

Iowa Local Food Day 2019 Evaluation



April 2020

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Introduction

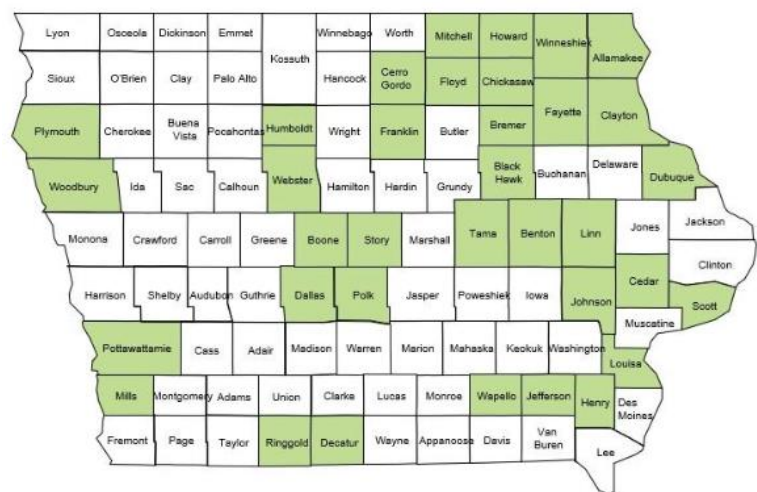
The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) initiated Iowa Local Food Day (ILFD) in 2018, bringing together all sectors of Farm to School to celebrate and serve Iowa-grown food. Intentions behind the event include growing a state network to support local food sales, engaging farmers and food service directors as partners, helping farms grow sales, and expanding farm to school to more sites with more product.

To participate in Iowa Local Food Day, schools, colleges, universities, and early care sites register and commit to serving at least two items made with primarily locally sourced ingredients for breakfast and lunch. On October 11, 2018, the first event brought-together 150 schools who served over 170,000 local meals. In its second year, over 280 schools and 10 early care sites participated in the 2019 Iowa Local Food Day October 11, 2019. This report interprets survey data collected from schools and early care sites that participated in the 2019 event.

Methods

In the fall of 2019, a total of 66 registrants- from 10 early care sites and 56 K-12 schools and districts- signed-up to participate in Iowa Local Food Day by completing an online form. Sites shared information regarding the size and location of school, technical assistance needs, requests for marketing material, and the local foods they anticipated serving. Figure 1 shows the 38 counties with registered schools and sites. Based on registration numbers, approximately 11% of Iowa school districts participated. Across these registered sites, approximately 107,900 local meals were served in ILFD in celebration of the event: 13,327 breakfasts, 94,528 lunches, and 1,293 taste tests.

Fig 1. Map of Iowa Counties Registered to Participate in 2019 Iowa Local Food Day



In February 2020, participants were sent a follow-up online survey through Qualtrics, inquiring about their purchases and processes related to the October event. The survey was completed by 33 sites, for a 52% response rate. Results were analyzed using Excel.

Results

100% of Respondents Plan to Participate in 2020 Iowa Local Food Day

The 33 sites that participated in the survey represent 184 schools and approximately 58,308 students participated in 2019 Iowa Local Food Day. Of the 33 representatives from school districts and early care sites who completed the online survey, that 100% of respondents reported that they plan to participate in the 2020 Iowa Local Food Day event.

Most Participants Promoted their Event and Received Positive Feedback

97% of respondents promoted their Iowa Local food Day event and 64% received positive feedback from families, students, staff, or the broader community. Respondents were asked to share best practices associated with their promotion plans. Their responses are listed in Fig 2. The most common best practices and strategies are associated with in-cafeteria promotion and posting information online. Promotional resources and information provided by IDALS were used by most sites, as ILFD posters are commonly cited as a valuable promotional tool in schools and cafeterias, and 67% of sites reported using the ILFD website (IowaLocalFoodDay.org) as resource.

