Overview

We’re pleased to share with you the 2020 report of the Local Food and Farm Program to the Iowa Legislature, covering its activities from July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020.

This program was established in August 2011 as part of the Iowa Local Food and Farm Initiative (SF-509). Its purpose is to empower farmers and food entrepreneurs to provide for strong local food economies that promote self-sufficiency and job growth in the agricultural sector and allied sectors of the economy. The goals of this program are to:

• Promote the expansion of the production of local foods, including the production, processing, distribution, and marketing of Iowa products.
• Increase consumer and institutional spending on Iowa-produced and marketed foods.
• Increase the profitability of farmers and businesses engaged in enterprises related to producing, processing, distributing, and marketing local food.
• Increase the number of jobs in this state’s farm and business economies associated with producing, processing, distributing, and marketing local food.

The program is a collaborative effort among the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, and the Iowa State University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

We welcome inquiries and suggestions about our work. Call us at (515) 294-3086, or email contactFFED@iastate.edu.

Local food market stronger than ever

USDA research shows that sales of edible farm products nationwide grew from $404 million annually in 1992 to $1.3 billion per year by 2012. This 223 percent increase over 20 years far outpaces the rate of growth in the commodity ag sector.

The rising demand for locally grown foods spells opportunities for rural economies. Local and regional food production tends to support new and beginning farmers, with lower entry and operating costs. It can also provide an alternative or diversified market for existing commodity farmers.

Other studies suggest that local food production may create jobs and stimulate local economies at a higher rate than non-local production. USDA data suggest that farms selling locally tend to pay higher wages than conventional operations. Meanwhile, the farm to school movement is flourishing in Iowa, adding momentum to the sector’s growth.

In early 2020, Iowans began experiencing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on all sectors of the economy. For local food producers, the supply chain disruptions actually represented an opportunity. Many consumers showed increased interest in finding safe, local sources of food.

You’ll find examples in this year’s report of how some producers have pivoted to take advantage of this trend—and how, with your support, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach helped them do it.
Investing in Iowa’s economy

In 2015, Iowa ranked 10th in the nation in direct farm sales, at $194 billion. This figure encompassed sales of locally products to consumers, retailers, institutions, and local distributors.

The Iowa Legislature continues to support this important sector of the state’s agricultural economy through the Local Food and Farm Initiative. The Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Farm, Food and Enterprise Development Program carries out the provisions of this initiative.

Local food production in Iowa provides:

• opportunities for beginning farmers to start farming with lower capital investment (smaller equipment and fewer acres are needed),
• opportunities for diversified farms that improve Iowa’s food security and resilience,
• new markets for existing farmers, and
• opportunities for children and adults to connect to their food sources and to develop healthy eating habits.

Farmers continue to rely on ISU

Consumer demand for local and regional foods has continued a steady rise for more than 20 years. We expect this trend to continue. To support this growth, Iowa’s local food producers, aggregators and processors need:

• up-to-date, research-based production, management, and marketing information,
• facilitated networking and learning opportunities, and
• one-on-one technical assistance.

The Farm, Food and Enterprise Development (FFED) Program of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach is committed to providing continued leadership and support in each of these areas. FFED was formed in 2018 with the merger of the Iowa State Local Foods and Value Added Agriculture programs.

Learn more about our work and sign up for our monthly e-newsletter at www.extension.iastate.edu/ffed.

Supporting farmers

Moving meat sales online

Chelsea and Sam Kenkel own and operate Kenkel Farms in western Iowa. They raise corn, soy, alfalfa, and livestock. They’ve been selling quarter and half-shares of beef and pork for about 10 years.

In summer 2020, Chelsea contacted the Farm, Food and Enterprise Development program at ISU Extension and Outreach to get help on creating an online sales outlet for their meat.

“COVID-19 has actually pushed us into action on an idea we’ve been kicking around for a few years now,” said Chelsea. “I feel that people are more aware that their food actually comes from a farmer they can visit with about what they are buying and not just a product from a store.”

