Root for Radishes!

Evaluation of 2018 Farm to Summer Campaign

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Introduction

In the winter of 2018, representatives of the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS), the Iowa Department of Education (IDOE), and the Iowa State Extension and Outreach Local Foods Program met to discuss opportunities for collaborative work around farm to summer. Farm to summer activities are often held at summer meal sites and connect participating youth with local food during peak season. Local food tastings, gardening and cooking education, and farmer visits are some examples of what farm to summer looks like at summer meal sites.

To support and promote farm to summer opportunities, these three organizations developed a campaign to center local food sourcing and education around one vegetable: radishes. The first of its kind statewide “Root for Radishes!” campaign took place in the summer of 2018. All summer meal sites were invited to participate through an application process. The campaign offered promotional material, technical assistance, and a $150 mini-grant to all participating sites.

Methods

Promotion

To promote the “Root for Radishes!” campaign, the IDOE hosted a farm to summer-themed webinar in early spring, announcing the opportunity to participate to all summer meal site hosts. They shared the parameters of the campaign, along with the graphic design images and promotional materials offered by the campaign organizers (Fig 1).

![Fig 1. “Root for Radishes” Graphic Design](image)

Organizers at participating sites completed a pre-survey created by the three lead organizations, assessing technical assistance needs, meal site numbers, educational plan, and supply requests. This pre-survey would have served as an application had interest been greater than available resources. After completing the pre-survey, meal site organizers were instructed to complete IDALS paperwork to access their grant funding and promotional material. The last requirement of the campaign was for meal site organizers to complete a post-survey, after their farm to summer activities had taken place. Both the pre-survey and post-survey were created and shared through Google™ forms. Results were analyzed using Excel™.
Survey Process
Open April-May, 2018, the campaign pre-survey was completed by 15 individuals who represented 15 summer meal programs. Evaluator Chelsea Krist of ISU Extension and Outreach Local Foods Program created a map using Google™ to show the location of each site, color-coded by region based on the site’s local food coordinator (Fig 2). Local food coordinators work across the state and can offer technical assistance toward purchasing local food, a useful skill for this project. This map shows a gap in responses from the northwest and north central regions of the state, an important note for planning future promotion.

Of the 15 pre-survey applicants depicted on the map, 13 completed paperwork to access the mini-grant funding and promotional materials, and 10 completed the final evaluation, for a response rate of 77%. This report is an evaluation of the feedback shared by the 10 sites whose organizers completed all three steps: completing the pre-survey, accessing funding, and completing the post-evaluation.

The post-programming evaluation was shared with participants in September and closed in October. It posed questions about site-specific promotion, farm to summer educational activities, grant funds spending, technical assistance support, barriers to implementing goals, and lessons learned.

This report combines relevant data from the sites that completed pre-survey and the post-survey to provide an overview of 10 meal sites’ experiences, the reach of the “Root for Radishes” Farm to Summer campaign, and recommendations for future statewide campaigns.

Results
Site Organizers Largely Valued Campaign Promotional Materials
IDALS provided several promotional materials to participating sites (an editable community newsletter, laminated 8”x15” posters, and 3’x5’ banners) to support outreach and communication around the farm to summer campaign (Appendix A). Figure 3 shows that respondents from all participating meal sites found these materials useful, especially the posters and banners. In additional comments, several respondents specified that the dry-erase whiteboards and stickers from IDALS were also useful for displaying the daily menu and engaging youth.
IDALS Funding was Used for Cooking and Gardening Supplies

All participating summer meal sites received $150 to support educational programming around farm to summer campaign. Site organizers were largely autonomous in deciding how to spend this funding, as long as the purchases went toward education and promotion of local foods at their summer meal site.

Results show that cooking and gardening implements were the most useful supplies site organizers purchased (Fig 4). Respondents mentioned that these new supplies are beneficial as they can be used in future educational programming (grill, table, cutting boards, knives), and educators did not have to use their personal belongings to support their programming.

