Local food systems encourage job creation, economic development and stronger, healthier communities.

According to a study by the USDA, farm operations with direct-to-consumer (DTC) increased food sales from $116,733 to $144,530 between 2002 and 2012. The rising demand for local food is evident in Iowa, and is engaging an increasing number of people in the food system (producers, processors, food system practitioners, etc.). In 2013, a sample of Iowa farmers reported employing 110 people for every $1 million in sales, 34.1 of which were FTE jobs.

Local foods production provides:

- Opportunities for beginning farmers to start up with lower capital investment (smaller equipment and less acres are needed),
- Promotes strong conservation practices that improve food security and resilience,
- New markets and economic opportunities, and
- Opportunities for children to connect to their food, and promote healthy eating habits.

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach’s mission is to help Iowans make informed decisions by applying relevant, needs-driven resources, to create significant impact in our state.

Food systems are at the core of each of Iowa State’s four signature issues:

- Food and the environment: supporting a safe, sustainable and affordable food supply (diversified farms, sustainable food production).
- Health and well-being: helping Iowa become the healthiest state in the nation (nutrition education, reconnecting children with food, edible landscapes).
- Economic development: growing businesses and strengthening communities (creating jobs, creating opportunities for beginning farmers, reconnecting consumers with producers).
- K12 youth outreach: preparing our young people for the future (farm to school, engaging youth).

The Local Foods Program within ISU Extension and Outreach assists Iowa’s growing local and regional food systems as facilitators, conveners, and partners to support communities in their food systems goals and objectives.

Our projects and initiatives fall into the following four priority areas:

- Priority #1: Beginning farmers.
- Priority #2: Economic impact.
- Priority #3: Community development.
- Priority #4: Evaluation.

On the following pages, you’ll see examples of how Iowans are creating vibrant local food systems, and how they are counting on the Local Foods Program at Iowa State for support.
LOCAL FOODS PROGRAM 2016 BY THE NUMBERS

10 staff members
4,012 unique visitors to our website and 21,672 page views
383 followers on Facebook
16 publications downloaded total of 3319 times.

(A Resource Guide for Beginning Farmers (LF 0006) was the most frequently downloaded pub, at 699 downloads)

3508 event participants, including 2000 at 2nd annual ISU Local Foods Festival in September

Provided 128 consultations to Iowans on topics ranging from community food systems development to food access to food and farm business planning

Partnered with 220 individuals (people or groups with whom team members worked together on a local food related project, program or initiative; engaged in joint problem-solving; or planned local food-related programs, events, or activities)

35% of these were new partners. 87% represented an organization, usually an educational institution or technical service provider; most were using our services on community food systems development

We helped our partners leverage grants worth $179,275, through letters of support, grant-writing assistance, developing evaluation plans, and other work

As a whole, our team spent 172 hours on professional development around equity

180 Iowans served on food systems-related steering committees convened by the Local Foods Program team


Priority #1: Beginning farmers.

According to the 2012 USDA Census of Agriculture, 18 percent of Iowa farmers are more than 65 years old, and only 4 percent are under 35 years old. Who will farm Iowa’s land in the future? The Local Foods Program team has leveraged support for programs and resources geared toward **beginning farmer training programs**, including a refugee incubator farm, resource guide for beginning farmers, beginning farmer network, and more.

**LOCAL FOODS HIGHLIGHT: BEGINNING FARMERS**

**HUMBLE HANDS HARVEST — DECORAH, IOWA**

Emily Fagan (left) will join her cousin Emily Breckbill (right) as co-manager of Humble Hands Harvest farm near Decorah this coming season. The two-acre organic vegetable farm will market its produce through a CSA (community supported agriculture), farmers markets, local food hub, and other wholesale accounts, in the Decorah area and Rochester, Minnesota.

“Growing healthy food, taking good care of the land, feeding myself and all my friends well seems like most important thing I can do,” Emily said.

This year will mark Humble Hands’ fourth growing season. Emily and Hannah are moving to new land, and working hard to establish the infrastructure and settle into a new space.

Emily says she is appreciative of the Beginning Farmer Network recently founded in northeast Iowa by the ISU Extension and Outreach Local Foods Program to network and find answers to her farming questions. “Everybody knows a different piece of the puzzle,” she said, “and when you connect them in the same room, it’s a pretty powerful thing.”

To get connected to the Network, email Kayla Koether at koether@iastate.edu.
Iowa has a long history of welcoming immigrants and refugees. Lutheran Services in Iowa (LSI), based in Des Moines, is one of the state’s premiere service agencies in helping resettle these new Iowans. Nearly 700 immigrants and refugees arrive in Iowa each year, according to the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants.