FFED Small Farms Team lead Christa Hartsook worked through a list of questions with the Kenkels to bring their idea to fruition. She guided them through the steps for labeling, storage, licensing and certification.

Chelsea said once their online store is up and running, they’ll add more products to the line-up.

The Small Farms Team responds to requests from family farmers regularly. This year, they’ve been busier than ever as Iowa’s farm entrepreneurs work quickly to respond to the changing customer needs and opportunities created by the pandemic.
Farmers market + food hub = online success

The Decorah Farmers Market operates in downtown Decorah on Wednesdays and Saturdays from May through October, offering a diverse mix of locally grown fruit, produce, and handcrafted products. The market typically consists of 55-60 vendors with a maximum of 42 vendors at any one market during the season.

Iowa Food Hub focuses on wholesale accounts in northeast Iowa—specifically food service institutions like schools and colleges. They have 18 institutional customers and 34 vendors. When COVID-19 struck Iowa, the hub created an online market for local farmers and market vendors that offers home delivery, curbside pick-up, and drop-sites in two communities. The hub works with 16 farms in this new platform and receives 70-100 customer orders each week.

“When the COVID pandemic hit, market vendors were concerned about how the farmers market would look and operate this summer,” said FFED field specialist Teresa Wiemerslage. “Some of those market vendors are also wholesale vendors for the Iowa Food Hub. The hub had a software platform that had been previously used for a multi-farmer CSA program at worksites. That platform was reactivated and turned into an online farmers market on March 23 with the goal to eventually make the online option available to any farmers market vendor.”

The farmers market and the food hub both responded quickly to the pandemic, putting parts of this structure in place. The online market platform was new to both the farmers market and the food hub. But Wiemerslage estimates that area farmers will sell $70,000 of product through the online market by November.

The Iowa Food Hub also played a key role in another pandemic success story: helping the Decorah Community Food Pantry provide fresh local produce to its customers. Normally the pantry offers coupons to clients to shop the market. When it became clear that the Decorah Farmers Market would not open in May, pantry manager Georgie Klevar started to contact area farmers about purchasing quantities of produce. She learned that the Iowa Food Hub was already facilitating that type of program.

Over the next 10 weeks, the hub arranged purchases for pantry clients of $2,650 worth of vegetables from local farms. Their quick response helped provide a market outlet for producers and helped meet the food pantry’s needs.

Wine growers, specialty producers merge conferences

More than 200 growers gathered in Ankeny in January for the Iowa Specialty Producers Conference. This was the first year that Iowa Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association and Iowa Wine Growers Association sponsored a combined annual conference. After months of planning and organizing with support from FFED’s Kendra Meyer, the event was a big success.

More than 40 workshops over the two-day conference ran the gamut from production topics to marketing and financial management. Presenters included researchers from industry and university extension, and plenty of Iowa producers eager to share their knowledge with peers.

“I enjoyed bringing the wine growers together with the fruit and vegetable growers for networking, learning and just getting to know one another,” said attendee Joanne Roepke Bode, co-owner of Bode’s Moonlight Gardens near Algona. “I hope the conference continues to grow and engage additional specialty crop growers and organizations.”

Meyer also provides education and technical assistance to Iowa’s agritourism industry, maintaining the Visit
Iowa Farms website (www.visitiowafarms.org) and offering annual workshops. Earlier this year she developed a set of six safety and health best practices checklists to help agritourism farms mitigate and manage risk. Find these resources on the website.

**Expanding markets through farm to school**

FFED has played a key role in supporting and guiding Iowa’s burgeoning farm to school and early care movement from the start. Thanks to our partnership with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship and the Iowa Department of Education, pre-K-12 farm to school programs are flourishing across Iowa. Most encompass both learning opportunities and meal program procurement for students.