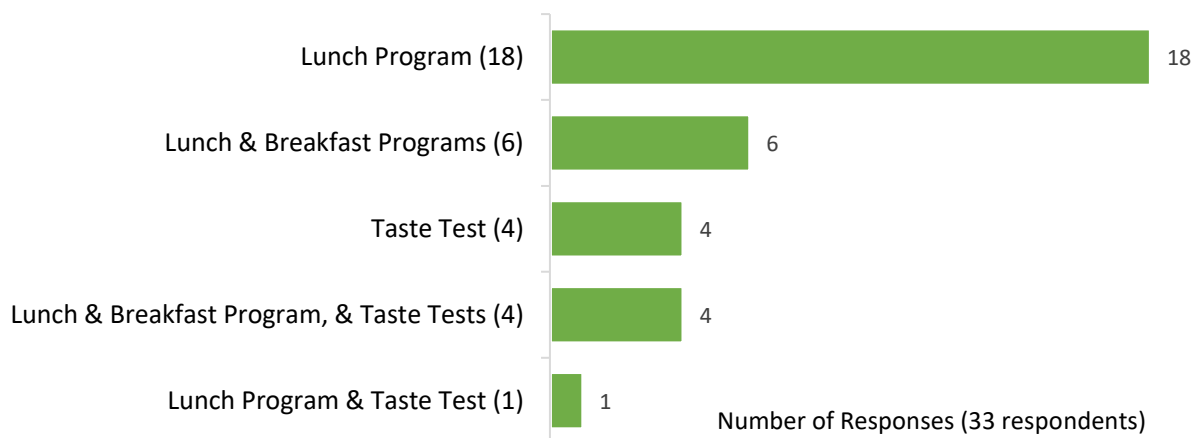
Fig 2. Sites Most Often Promoted in Cafeterias and Online

# Responses	Promotion Strategy	Best Practice Details
12	In-cafeteria promotion	Labeling local food items and their sources in cafeteria posters, on menus and menu boards
12	Posting information online	Posting about ILFD on social media (Facebook, twitter), and posting info on school/site websites
10	In-school promotion (outside of the cafeteria)	Hanging posters around school, school-wide announcements, cross-age teaching, and teacher education in classrooms
5	Communication to Families	Through newsletters (hard copy and electronic)
3	Connecting with Local Media	Contacting local newspapers, television stations

Participating Commonly Enhanced Meal Participation Rates

To be considered official participants in ILFD, sites are asked to serve at least two local items through breakfast or lunch programs, or through taste testing. Sites reported serving local food through several combinations but most commonly, the lunch program (Fig 3). Six sites served local food during breakfast and lunch, and four sites served local food in all forms, during breakfast, lunch, and through taste testing.

Fig 3. Most Schools Served Local Food through Lunch Programs



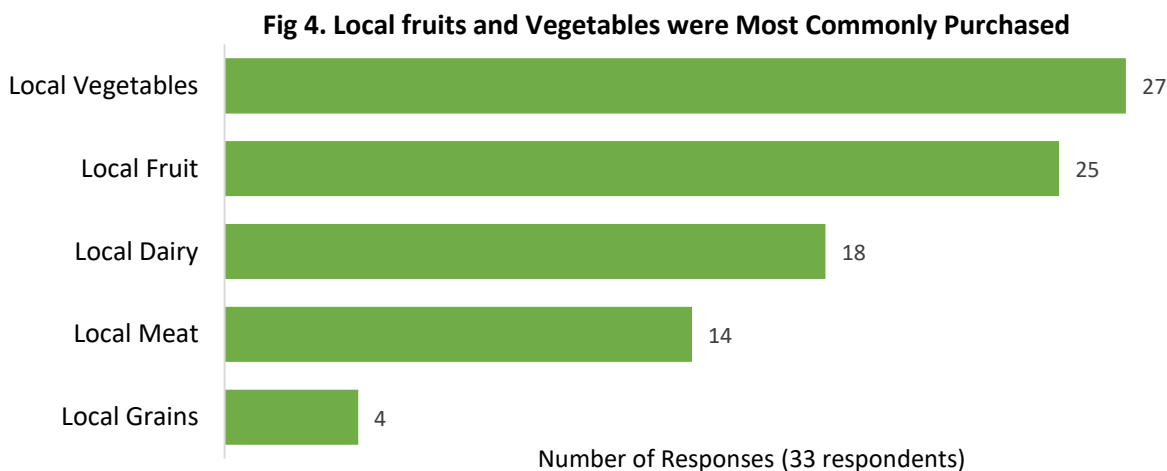
Respondents were asked whether their participation in ILFD and incorporation of local foods impacted student participation rates. While 52% of sites reported that their participation rates did not change, 33% of sites reported higher breakfast and/or lunch participation rates on ILFD. 15% of sites did not know whether their participation rates were impacted.

