

## Extension Connections with Northeast Iowa Economic Development

**Northeast Iowa plans for more local food and healthier communities.** An effort to promote local agriculture took root this spring when the W.K. Kellogg Foundation awarded the Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative a \$500,000 two-year planning grant. Co-led by ISU Extension and Northeast Iowa Resource, Conservation, and Development, citizens from Allamakee, Clayton, Fayette, Howard, and Winneshiek counties are mapping strategies to increase the availability and consumption of healthy, locally grown foods and improve opportunities to incorporate physical activity into daily lives. Already there is an expansion of “food-preneurism,” growing the local food economy at multiple points along the food chain. A \$50,000 increase in sales to local retailers and institutions is projected for 2007 alone.

**Reduce lead-time, increase returns.** SMI Co. in Cresco, a large pallet manufacturer, needed help in reducing lead-time and increasing inventory turns. The company contacted ISU Extension’s Center for Industrial Research and Service (CIRAS) for assistance. Through lean training and ISO certification SMI was able to achieve its goals, allowing the company entry into new and better markets. As a result, the company has increased sales by \$600,000, retained sales of \$1.2 million, and created two new jobs.

**Center boosts tourism, celebrates agriculture.** The newly opened Heartland Acres Agribition Center, located adjacent to Highway 20 in Independence, attracted more than 1,600 visitors in the first month. Since 2001, ISU Extension in Buchanan County has been “at the table” as a critical player and planner in the collaboration that launched this interactive salute to agriculture and celebration of its heritage and future. ISU Extension helped write the educational and interpretive plans with assistance from many Iowa State University experts, and provided planning data to project the economic impact. The center houses displays, a small theater, an events center, and the ISU Extension county office. The projected 50,000 annual visitors to the interpretive center alone will increase tourism revenues and reduce retail leakage by 12 percent.

**‘Wellness and Wisdom’ for kids.** Citizens of Elma have decided to grow their community and keep their local charter school by attracting new families to their town of 714. For the second summer, ISU Extension 4-H Youth Development in Howard County is partnering with the Elma Elementary Charter School and the Howard-Winneshiek School District to conduct four weeks of “Wellness and Wisdom,” a summer program offering nutrition and educational courses to more than 100 children from Elma and the surrounding area. Due to the large number of latchkey children and those qualified for free and reduced meals (more than 60 percent), the program is designed to promote wellness and nutrition in a safe place where children can continue to develop socially and intellectually during the summer. In 2006, more than 3,260 USDA funded breakfasts and lunches were served. In 2007, a companion program in Lime Springs will increase the total number of youth served.

**Worth County commits to reducing teenage drinking.** Using Drug-Free Communities funding, the Worth County Asset Team (WCAT), a countywide coalition led by ISU Extension, has developed a comprehensive prevention effort that is making a difference. Iowa Youth Surveys in 2002 and 2005 revealed a significant drop (from 60 to 36 percent) in Worth County 11<sup>th</sup> graders’ past 30-day use of alcohol. Building upon the local success of the Strengthening Families Program for Parents and Youth 10–14, WCAT and other coordinated programs are showing that peer pressure can be effective in telling teens they don’t have to drink. The National Institute of Health estimates that for every dollar invested in substance abuse prevention, there is a return of \$4 to \$7 or more in reduced drug-related crime, criminal justice costs, and theft. In the coming year, WCAT plans to build an assessment team to verify similar reductions in Worth County.

**For more information, contact your county extension education director or visit the Iowa State University Extension website, [www.extension.iastate.edu](http://www.extension.iastate.edu).**