ISU LOCAL FOOD FESTIVAL
2023 SUCCESS STORY

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LOCAL FOOD FESTIVAL ON ISU CENTRAL CAMPUS PROMOTES FOOD, SUSTAINABILITY, AND COMMUNITY.

In Fall 2021, a sample of 1,035 Iowa State University students completed a survey with the National College Health Assessment (NCHA), which collected data on health indicators including levels of food insecurity. According to the survey results, 31% of all students at Iowa State University experience low or very low food security, which is a 7% increase from Spring 2019. More broadly, according to the US Census Bureau, 26.8% of the total Ames population lives below poverty level. According to Shaak (2021), supporting local food systems through mutual aid is a tertiary level of addressing college student food insecurity. By voluntarily exchanging resources and services for mutual benefit, community members can give what they can and get what they need from others. The Iowa State University Local Food Festival, held on September 20, 2023, is a one-day farmers market that features businesses, nonprofit organizations, and ISU departments and student organizations. The goal of the festival is to promote local foods, sustainability, and community.

RESPONSE

Primarily led by Farm, Food and Enterprise Development and the Office of Sustainability’s Live Green! Initiative, the Local Food Festival is a one-day event that occurs annually on Iowa State University’s central campus in Ames, IA. As a farmers market-style celebration of food, sustainability, and community, the Local Food Festival strives to be a low-barrier opportunity for both local food and farm-related businesses and organizations to interact with the ISU community. Approximately 2,500 ISU students, faculty, and staff to connect with local food and farm businesses, local organizations, and ISU departments and student organizations.

The Local Food Festival served as a space where attendees could purchase local ingredients for their meal later in the day or a quick snack on the walk across campus. Local food and farm business booths ranged from fresh produce, protein, and dairy products, baked goods, freeze-dried snacks, canned salsas and jams, and an old-fashioned ice cream tractor. An ISU student-entrepreneur with a food trailer business sold out of all their menu options for the day prior to the end of the event. Local organizations also shared about volunteer opportunities with different farms, programming available for immigrants and refugees, services available to military veterans, and ways to engage with Story County Extension and Outreach. Vendor-led activities included a spice-blend challenge, a blender bike, and demonstrations of hydroponics.

OUTCOMES

The estimated attendance was collected via clickers at the two entrances to the festival space. Attendee engagement was tracked via community mural booths, which were also located at the East and West entrances to the festival.
At the activity booth, participants at the opportunity to write their answers to these four prompts:

- How do you incorporate local foods, sustainability, and community in your life?
- My favorite booth is...
- Add a sticky dot if you tried a new food.
- Add a sticky dot if you learned something new.

Over 300 responses were collected for the first question, which was able to be answered prior to walking through the farmers market space. The most common answers included farmers markets, buying local, using reusable bags, recycling, growing produce at home, and volunteering in their community. To track if attendees tried a new food or learned something new, the booth staff asked attendees to stop by one of the two activity booths prior to leaving the festival to share about their experience. As documented on the community mural, 129 attendees indicated that they tried a new food, with at least 13 people trying a new salsa and 6 people trying a freeze-dried snack. Ninety-nine (99) attendees indicated that they learned something new, including when Election Day is, campus events to attend, types of recyclable items, and student organizations they can join.

In addition to an interactive activity table for attendees at the festival, an evaluation was developed in Qualtrics and distributed digitally to all 41 sponsors and vendors, six event planning staff, and seven volunteers. Fifteen responses were collected for a 28% response rate. Most of the responses came from vendors and booths. When asked to rate agreeance that the Local Food Festival met its goal of promoting local foods, sustainability, and community, the average response was a 4.64 on a scale of 5.

The Local Food Festival met 100% of respondents’ expectations, with 80% of those respondents saying that the festival exceeded their expectations. One hundred percent (100%) of the vendor and booth responses are at least somewhat likely to return to next year’s festival. When asked what they enjoyed most about the Local Food Festival, one vendor shared, “Our sales exceeded our expectations and watching students try our [products].” Anecdotally, vendors and organizations shared that they enjoyed being able to connect with the ISU community and share about their passion for local foods and sustainability. In total, vendors and sponsors contributed $3,066 in support of the Local Food Festival in 2023.

**IMPACT**

Over 2,500 attendees participated in the 2023 ISU Local Food Festival that featured 41 booths, vendors, and sponsors working together to promote local foods, sustainability, and community with opportunities to learn about how to get involved with community initiatives, try samples of locally grown and made food, purchase local products, and engage in booth activities. Over 300 respondents shared how they support their communities in local foods and sustainability, tried a new food, and learned something new at the festival.

For more information on the Local Food Festival, contact Megan Kemp at mkemp@iastate.edu or visit bit.ly/ISULFF

**References**

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