New Local Procurement Partnerships Emerged

Learning and refining the local food procurement processes is at the center of participating in the annual Iowa Local Food Day event. Respondents were asked to list the names of their local food sources, and offered a total of 50 unique responses, including farms, dairies, orchards, food hubs, and school gardens (Appendix A). Almost half of these purchases (24) were reported as first-time purchases, indicating that new partnerships and markets were grown through ILFD.

Most Schools and Sites Purchased Local Produce

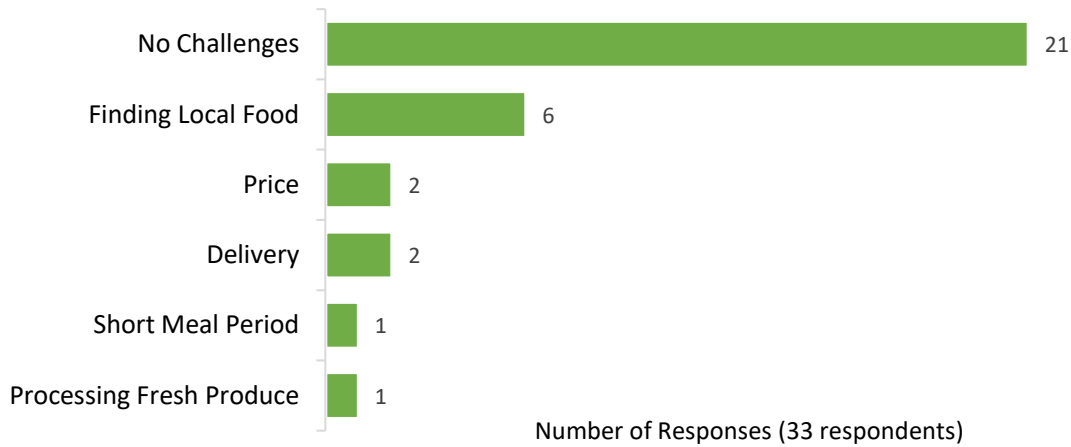
Schools and sites can source and serve a variety of food items considered local, with the exception of milk. Respondents were asked to share which local items they purchased for the ILFD meal offerings. Local vegetables and fruits were most commonly purchased (Fig 4), followed by local dairy (cheese and yogurt), local meat, and lastly, local grains. Schools used these local products in a variety of ways to build-out diverse, local-centric meal plan for ILFD. A summary of ILFD menus shared by respondents can be found in Appendix B.



Food Hubs and Community Partners Help Overcome the Challenge of Finding Local Food

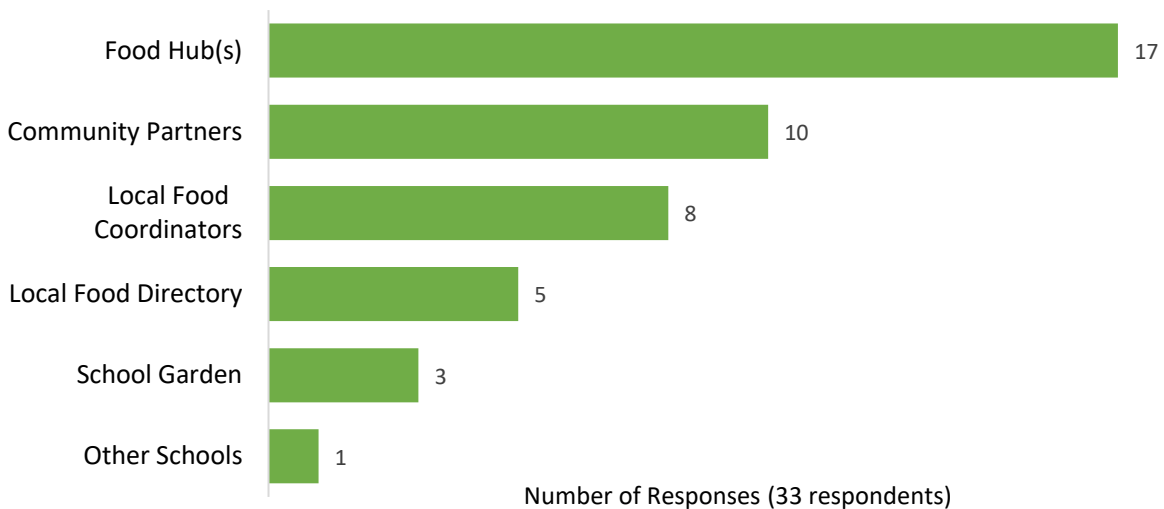
Fig 5 shows that while most sites reported that they did not experience challenges associated with participating in ILFD, six cited finding local food in October as the most common challenge. A few sites noted additional challenges including price (2), navigating a new delivery process (2), processing fresh food (1) and celebrating within an already short meal period (1).