Most Respondents Found and Used Technical Assistance

As part of the farm to summer campaign, organizers connected participating sites with technical assistance providers (often local food coordinators) who could offer broad support around local food sourcing, educational programming ideas, promotion, etc. Of the 10 respondents, 7 used some form of technical assistance to support their farm to summer campaign. Of the 7 respondents who did use technical assistance, 5 partnered with ISU Extension and Outreach (Fig 5; Fig 6).
Local Food was Served at Most Sites

Of the 10 participating meal sites, 7 sourced and served local food as part of their farm to summer campaign (Fig 7). The frequency of offering local food varied between sites, as shown in Fig 8. While 3 out of the 7 meal sites served local food daily, other sites served local food less than that.

The sources of local food varied, as well. Most sites acquired their local food from more than one source throughout the summer, checking two or more options on the survey. The most common source was a grocery store, followed by the farmers market, school or community garden, individual local farmers and producers, and a food hub (Fig 9).
Summer Meal Site Organizers are Enthusiastic about the Local Food Education they Offered

The post-survey asked participants to share an overview of the educational activities they led with youth throughout the summer. The 10 raw responses to this open-ended question can be found at the end of this report (Appendix B).

The most popular educational activities across sites involved planting and caring for seeds (often radishes), hosting taste tests and cooking activities using youth-grown produce and local produce acquired elsewhere in the community, and veggie-themed physical activities and crafts. Seven of ten responses explicitly mention using radishes as part of this education, which was encouraged through the campaign. Radishes grow easily and quickly, are versatile and flavorful, and are affordable.

These responses showcase the overall enthusiasm for the education and campaign opportunity from respondents. Site organizers were adaptable to conditions of the growing season, valued youth engagement through hands-on activities, and made note of the parent and family connections fostered through this education.

Barriers to Implementing Farm to Summer Programming

The survey asked participants to share barriers to implementing farm to summer activities in their communities. Inconsistent student participation and limited staff time are the most common barriers across these sites, each mentioned five times; funding is the next most common challenge, mentioned four times. Barriers within education and training support, and finding local food were each mentioned one time (Fig 10).

One respondents chose to respond with “other” and offered: “There does not seem to be a lot of barriers. Moving forward it is the excitement of coming up with creative ideas for presenting the food. Funding might be an issue depending on how creative we want to get with our program.”
Respondents were asked to share what practices, if any, they found most helpful for overcoming the challenges of implementing farm to summer. People from six sites responded, all mentioning that partnerships (with volunteers, farmers, food educators, families) were important to overcoming challenges. A more specific response under “Other” recommended a schedule of garden duties and upcoming events to keep the garden growing and the youth engaged.

**Outcomes and Continued Learning**

As summer meal site organizers develop community strategies to implement farm to summer activities, program leaders continue to learn and reflect on the outcomes of this first campaign, as shown in the responses to this evaluation. Respondents were asked to check one or more outcomes of participating in the “Root for Radishes!” campaign, and all respondents checked at least one outcome.

Six respondents stated that farm to summer programming increased support for local food education. Four respondents noted that farm to summer increased participation and retention of attendees at their summer meal sites. Again, new partnership development was noted as an outcome by two respondents. Two respondents selected “Other,” one stating increased awareness of the campaign as an outcome, and one stating that farm to summer “made no difference unfortunately, due to the size of the program and community” (Fig 11).
Respondents were asked to share one thing they learned through participating in the “Root for Radishes!” campaign. Of the nine responses, six mention a positive association between hands-on activities and learning (such as gardening and cooking) and youth trying and liking new foods. Respondents share an understanding that exposure to new and local foods encourages students to try it and like it. The raw responses are listed below (Fig 12). One respondent learned that it is difficult to keep kids involved, a common challenge with open summer meal site programs, and one respondent would like to have planned their programming earlier.

**Fig 12. Learning Expressed By Participating Summer Meal Site Organizers**

“I learned that the more you offer new foods to kids, sooner or later they'll try it!”