Many of these new Iowans come from farming backgrounds, and are eager to begin growing food crops in their new home — both for their own dinner tables and for sale. LSI began its Global Greens program in 2011 to help clients get access to land for growing vegetables. At first, clients were connected with existing community gardens near their neighborhoods in Des Moines. Later, new gardens were created.

In 2013, the program expanded to help accommodate those farmers who wanted to grow on a larger scale and begin farming businesses. Through a conversation with Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey, who was a parishioner at Valley Community Church in West Des Moines, LSI was able to lease a few acres of land owned by the church to begin an incubator farm. In 2017, 23 families will raise crops on seven acres of land, on plots ranging from 50 x 50 feet to a quarter acre.

The farmers will market their products through a booth at the Des Moines Downtown Farmers Market, through the Global Greens CSA (wwwlsiowa.org/csa; photo above), and at the LSI Farmers Market.

Global Greens has received grant funding from the Leopold Center at ISU, and technical assistance from the Local Foods Program through staff serving on its advisory board.

“We have tons of supportive partners around central Iowa,” said Hilary Burbank, program supervisor. “But our real strong point is our farmers. They absolutely know what they’re doing, and they work hard.”
LOCAL FOODS HIGHLIGHT: BEGINNING FARMERS
SINSINAWA MOUND COLLABORATIVE FARM —
DUBUQUE, IOWA, AND SINSINAWA, WISCONSIN

The Dominican Sisters community at Sinsinawa Mound has been serving its neighbors in northeast Iowa and southwest Wisconsin through agriculture since its founding in the 1840s. A new project, the Sinsinawa Mound Collaborative Farm, is underway on 12 of the congregation’s 450 acres, as an incubator to help disadvantaged farmers in the area begin operating successful farm businesses raising food products for local markets.

The project is a partnership between the congregation and Dubuque Eats Well (https://dubuqueeatswell.com) — a coalition of food systems advocates and practitioners coordinated by ISU Extension and Outreach that includes county staff and members of the Local Foods Program team on campus.

The coalition partnered with ISU to conduct a community food systems assessment, and identify priority projects. The incubator farm was named a priority, and Courtney Long of the Local Foods Program designed marketing materials to get the project started. In December, she helped facilitate listening sessions with community members to guide the project.

“The Local Foods Team helped us design screening criteria and identify our pilot group of five farmers,” said Sister Sheila Fitzgerald, originator of the project. Eventually she hopes the congregation can provide a half acre of farmland each to 24 low-resource beginning farmers. “We hope this is just the beginning of a larger project.”

For information, visit Sinsinawa Mound Collaborative Farm on Facebook at www.facebook.com/CollaborativeFarm.

Check out the growing list of local foods-related publications and toolkits on our website, all available for free download from the ISU Extension Store: www.extension.iastate.edu/localfoods/publications

Photo courtesy of Sinsinawa Mound Collaborative Farm.
Priority #2: Economic impacts.

Robust local food systems bolster Iowa’s economy — particularly in rural areas working hard to retain their population base and create new business opportunities. The ISU Extension and Outreach Local Foods Program is constantly developing tools to enhance farmer profitability, research on food hub financial viability, and consumer outreach.

LOCAL FOODS HIGHLIGHT: ECONOMIC IMPACTS

IOWA FOOD HUB — SERVING NORTHEAST IOWA

The Iowa Food Hub (www.iowafoodhub.com) is a non-profit local foods aggregator, distributor, and marketing organization serving northeast Iowa. Based in West Union, it was created by the Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative in partnership with ISU Extension and Outreach to further its mission to support small- and mid-sized farmers while providing healthy local food to everyone, including northeast Iowa’s most vulnerable residents. As you can see on the chart above, total sales have climbed impressively since the hub began serving the area in 2012. A few highlights:

- In 2015, IFH purchased $508,439 from local farmers and reached the milestone of purchasing a total of $1 million from farmers since its start. As of July 2016, a total of 67 farmers or farmers groups were selling products to the IFH.

- School purchases of local food remained high in 2015-16, with 14 schools spending a total of $63,438. (You can see the sales spike each October during national Farm to School Month.) Local food sales reported by farmers increased 16% from $2.2 million in 2014 to $2.58 million in 2015.

- Ten new local food producers began selling food to local markets in 2015, and nine jobs were created by farms, businesses, and institutions as a result of producing, processing, or utilizing local foods in 2015. Seven of those jobs were full-time jobs.

- The IFH started a new “node” in the Dubuque area in 2016. They are working with local partners to identify key local food farmers and buyers to develop buying and selling relationships.