Fig 6. Most Sites Did Not Experience Challenges



In Iowa, numerous resources and networks exist to simplify the procurement process for both schools and sites looking to purchase local food, and for the farmers and producers working to sell their product into school and early care markets. Respondents were asked to select, from a multiple-choice list, any tools or resources they used to find and purchase local product. Notably, 32 of 33 respondents selected at least one resource (Fig 6), the most common of which was food hubs (17), followed by community partners (10), local food coordinators (8), a local food directory (5), and three sites added alternate responses, citing that they used a school garden/greenhouse (3) as a resource. One site selected using other schools as a tool for finding local food.

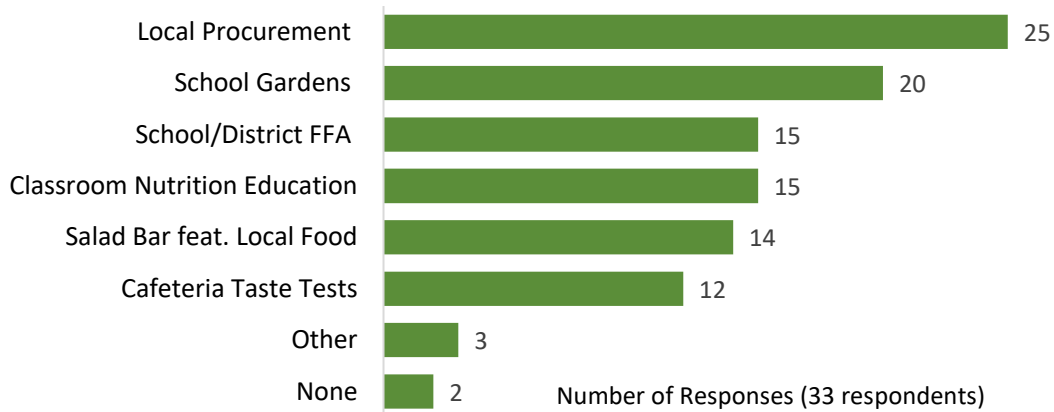
Fig 6. 97% (32 of 33) Respondents Used at Least One Resource



Participants Engage in Numerous Farm to School Initiatives

To learn about the broader farm to school landscapes that exist at participating sites and schools, the survey asked respondents to select, via checkbox format, activities which take place at their school or site, or within their district. Fig 7 shows a wide range of farm to school and early care activities that schools are participating in, alongside Iowa Local Food Day.

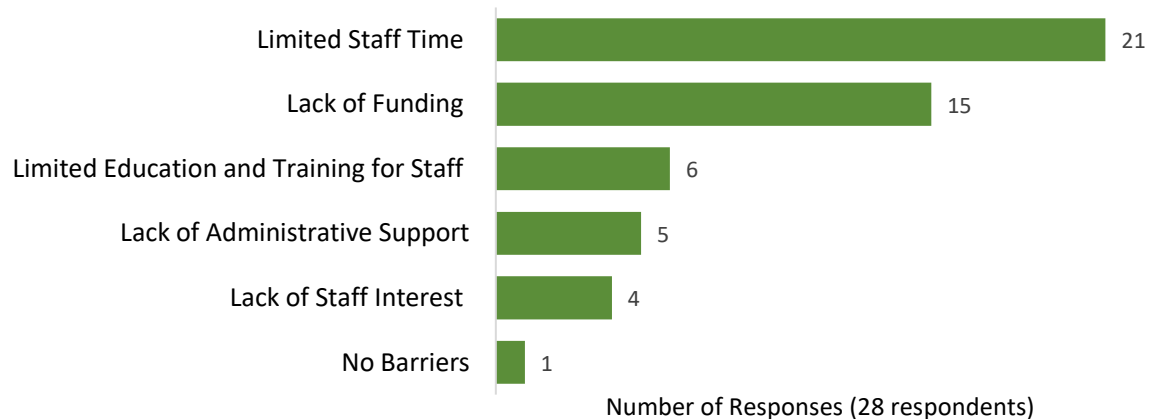
Fig 7. Schools are Engaged in Multiple Ways



