

Developing and Implementing a Strategic Plan For Farm-to-School Programs in Northeast Iowa

February 1, 2009 — December 30, 2010

Overall Goals:

The Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative will develop a successful farm to school plan with districts/colleges, distributors, farmers and other local partners to increase access to and consumption of fresh and local healthy foods for K-12 and college students, staff, and faculty.

Hopeful Results:

1. Increase access, exposure and intake of fresh and local healthy foods for K-12 and college students, staff and faculty.
2. Enhance and diversify local markets for agricultural producers in Northeast Iowa; increase markets for value added products.
3. Increase students knowledge of nutrition, health, and agricultural and food system literacy.
4. Create programs, policies, and understanding that will perpetuate a farm to school connection even after the pilot program is done.

How this will happen:

Fourteen of the eighteen school districts plus three colleges in Northeast Iowa will send one representative per school from their school wellness committees (champions in food, physical activity and/or health environments) to meet monthly between October 2008 – May 2009 as a member of the Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Regional School Planning Committee that will include Northeast Iowa FFI partners. The Food and Fitness Initiative will work on policy, communication, information development and dissemination, networking, and training in order to multiply the impact of this project. Key to the process is inclusion of youth input.

Our process will be shaped by the key stakeholders in the process. School Superintendents, food staff, faculty, youth, and food producers will implement key programs, policies, and training to perpetuate the program after this pilot project is completed.

Why this is Important Now

- The Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Regional School Planning Committee increases capacity for Northeast Iowa schools and the Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative (FFI) members to partner and plan around common goals related to food and fitness environment designed to improve the overall health of students and staff. This partnership forms a new community of practice that leverages the learning of diverse group participants to benefit farmers and communities.
- Farm-to-School programs, tied to comprehensive local healthy food policies, will lead to profitable farmer led-businesses and networks with schools/colleges with increasing capacity to meet demand for products in various market segments and scales, with emphasis on larger-volume markets.
- Commitment of schools and policy makers to Farm-to-School programs and to comprehensive local healthy food policies will lead to increased local and state investment in community-based food, fiber, and energy enterprises.
- Commitment of schools and policy makers to Farm-to-School programs and to comprehensive local healthy food policies will lead to food, fiber and energy enterprises that significantly contribute to the health and well-being of Iowans in rural communities, like those in Northeast Iowa.

Objectives

The Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative (FFI) hopes to expand markets for local growers, increase sales and consumption of healthy fresh foods, and positively impact healthy lifestyles by the Farm to School Partnership. This project will serve to identify and reduce barriers for institutional purchasing of locally grown foods, excite key decision makers about the benefits of locally purchased foods, and educate students and faculty and families about their connection to local food systems.

Strategies:

1. Northeast Iowa FFI co-leaders and partners will create monthly learning opportunities for the Regional School Planning Committee to:
 - a. Take a base line survey of educational institutions in NE Iowa to determine: amount of locally purchased/ sustainably grown foods already in the cafeterias, document attitudes towards locally grown food, identify barriers to increase the purchase of local foods.
 - b. Use data as a foundation for shaping further strategies and education.
 - c. Build relationships between educational institutions and local food producers who are connected with FFI.
2. The Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Regional School Planning Committee implements a Farm-to School plan that will:
 - a. Facilitate pilot projects, assisting schools to increase contracts with local growers.
 - b. Based on school input, identify local markets that have potential to be enhanced or diversified for agricultural producers in the Northeast to increase markets for value added products.
 - c. Assist in making policy changes within the school's food systems that make buying local easier.
3. The Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Regional School Planning Committee implements a Farm-to School plan that will include:
 - a. Foster communication, information development and dissemination, networking, and training and technical assistance. FFI will prepare handouts, newsletters, and events to increase health and food system literacy for schools. FFI will partner with the State of Iowa Department of Agriculture Farm to School Program and the Regional Food Systems Working Group to utilize their resources for educational and outreach materials.
4. The Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative will partner with state and regional groups to share best practices.
 - a. Groups such as the Regional Food Systems Working Group (RFSWG) and the Iowa Food Policy Council are resources and partners for FFI. We will share our successes and lessons learned with them as well as learn from their experiences.
5. The Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative will foster buy-in from local communities and parents of school children.
 - a. FFI will utilize our channels of communication and existing network of supporters among the schools, health care educators, economic development organizations, lenders, producers, and institutional buyers to build understanding and support for the Farm to School initiative. FFI has a broad network of supporters including youth, dieticians, and public health. Communication will be distributed through media outreach, the website, email, and information sent home with children.

Project timeline:

September 2008 First meetings with 17 regional school districts to explain the project. Fourteen sign on.
February 2009 Initiate baseline survey. Continue monthly meetings of the Regional School Planning Committee.
April 2009 Survey information is incorporated into planning and strategies for upcoming meetings.
April - December Build connections between schools and local producers. Develop a strategies for education and pilot projects.
December 2009 Initial planning is complete with pilot projects identified.
January 2010 Implement pilot projects. Implement education programs. Continue to build relationships between schools and growers.
December 2010 Follow-up survey.

Proposed Budget:

	Year 1	Year 2
Category	Amount	
Travel-Domestic	\$2,000	\$1000
Supplies/Materials	\$5,500	\$6000
Consultants/Honorariums	\$5,000	\$3000
Other Direct Costs	\$5,500	\$2000
TOTAL Expenses	\$18,000	\$12,000