accessing wet fields.
- **Economy:** Local, Regional, and State impacts. Northeast Iowa experienced the triple economic impact of the raid, followed by the flood, followed by the National economic crisis. As of March, 2009 Allamakee County has the highest unemployment rate in the state at 11%. Free and reduced lunch rates in Postville went from 50% to 80% for the school district. Other school districts also saw increases in free and reduced lunches. Major lay-offs account for 2500 lost jobs in the area. This does not count minor lay-offs that are not recorded by the Iowa Workforce Development office.
- **Change of timeline for Community Action Plan** – Extending the timeline from April 2009 for the Community Action Plan to August 2009 allowed FFI to expand our objectives and accomplish more activities during the work period than earlier expected. Additional work was the development and distribution of the Request For Activities process.

## **3. What else is important to understand about your work over the past year?**

Although planning has been the key focus to date, change is already underway. By developing quality relations, people are sharing information about our food and fitness environments and gathering data on what is unknown. This has led to better and more focused planning and the start of extensive collaboration and innovation in NE Iowa.

### **Negative Unexpected Outcomes**

- While FFI strives for transparency by sharing the process with all involved and posting reports, minutes, and newsletters, it is extremely labor intensive. We have increased our expectations

for the amount of time and staff resources required to maintain a high level of communication and transparency for the FFI work.

- Even though there has been a high level of transparency, we have continually worked to correct mistaken beliefs about funding and how the funding will be disbursed or utilized throughout the five counties. Many people hoped to see direct county appropriations for specific projects (such as building trails) with FFI funding even though this was never the concept or intention.
- The planning process was longer and more involved than some partners expected. Many expressed eagerness to 'get to work' and were put off by the series of learning workshops and overall planning process.

### **Positive Unexpected Outcomes:**

- **Greenhouse converts from ornamental flowers to growing produce:** Regular producer meetings on local food production and farm visits led The Plantpeddler, a local wholesale and retail Cresco-based horticultural company, to convert three of its eight acres of greenhouse space to grow several types of vegetables and fruits (beets, eggplant, leafy greens, kohlrabi, raspberries, green peppers, cucumbers, and several types of herbs). Over 6,000 tomato plants and more than 10,000 strawberry plants are also soaking up sun in these greenhouses.
- **Luther College commits to purchasing 35% from local producers:** In the coming year Luther College will contract with local producers for seven high volume food products. A second local college is now looking at buying more local food. As a result, a local food distributor expressed interest in purchasing and distributing local food in our region. He says he is getting requests from local institutions.
- **Producers are investigating collaboration for processing and distributing food:** The Food & Farm Coalition work group is exploring how to aggregate, process and distribute local food in NE Iowa. They also want to determine the feasibility of using Farmer's Markets to aggregate food in regions near schools for storage, processing, distribution, etc. They also want to conduct feasibility studies of small scale processing (targeting larger scale food products being used in school institutions, where seconds could be harvested/purchased and processed to be used in schools). They are also interested in exploring the idea of starting with on-farm small scale processing with options leading to larger scale processing, including the study of institutional kitchen models.
- **Built environment assessments initiated:** System change around the built environment is in the beginning stages. Community volunteers helped create inventories of indoor and outdoor infra-structure in their communities, including playgrounds, parks, recreation centers and trails. Luther College students helped gather assessment data around school playgrounds and sidewalks. A regional FFI Built Environment work group was formed and has begun discussions on how they could support schools with Safe Routes to School and joint-use facility agreements between schools and communities. This is the first time regional discussions around the built environment has occurred in the region.
- **Communication with US Senator Harkin's office:** This past fall, Senator Harkin's majority staff member, Dan Christenson, visited NE Iowa and spent a day with FFI members. He indicated the information and data shared would help as he drafts policy around the Child Nutrition

Reauthorization Act. He has since followed up with the NE Iowa Food & Fitness Initiative on several occasions. In addition, Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack's staff has requested information regarding Farm-To-School programs and what is needed to get local food into our nation's schools.

- **Economy encouraging ag- diversification:** The depressed agriculture economy is making people more open and receptive to new ways to create income. We find that lenders are also more receptive to lending for local food growing.
- **Agriculture implement dealers selling specialized equipment:** One system change of note is that Windridge Implements, a local agricultural implement dealer is carrying small ag equipment such as planters, tillers and harvesters for fruit and vegetable production.
- **Open sharing of information between** growers on information for improving operations is able to happen because of the knowledge and trust built among the network of producers.
- **Regional conversations are emerging.** Partners are finding win-win ways to share best practices and find partnerships.
- **Department of Natural Resources is partnering to encourage active lifestyles:** The DNR gave \$13,000 for built environment work in NE Iowa intended to get people into the outdoor environment. Funding was given to Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission to develop a passport program partnering with a school in each county get "passports" stamped in parks throughout the summer.
- **Iowa State University hires small farms specialist:** Andy Larson was hired by ISU Extension to be an Extension Small Farms Specialist for the State. He has met with NIFF, along with the ISU Graduate students. He was hired from a Leopold Center funded project that came out of communications with NIFF.
- **ISU sustainable agriculture class provides graduate students to do community-based projects.** ISU is providing two graduate students to work with NIFF. They are doing a literature review and researching case studies of best models/recommended steps for kitchen incubators and similar activities. Graduate students are assisting the FFI and other regional food system groups around the state.
- **Cross learning and sharing:** At the Iowa Network for Community Agriculture (INCA) conference in February, participants practiced asset mapping. They are using the data to create a Google map similar to those created by the NIFF Coalition and have consulted NIFF for advice.
- **ISU Extension providing community visions for Turkey River Corridor** – The communities of Elkader, Elgin, and Clermont are working to link together with river and walking/biking trails. ISU is providing planning and visioning through the Community Visions Program. They also received a \$500,000 grant from the Iowa Transportation Commission Enhancement program. FFI was acknowledged as influential in the initiation of the project. The award-winning program integrates technical landscape planning and design techniques with sustainable community action to assist community leaders and volunteers in making sound and meaningful decisions about the local landscape. Clermont, Elgin and Elkader, which are located in the Turkey River corridor, experienced major flooding in 2008. To qualify for the visioning program, a community must have a population of fewer than 10,000, existing transportation-related issues and a committee of volunteers willing to dedicate their time and talent to the visioning process.