“It was fun and it can make a huge impact in others’ lives in a good way. I want to continue this and I hope your program can still provide packets with hands-on activities that you did for this year’s program. We are going to use the growing packets inside this winter so it will be a year around project. Thank you so much for selecting us to be a part of this amazing campaign.”

“It's difficult to keep kids involved. Many of the children did not want to be there; they were there because their parents ‘made’ them go.”

“Loved it and thank you very much for the boost to help support local food this summer!!”

“Activities are important for retaining participation at summer sites, and this is another activity that can enhance that participation.”

“That kids will like radishes if you put them in a salad or make other things out of them.”

“Kids love hands on and what they can see.”

“Honestly, I learned that kids aren't crazy about raw radishes, but once they get to cut and cook them, they loved them! Reinforces trying new things and not being scared!”

“We were a little late in getting going with it so pre-planning on our part would have been better.”

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

In its first year as a statewide pilot project, the “Root for Radishes!” farm to summer campaign was successful in garnering interest and providing useful resources (promotional materials, gardening and cooking supplies through mini-grant funding, technical assistance) to summer meal programs. Program organizers learned useful, relevant information about the context of local food education during the summer months.

While common barriers exist, including inconsistent youth participation numbers and limited staff time, site organizers are looking toward broad community partnerships and innovative programming to overcome these challenges. It is clear from this project and evaluation that meal program coordinators are enthusiastic about farm to summer opportunities and observed the benefits of the campaign, including increased participation and retention of youth, enhanced support for local food education, and direct connections between hands-on activities and student willingness to try new foods.
This evaluator recommends that for the future, outreach and promotion of the statewide farm to summer campaign be enhanced and specifically directed to the northwest and north central regions of the state, where no connections were made this year. If pilot site leaders decide to remain involved with farm to summer, they will need to address the major barriers of staff time, inconsistent participation, and eventually funding- as site organizers expect projects and participation to grow.

Campaign organizers should consider how to support communities in localized fundraising and volunteer opportunities, and how to best connect local leaders with specific technical assistance. ISU Extension and Outreach, along with Iowa’s local food coordinators, can provide useful support in leading programming and sourcing local food. As future campaigns are developed to feature a different summer veggie, it will be beneficial to hear opinions from participants and summer meal leaders.
APPENDIX A.

Graphic Art Designed as Promotional Materials

“Root for Radishes!” 8” x 15” Poster

“Root for Radishes!” 3’ x 5’ Banner
Help us Root for Radishes!

This summer [INSERT SITE OR SPONSOR NAME] will be highlighting radishes as the RADDEST vegetable of the summer! Students eating summer meals at [INSERT LOCATION] will get the chance to [INSERT GENERAL ACTIVITIES; EXAMPLE: “grow, cook, and taste local radishes”]. Join us as we root for Radishes!

[INSERT ADDITION INFORMATION ABOUT SITE. INCLUDE A GENERAL OUTLINE/SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES BEING OFFERED. MENTION OTHER COMMUNITY PARTNERS/EDUCATORS WHO WILL BE ASSISTING WITH PROGRAMMING]

Questions? Contact [INSERT POINT OF CONTACT AND CONTACT INFO].
Where can you find radishes?

Radishes are jam-packed with peppery flavor and make a great addition to a fresh summer salad or thrown on street tacos. But where do you find radishes?

You can find Iowa-grown radishes in abundance during spring, early summer, and fall. Just check out [INSERT NAMES OF LOCAL FARMERS MARKET, FOOD CO-OP, FARMS, ETC.] for the freshest local radishes! If you don’t have convenient access to any of those options, you can find them year-round at all major grocery stores.

Super Simple Sautéed Radishes

Ingredients:
1 tbsp olive oil  
1 lb radishes, ends trimmed and cut in half  
Salt and pepper, to taste

Directions:
1. Heat olive oil in a skillet over medium-high heat.  
2. Arrange radishes, cut-side down, in the skillet.  
3. Cook, stirring occasionally, for 10 minutes, or until radishes are tender.  
4. Add salt and pepper, to taste.
APPENDIX B.