Limited Staff Time and Lack of Funding the Main Barriers to Engaging More

While most sites participating in ILFD are engaging in multiple farm to school and early care initiatives, respondents noted several barriers that prevent them from engaging in more activities (Fig 8). Limited staff time (21) and a lack of funding (15) are the most common barriers, followed by limited education and training for staff (6), lack of administrative support (5) and lack of staff interest (4). One site reported that no barriers exist, and five sites left this question blank.

Fig 8. Limited Staff Time is the Most Common Barrier



Ten respondents offered input and ideas regarding what they would like to see done on a state level to make local procurement easier in the future. Responses to this open-ended question were coded and are summarized in Fig 9. Overall, sites are looking for systems coordination at the state level, including standardized resources (ex. procurement templates, local food listings, recipes) and enhanced organizing and outreach (ex: buying groups, promotion to schools and media). As it was reported as a top barrier, funding and other forms of incentivized reimbursement were recommended. It is important to note that only one site reported using the AMS Iowa Farm to School Local Purchase report for pricing and product information. Enhancing promotion of that report may fill a state-level need that sites are looking for.

Fig 9. Site Offered Valuable Recommendations for State Support

Standardized local food procurement templates and partnership processes (3 mentions)
Offer additional funding for local food purchasing (3)
Host a regularly updated listing of available local food and sources (2)
Enhanced promotion to school food departments and administration (2)
Partially processed local food (1)
Standardized, budget-friendly recipes that include local food (1)
Enhanced media coverage (1)
Coordinated buying groups (1)
More local food available on DOD through Loffredo (1)
Launch a 2:1 reimbursement for local foods through CACFP (1)

Several responses indicated that the procurement process gets simpler and fine-tuned after participating in ILFD for multiple years. One respondent detailed their learning process (quoted below) and highlighted that learning about food hubs at the Iowa Farm to School Conference has led to an effective and simplified system at their site. They recommend sharing information and opportunities for food hub partnerships with other sites to save valuable time for food service staff.

“When I first learned how to procure local food, it was so overwhelming to learn what type, size, etc. of an apple I needed to purchase for school food. Then, to ask a farmer to complete paperwork they did not understand. Then, to possibly take time to visit the farm where I would be procuring the food from. And so much more. I barely have time to complete everything I need to now. Having a local Food Hub to take care of that part of the procurement has made everything so much easier for me now.

Until I attended the Iowa Farm to School conference, I didn't even know what a Food Hub was. I've come a long way since then. Are there other school food service personnel who do not know this or how the process works, and are they stuck in the mode thinking like I was when I first looked into the procuring local foods? Do we need to help other school food staff understand the Food Hub process and how much easier it can be? I'm sure there are many out there that have the same thoughts that I did when first starting out with local food [procurement].”

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, these 33 sites had a positive experience participating in 2019 Iowa Local Food Day and 100% of respondents are planning to participate again in 2020. Participating in Iowa Local Food Day is benefiting schools and early care sites by increasing their meal participation rates, enhancing their local procurement knowledge, creating new partnerships with local growers, and bringing positive feedback into their school and site meal programs. Likewise, this event is benefiting farmers and producers, as more schools and early care sites are becoming engaged, viable markets for local food. Continued evaluation should track whether the many first-time local food purchases for this event become longer-term procurement partnerships.

The average site participating in Iowa Local Food Day seems to be newer to the local food procurement process and is likely leading other farm to school activities alongside their local food procurement work, like gardening and FFA programming, for example. Most sites are participating by purchasing local fruits and vegetables and serving these within lunch programs. This finding indicates that local food procurement is a more challenging aspect of farm to school and early care work, and sites find integration most quickly through lunch programs.