More school districts buying local food means expanded market opportunities for Iowa farmers. With guidance from the FFED Food Systems Team, two existing coalitions supporting farm to school in Iowa merged in early 2020. The Iowa Farm to School Coalition and the Iowa Farm to ECE Coalition operated independently from 2016–2019. During that time, both groups made great strides advancing work across the state. They developed professional development opportunities, trainings, collaborative grants, educational resources, and partnerships—but with some duplication of efforts. In January, 24 key stakeholders from 15 organizations met in Des Moines. The unified organization developed a clearly defined vision and pathway for moving forward together—as the Iowa Farm to School and Early Care Coalition. Learn more about this impactful group and its work at www.iowafarm2ece.com.

The coalition promotes farm to school efforts statewide through these collaborative projects:

- **Iowa Farm to School and Early Care Conference:** Due to COVID-19, the third annual conference convened virtually on June 19, 2020. The 150 participants, most from early care settings, were very satisfied with the content and information shared. Their evaluations showed they were most energized to incorporate new information into their current work, participate in 2020 Iowa Local Food Day, and either begin or increase local food procurement efforts.

- **Iowa Local Food Day:** In 2019, more than 280 K-12 schools (11 percent of districts) and 10 early care sites served nearly 108,000 locally sourced meals to students (see map below). Foods included dairy, meats and vegetables, purchased from nearly 50 farms and food hubs. The third annual statewide celebration is set for October 14, 2020. Learn more at www.iowalocalfoodday.org.

- **Iowa Farm to Summer Campaign:** Thirty of Iowa’s summer meal sites participated in the second annual statewide Farm to Summer Campaign in 2019. They purchased $3,750 in local food to serve around 1,850 students through the “Snap for Snap Peas!” program. The third annual campaign, “Crunch into Cucumbers!,” ended in August 2020.

![Map of Iowa Local Food Day participants](image)

**Guiding farmers to food safety certification**

FFED works closely with ISU’s food safety team to help specialty producers meet the requirements of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA). In 2019-20, ISU offered nine trainings. Two were adapted specifically for Plain sect growers (Amish, Mennonite, etc.) Of 183 participants, 99 were members of a Plain community.

**Supporting food systems**

**Professional development training**

FFED’s Food Systems Team, led by Courtney Long, has pioneered the ISU Extension and Outreach Local Food Leader and Community Food Systems trainings and certifications since 2015. Although now expanded nationwide and even to the US Virgin Islands, these trainings remain rooted in the experiences and needs of Iowa’s local food systems practitioners.

Local Food Leader is an individual skill development program for beginning local food practitioners and local food supporters. LFL teaches foundational competencies critical to successful engagement in community food systems development. After completing the workshop, participants can receive full certification by completing online modules. Once a certified Local Food Leader, participants can teach and
offer the workshop in their own communities.

In the fall of 2019, the team hosted four Local Food Leader (LFL) workshops in Iowa, Massachusetts, Nebraska, and Oregon. These locations were selected as national hubs, providing access to this in-person training in the central, western and eastern areas of the United States. A total of 99 people participated in the workshops, including 23 from Iowa. A second LFL workshop was held in Iowa in January, with 25 participants.

“It’s important to get the leaders of local food work together to learn, network and brainstorm,” commented one Iowa participant. “This work is always growing and changing, and this is a great space to connect and walk through it all together.”

Evaluations showed a 48% increase in participants’ understanding of what is involved in a community food system; and a 47% increase in participants’ confidence in their work with communities to develop food systems. This workshop, along with the Community Food Systems trainings, will now be offered in an all-virtual format beginning in September 2020, in response to COVID-19.

Additional COVID-19 assistance

In spring 2020, the Food Systems Team created a resource page and technical assistance request form to support communities and organizations dealing with impacts of COVID-19. Clients can visit www.extension.iastate.edu/ffed/ffed-covid-resources for continually updated information for farming, businesses and food systems and farm to school.