For more information, contact Teresa Wiemerslage at wiemer@iastate.edu.
LOCAL FOODS HIGHLIGHT: ECONOMIC IMPACTS
FARMTABLE PROCUREMENT AND DELIVERY —
HARLAN, IOWA

In classic entrepreneurial style, FarmTable Procurement and Delivery is a business that grew out of a perceived market gap. Ellen Walsh-Rosmann started the business in 2013 with her husband Daniel Rosmann, to provide farmers in southwest Iowa with a connection to markets, and buyers with a connection to growers.

The company started with a handful of clients and now handles orders and deliveries from up to 80 buyers a week, mainly grocery stores and restaurants along the I-80 corridor between Omaha and Iowa City/Cedar Rapids. FarmTable sources its products from about 45 farmers along that route, and their driver delivers them in a 18-foot refrigerated truck that was purchased using crowd-sourced funds.

“What I appreciate most about FarmTable is the way its system allows me to not only stay on farm to grow, harvest, and package orders, but it also allows us to reach markets and build customer relationships we would never have time to cultivate on our own,” said Danelle Myer, owner of One Farm near Logan, Iowa. The fact that FarmTable manages the sales, delivery, and billing is as efficient as it can get for the farmer.”

Ellen and Daniel are farmers themselves, raising laying hens that they distibute via FarmTable and helping Daniel's parents grow 700 acres of certified organic grain. “As a farmer myself, I saw the need for this service,” Ellen said. “We also provide support services to farmers, like group packaging supplies, group seed orders, and storage space in our warehouse.”

Ellen says ISU Local Foods Program has supported her with technical and labor support, and she has in turn served as a research site for tools the team has developed on managing food hubs. Learn more about food hubs on the Local Food Program’s website at www.extension.iastate.edu/localfoods/food-hubs.

Visit FarmTable on Facebook at www.facebook.com/FarmtableDeliveryIowa.
Priority #3: Community development.

Many Iowans are working to facilitate the development of local and regional food systems, including producers, farm laborers, service providers, nonprofit organizations, and more. The ISU Extension and Outreach Local Foods Program staff continues to support the facilitation of communities of practice such as the Regional Food Systems Working Group and Iowa Food Hub Managers Working Group. We help communities analyze their assets and challenges, build coalitions, and plan and develop sustainable local food systems.

LOCAL FOODS HIGHLIGHT: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS WORKING GROUP

Networking is key to business success in almost every sector. ISU Extension and Outreach supports learning and networking among Iowa’s local food system practitioners by regularly convening “communities of practice,” such as the Regional Food Systems Working Group (RFSWG) and Iowa Food Hub Managers Working Group (IFSWG), among others.

These groups meet regularly, about once a quarter, and provide a combination of structured professional development opportunities (workshops, presentations, field tours) and informal networking and social time for food systems professionals of all experience levels.

Beginning in 2017, the Local Foods Program is matching new local food coordinators with more experienced ones for mentoring, and recently began scheduling peer-led webinars on a variety of topics ranging from peer coaching to conflict management to program evaluation basics.

“RFSWG has been an excellent way for me to network with other like-minded people and to learn so much more about Iowa food systems than I ever would have learned on my own,” said Alexi Groumoutis, local foods coordinator for the Southern Iowa Local Foods Initiative. “It feels like a support group on so many different levels.”

Visit the Local Foods Program website at www.extension.iastate.edu/localfoods/for-local-food-coordinators for lots of useful resources and tools to grow your community’s local food system. For more info on this working group, contact Lynn Heuss at leheuss@iastate.edu. RFSWG also maintains an active listserv and Facebook group!
Residents of Pleasant Hill, Iowa – a Polk County community of 9,000 – now have access to an online ordering system for local foods. The city is partnering with the Iowa Food Cooperative, a Des Moines-based online local foods market, on a pilot project to gauge the community’s interest in purchasing Iowa-grown food products.

“This is one of our quickest successes as part of the community food systems development process, and showcases the opportunities of building relationships across sectors,” said Courtney Long, coordinator of the Local Food Program’s community food systems development program. “Pleasant Hill will have an opportunity to offer local products to residents, while also helping the Iowa Food Cooperative test out a new distribution location for their business, which supports numerous farmers across Iowa.

Pleasant Hill is currently working with ISU Extension and Outreach to design a comprehensive food system for the community that incorporates its goals and values. Throughout the rest of the three-year planning process, there will be opportunities for the public to give feedback about additional projects and programs residents would like to see in Pleasant Hill.

In the photo above, baker Rachael Owens from Sweet to Eat Bakery and Cake Shop in Ankeny drops off the bakery’s order at the Iowa Food Coop aggregation site in Des Moines.