As 32 of 33 respondents utilized at least one resource for support, we can see that growing and developing a local food procurement plan takes support and partnership. For this, sites are engaging food hubs, community partners, and local food coordinators in developing their local procurement processes, especially to overcome the most common challenge of finding local food. It will be interesting to learn if and how the need for procurement support shifts for sites that participate in Iowa Local Food Day for several years.

This evaluator recommends that event organizers consider new opportunities that get sites familiar with existing state resources and respond to their recommendations for new forms of support. Sites clearly used the Iowa Local Food Day website for event information and promotion, but they are less familiar with the Farm to School Directory and AMS Report on the IDALS Farm to School website. Consider creating the standardized resources and systems that sites are asking for and elevate opportunities for sites to partner with food hubs for procurement support. The effectiveness and benefits of food hub partnerships are clear from these respondents' input.

Appendix A. List of Local Food Sources (50 unique sites)

Aldi	Iowa Food Hub (2)
All Season's Harvest	Iowa Select Farms
Anderson Erickson Dairy (2)	Jones Dairy Farms
Apples on the Avenue Orchard (2)	KOHL WHOLESAL
Beck's Orchard	Local Farmer donated corn
Berkshire Pork	Loffredo/DoD fresh produce (3)
Breezy Lane Farms- Bacon (2)	Lone Tree Foods
Buffalo Ridge Orchard (2)	Mariposa Farms -Grinnell
Country View Dairy (6)	Matthew 25 Urban Farm - Cedar Rapids
Dan & Debbie's Creamery - Ely	Maynard Wiemers
Deal's Orchard (2)	North Iowa Fresh (3)
Early Morning Harvest	Oak View Farms
Erling Bilden Orchard	One Farm
FarmTable Delivery (5)	Orchard (unnamed)
Farmin' with Mark	Oswald beef farm
Fertile Valley Gardens (2)	Our school garden
Field to Family	Parmera's produce
Flint Ridge Organic	Richland Farm's
Gilmore City-Bradgate Elementary School	Rose Acres
Good Source (Curlys)	South Mound Orchard
Graverts Orchard	State Line Produce
Green Stems Farm, Amber & Jeremy Prochnow	Twin City Produce, Kalona, Iowa
Henry A. Wallace Farm	US Foods
Hinterland Dairy	Wanda Brink - Locally Grown
Hy-Vee	Wilker Produce

Appendix B. Descriptions of Iowa Local Food Day Menus (29 responses)

Ames Community Preschool Center (ACPC)	Breakfast: Local yogurt with granola Lunch: Local Beef tacos with Local veggie toppings Snack: Local Cornbread Mix and Milk
Cedar Rapids Schools	Caprese style skewers or caprese salad (aka "pizza salad") Included local cheese curds from Dan & Debbie's Creamery, local basil, local tomatoes (+ olive oil, vinegar, salt, pepper)
Central City Community School	Locally grown apples Iowa butternut squash
Central Community School Elkader	Grilled locally made hot dogs Corn on the cob Apples

Central Decatur CSD	Breakfast: Local sausage, gravy, biscuits and local apples Lunch: beef burgers, broasted local sweet potatoes, local watermelon and local apples, local fresh peppers
Clear Creek Amana Schools	Breakfast: Yogurt cups from Country View Dairy Apples from Buffalo Ridge Orchard served with "cinnamon dip" (Country View Dairy vanilla yogurt and cinnamon) Watermelon from Flint Ridge Organic in Kalona, Iowa
Council Bluffs Community Schools	Local apples, multiple varieties Local tomatoes, cherry and slicing Local red, orange, yellow and green bell peppers Local purple daikon radishes Local red potatoes Local yellow and red beets
Decorah Community School District	Hand-cut, baked French fries topped with warm, freshly made (that morning) cheese curds, hickory-smoked pulled pork, gravy, and a variety of vegetables for toppings. Freshly baked wheat dinner rolls (from the in-house bakery). Local field greens with homemade Caesar and French dressings. Local McIntosh caramel apples and milk. Smoker: U 2 BBQ, Calmar, IA Pork & Gravy: Quillins Food Ranch, Waukon, IA Cheese Curds: Homestead Dairy, Waukon, IA Potatoes: State Line Produce, Lime Springs, IA Sour Cream: Country View Dairy, Hawkeye, IA Apples: South Mound Orchard, Sherrill, IA Field Greens: All Seasons Harvest, Cedar Falls, IA Onions: Decorah High School Garden Peppers: Decorah High School Garden
Des Moines Public Schools	Breakfast pizza: local eggs, cheese, crust Apple crisp from school garden apple trees
Diagonal Community School	Local pulled pork (Iowa Select Farms) Local apples, carrots (from a farm 25 miles north of our community) We also had whole wheat bun and coleslaw
DMACC CDC	Local kale and eggs
Durant Community School	Local butternut squash (available on DOD program orders) Country View Dairy Yogurt <i>We Roasted the Butternut squash, and kids enjoyed it-many had never tried roasted butternut squash before!</i>
East Mills Elementary	PreK - 6th Grade: taste tested 5 different types of bell peppers during lunch (white, purple, red, yellow, orange)