This summer, the team received a request from Stanton community development director Jenna Ramsey. This active small town of 689 in Montgomery County recognized that the pandemic would make local foods even more important than ever. They invited the Food Systems Team to tour the community and give them guidance on community projects such as a teaching kitchen, community garden, edible landscaping and a shared-use kitchen.

“COVID made us even more aware of the need for these projects,” Jenna said. “Connecting with ISU and having the Food Systems Team tour our community has been extremely helpful.” Stanton’s community leaders plan to build on the partnership in the future.

Boosting value-added

Census data showed that 749 Iowa farms sold nearly $23.3 million of value-added products in 2017, for an average of $31,104 per farm. FFED team members conducted research in 2019 on scaling up processing and shared-use kitchens. This research resulted in a toolkit for expanding processing capacity in Iowa, available at www.agmrc.org/media/cms/Scaling_Specialty_Crop_Processing_F_25DE574CA6612.pdf. The project will continue in 2020-21 with designing and building a prototype of a mobile cart for fresh-cut processing that can be used by retailers and businesses that don’t have access to shared-use kitchens.

Four new Iowans originally from Burundi are among the farmers working on the newly leased land in Pleasant Hill. These farmers are graduates of the Global Greens incubator program. LSI photo.

Connecting new Iowans to farmland

New Iowans have a new place to grow food for sale this summer, thanks to a partnership between Lutheran Services in Iowa (LSI), the city of Pleasant Hill and a local landowner. The Community Food Systems team was instrumental in bringing this project to fruition.

The team worked with local group Grow Pleasant Hill between 2016 and 2019. They led a food systems assessment that clarified priorities to support a healthy local food system in this community of 8,700 a few miles east of Des Moines.

One priority project was creation of an “agrihood,” or a neighborhood centered around community agriculture.

In response, area landowner Phyllis Childers is leasing 12 acres of her family farmland to LSI for its Global Greens program. As part of the organization’s Refugee and Immigrant Services, Global Greens supports former refugees in the Des Moines area as they start their own small farming businesses. Two farming families have expanded their businesses and are subleasing Childers’ land from LSI. The 25 beginning farmers participating in LSI’s Global Greens Program each year sell their produce at their own farmers market and through a CSA. Learn more at https://lsiowa.org/refugee/global-greens.
Supporting businesses

COVID-19 response for Iowa entrepreneurs

The Enterprise Development Team, led by Brian Tapp, works closely with Iowa's business owners, entrepreneurs and startups bring their ideas to fruition. Services include business feasibility studies, entrepreneurship training and business plan development, among others.

During 2020, the team moved quickly to develop resources for Iowa businesses impacted by COVID-19. In March, they developed a partnership with America's Small Business Development Centers—Iowa to create a new podcast series: Back to Business Iowa. Topics cover education, research and technical assistance resources for Iowa's small business, during and post-COVID-19.

Among the 30 podcasts produced to date, host Steve Adams has interviewed experts on reopening guidance for restaurants, Small Business Administration assistance programs, and best practices for moving to an online retail platform, among many others. A recent episode guides business owners on how to evaluate whether it's time to close down, and how to do so wisely. Several episodes have been translated into Spanish. Find the whole series at www.extension.iastate.edu/ffed/B2BI.

Helping Iowa businesses start + expand

Once a business has a few years of success under its belt, it may be time to consider expanding. ISU's Enterprise Development Team has helped many Iowa businesses navigate through the market analysis and financing options necessary to capitalize on success.

Shaughn and Jerry Roorda own In't Veld's Meat Market, a popular Pella business. In 2019, they worked closely with our team to plan a much-needed expansion. “The Enterprise Development Team has been invaluable as we contemplated and now are moving ahead with an expansion plan,” said Shaughn. “From an initial brainstorming meeting to the final business plan, they have been instrumental in helping with everything from contacts to financing. We could not be moving ahead had it not been for their expert help.”