Overview of Educational Activities led at Summer Meal Sites

“The kids loved planting and raising the plants, we had a ton of fresh fruit and veggies this summer and taught them ways they can provide for their families at home. Our plants are still growing!”

“We planted a garden and the students helped plant, maintain, and harvest. After the harvest we have provided food samples (broccoli, cucumbers, peppers, pickles) at the summer lunch program. We also used our new grille and made green peppers with cheese on them. This was a huge hit. We had canned dill pickles and they were also a huge hit. We gave the students and family members the different items that were sent in the packets from your program. The seed packets were fun. We asked the kids different questions from the packets. An example of one of the questions was- how many seeds are in a strawberry? Some of the kids went home and made smoothies they learned from the packet. One particular family took pictures and showed them to me. The boy was so excited to explain the pictures. I handed out the radish seeds and clear cups for the students to plant at home with their family. One parent told me their child was so excited to look at the radish the next morning only to be disappointed the radish did not fully grow over night. The parent explained the growing process. One parent emailed me pictures of their radishes growing. Honestly, I was excited to provide activities during the lunch program but did not realize the impact I would have. For example, I was early the first day to set up and explained what I was going to be doing with the individuals eating. The next day, I arrived fifteen minutes after the individuals started eating. The cooks said, “I am glad you showed up, because the kid were wondering where the guy was that is at the table.” That made me feel so good that I was making an impact with this program. There are numerous examples, but I wanted to share that one. What a great experience. We made coleslaw in one of the classes I teach with 8th grade students. We went to the garden and picked cabbage, onions and peppers. I brought the food processors and other items to help make the slaw. I had three different examples of how to make the slaw and let them create their own. There were three groups and three different tastes. One group was really good and their slaw had jalapenos in it. I asked if they could recreate the recipe and they were not sure. We have enough supplies that we are going to try a round two of making their own recipe. This gives you a little bit of what we did with the program you helped us with. This was an amazing experience and I hope to continue and build from what we have done.”

“I worked with kids up to 3rd grade in the summer school program and had them plant radish seeds. Each week I read a book, we did exercises and we did a "radish" themed craft.”

“ Took place in food tastings, sweet corn shucking, and local food give away from food bingo!”

“We had Mary Krisco, the ISU Extension and Outreach Nutrition and Health specialist for Polk county, and an intern that was working with her to provide the educational components of our programming. She and her intern visited all 5 of our as over the summer (some multiple times) and provided engaging physical activities and taste tests, such as radish pizza, radish dip, and radish bites for the kids.”

“This summer we were able to grow gardens at 4 schools. Those 4 schools have summer school as well. The students helped us take care of the gardens during the summer and learn about the growth of the gardens. Once the produce was ripe we donated it to the Food Pantry and did educational food presentations with the kids. We made a radish salad, salsa and a tomato herb salad. This helps the kids understand the taste of the produce and enjoy it.”
“Kids came in and help me set up the roots for radishes. They loved planting the seeds, watering them, and especially watching them grow day after day.”

“We sourced local food for kids to prepare a snack in addition to the food they were served by the school district at summer meals. Originally, we had wanted to serve radishes and other root vegetables in a variety of ways. The farmers I knew had a difficult time growing radishes, turnips, and carrots because of our hot spring which was a big shame because Farmer Mark has THE BEST carrots and turnips. We ended up featuring kohlrabi, kale, swiss chard, dill, cucumbers, and a couple other things at 2 locations, 3 visits to each location. Kids got to do a lot of practice on their knife skills chopping lots of vegetables. Almost all attendants to the summer meals wanted to take part in making the snack even if they were unfamiliar with the vegetables being prepared or didn't think they would like them.”

“I had classes every day with the program. It was part in the garden and part in the "kitchen". My students got to do both each time they were there. We did lots of garden activities including scavenger hunts, planting, weeding, harvesting, and so much more! In the kitchen, we learned about different foods and how to read recipes. My students got to really work on cutting skills and trying new things like cooked radishes and garlic scape pesto - a new one for me even!"

“We were able to engage children with the hands-on activities at our fair.”