Gilbert Consolidated Schools	Local apples (Deals Orchard)
Gilmore City-Bradgate Elementary	<i>We purchased watermelon from Maynard Wiemers, a local community member for cheap because no one wanted to buy his HUGE watermelon due to the look of the outside. However, they were some of the best watermelons we've ever had! We also had acorn squash that we grew in our school garden. We also served tomatoes and peppers that we grew in our garden that were ready at the time.</i>
Hampton-Dumont CSD	Local potato bar Local bacon for topping Local apples
In-Home Childcare Provider, North Liberty	Breakfast: pancakes and local pears AM Snack: Local apple slices and peanut butter Lunch: Grilled cheese on whole wheat w/home grown tomato, home grown cucumber slices w/ranch dip
Lamoni Community School	Local peppers and cucumbers on the salad bar
Lincoln Elementary	Local cheese curds Local apples
Mt Pleasant Community High School	Local squeaky cheese curds Local apples
New Hampton Community Schools	Breakfast: local Strawberry Yogurt Parfaits Lunch: local cucumbers and bell pepper strips, chef salad's made with local salad greens, local apples
Postville School District	Local Hamburgers (grilled by Local cattlemen) Roasted zucchini (from our school garden) Baby red potatoes (local producer and our garden) Melon and strawberries (our garden and local producer) Frozen yogurt (local producer) Harvest bars (pumpkin from our garden)
Saydel Community School District	Breakfast: Big Country Bowl (Biscuit, egg, sausage gravy) Breakfast potatoes Fresh and/or sliced apples Homemade Applesauce muffin Vanilla yogurt parfait w/ frozen berries Lunch: BBQ Pulled pork on a hamburger bun Steamed corn Fresh cucumbers w/ ranch Fresh grape tomatoes w/ ranch Cinnamon Iowa apple bake Fresh apples

Union Community Schools	Loose meat Hamburger on bun (Local Beef) Roasted Butternut squash (Local growers) Apple slices (Local Orchard)
Vinton-Shellsburg CSD	Breakfast Pizza Local Roasted Sweet Potatoes 100% Fruit Juice Local Yogurt <i>Thank You, it was a great day, and many, many students ate the sweet potatoes. I gave samples to all students, including the cold lunch kids and had very positive results. The yogurt was also a hit! We had parfaits this am, with the Country View Yogurt- I'm excited to hear the reports.</i>
Waukee Community Schools	Elementary Breakfast: Country View Yogurt, Local Apples Lunch: Local Watermelon, Local produce on salad bar Middle Schools Breakfast: Country View Yogurt, Local Apples Lunch: local cucumber slices, Roasted Cajun Sweet Potatoes, local apples, local watermelon, local lettuce and tomato Wee Warriors Lunch: Local Watermelon, local Roasted Sweet Potatoes (sliced) with Maple Seasoning High School Breakfast: Country View Yogurt, Local Apples Lunch: local cucumber slices, Roasted Cajun Sweet Potatoes, local apples, local watermelon, local lettuce and tomato
Western Dubuque CSD	Local Sausage Links Local Yogurt Local Apples
WisdomQuest Education Center	Local apples and cheese curds
Woodward Academy	Pulled Pork sandwich on WW Bun BBQ Sauce Coleslaw French Fries Flavored Applesauce Fresh Fruit