Other work by the Enterprise Development Team during this project year included:

- **Feasibility studies**—reviewed and advised new and expanding businesses in search of financing, from investors, banks and gap financing instruments. Reviewed and completed financing requests totalling $7 million for FY 2020.

- **Market analysis**—reviewed economic conditions for market entry for restaurants, event centers, hotels and food production projects. Total reviews summed to $5 million.

- **Financial analysis**—reviewed financial projections and benchmarking for specific clients in conjunction with lenders. This deep dive on financial analysis provides another review for the lender on the benchmarking, market opportunities, and assumptions built for the projections. FY2020 reviews totaled $3 million.

The team contracted to provide statewide marketing studies for the Iowa wine industry, Iowa aquaculture, and Iowa dairy industry in 2020.

Team members continue to provide technical support to individual businesses impacted by COVID-19 in partnership with SBDC counselors. This partnership also includes reviewing historical and future projections for specific Iowa projects during and beyond the pandemic.

Another frequent project partner is Black Hawk Economic Development in Waterloo. Executive director Steve Brustkorn is highly appreciative of the work of Brian Tapp and his team.

“The team has been instrumental in getting several of our projects over the goal line,” he said. “ISU’s expertise adds another level of credibility that helps us move applications through SBA more quickly. “This kind of collaboration is how Iowa is going to move ahead.”
A wealth of virtual resources

Even before the pandemic made virtual earning opportunities essential for Iowans, FFED offered a wealth of online resources for clients. Below is just a sampling; visit our website at www.extension.iastate.edu/ffed (or other sites as indicated) to access these tools and much more.

Our podcasts

- Back to Business Iowa. This podcast series is a collaboration between Iowa State University Extension and Outreach programs including Community and Economic Development and FFED, and the Iowa Small Business Development Centers. Episodes cover relevant topics for businesses and individuals related to education, research, and technical assistance.
- Small Farm Sustainability. Interested in starting seeds on your farm, beginning with beekeeping, or getting started in niche pork production? The Small Farm Sustainability program’s weekly podcast covers all things small farm, including COVID-19 topics.

Our newsletters

- FFED NEWS BITES. Monthly e-newsletter on projects, events and resources to support you in your work with small farms, local food systems and small business development.
- Acreage Living Newsletter. Monthly e-newsletter on Iowa small farm and sustainable ag issues.
- Iowa Farm to School Newsletter. Weekly e-newsletter offering information from the National Farm to School Network as well as Iowa F2S and F2ECE resources.
- Iowa Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association. Quarterly newsletter for members.
- Visit Iowa Farms Newsletter. Information and resources relating to agritourism in Iowa.

Ag Marketing Resource Center

A national information resource for value-added agriculture at www.agmrc.org.

Our publications

Our staff continually researches and creates publications and toolkits for clients on topics ranging from organic ag and vegetable enterprise budgets to best practices for selling food to schools and institutions. Find them on our publications page: www.extension.iastate.edu/ffed/our-publications.

On social media

The FFED Facebook page is your up-to-the-minute source for timely resources and events of interest to farmers and food systems practitioners. Follow us at www.facebook.com/ISUFFED.

Advisory council

A local food and farm program council was established by the LFFIT’s legislation to “advise the local food and farm program coordinator carrying out the purpose and goals of the [Initiative].” The council consists of six members representing different partners within Iowa’s local food system who meet at least once a year. Current members include:

- Maury Wills, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship
- Aaron Lehman, Iowa Farmers Union
- Jason Grimm, Iowa League of RC&Ds of the Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Teresa Wiemerslage, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and the Northeast Iowa Food and Farm Coalition
- Donna Brahms, Iowa Farmers Market Association
- Marcy Billings, Loffredo Fresh Produce

Questions about this year’s report or our ongoing work?
Email us at contactFFED@iastate.edu or call 515-294-3086.