If the pilot is successful, the city could become a permanent distribution site for the coop, which has offered its customers bi-weekly delivery of local products ordered online since its inception in 2008. Today, nearly 70 producers are approved to sell hundreds of products through the coop, which delivers orders to nearly 1,000 customers, mainly in the Des Moines metro area. Pleasant Hill would become the seventh distribution site outside of metropolitan Des Moines. For more information on community food systems development, contact Courtney Long at court7@iastate.edu.
FOODCORPS GIVES CHILDREN A CHANCE TO GROW

Cooking and trying new foods together can be a fun focal point for family time. Sixteen families with young kids recently signed up for a family cooking night at James Elementary School in Ottumwa, where they worked with local FoodCorps Iowa service member Regan O’Hanlon to prepare and cook a delicious dinner to share.

FoodCorps is a national service program that connects kids to healthy food in high-needs schools. They focus their service on delivering hands-on lessons in gardening, cooking, and tasting healthy food; improving school meals; and encouraging a school-wide culture of health.

In Iowa, the ISU Extension and Outreach Local Foods Program acts as the state partner for FoodCorps Iowa, overseeing FoodCorps programs across the state.

“I really liked the idea of a family cooking night,” said Regan. “My supervisor [Jen Daugherty, horticulturalist and local foods coordinator for Wapello County Extension and Outreach] has done family garden cooking nights during the summer and they have been really successful and a lot of fun for families to get to come out and work in the garden and cook together, as a family and as a community group.”

Regan said the project was funded by a $500 grant from a national non-profit organization called The Kids Cook Monday, available only to FoodCorps sites. The grant will fund two family cooking nights in Ottumwa public schools during the 2016-17 school year.

Carrie Mendibles and her two daughters, Erinne (10) and Sophia (9) had a great time at the first event. “I think there should be more events like this,” Carrie said. “It brings families together. Kids can learn about the different foods as they are preparing them, and maybe even try new things.”

Curious about the work of FoodCorps Iowa? Learn more on our website at www.extension.iastate.edu/localfoods/foodcorps-iowa.

DONATION GARDENS SPROUTING UP ACROSS IOWA

One in eight Iowans is food insecure, meaning they don’t have regular access to adequate food for a healthy diet (Hunger in America national survey, 2014).

Many depend on food pantries as a regular source of groceries, and according to a Feeding America survey, the number one thing they are missing on pantry shelves is fresh fruits and vegetables.

Iowa State University’s SNAP Education Program and Master Gardener Program have teamed up to address this challenge through a project called “Growing Together: Healthy Food Access Project.” They are working with the ISU Research and Demonstration Farms to create a model for community-based “donation gardens,” which will raise fresh produce specifically for food pantries.

ISU SNAP-Ed also awarded mini grants of $1,000 to Master Gardener volunteers in 25 communities around the state in 2016. Volunteers in these communities are growing food for local food pantries to increase healthy food access for their neighbors with low income.

Carrie Chennault, an ISU graduate research assistant and Local Foods Program team member, is assisting with this project and conducting research for her doctoral degree at the same time. To learn more about the project, read the blog post at http://bit.ly/2n7aej3.
Priority #4: Evaluation.

Systematically gathering information on the context, processes, and outcomes of local food system work informs the decisions and actions of our partners, who can then more effectively plan, publicize, and fund their efforts. The evaluation team of the ISU Extension and Outreach Local Foods Program conducts on-going research into the effectiveness of the team’s projects, and also helps community groups to design and conduct their own on-going local foods program evaluation.

LOCAL FOODS HIGHLIGHT: EVALUATION

NORTHEAST IOWA FOOD AND FITNESS INITIATIVE — LUTHER COLLEGE, DECORAH, IOWA

The Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative (NIFFI) is a collaboration of four core partners serving six counties, whose mission is to “create vibrant communities where the healthy choice is the easy choice.” Luther College is one of these core partners, through its Center for Sustainable Communities, and its role is to coordinate outreach to area K-12 schools.

Ann Mansfield has coordinated NIFFI for the past 10 years. Although her background includes 30 years in health care, she said the systems approach was new to her. She credits the Local Foods Program evaluators — Corry Bregendahl and Arlene Enderton — with helping her project team develop its own expertise in evaluation, so that they can use it every day to improve their programming.

“Our project team came from all areas,” she said. “I’ve never had a more diverse group of stakeholders around a table. The two of them were key in creating a regional shared vision for greater access to healthy food and greater physical activity for children and their families. I feel lucky to have had them as partners.”

Corry and Arlene help Ann’s team conduct its own annual program evaluation, and incorporate ongoing feedback from all aspects of the program into their daily work. “It’s been transformative,” she said. “It’s how we build long-term, sustained change.” Learn more about the NIFFI at www.iowafoodandfitness.org.

Above: Ann Mansfield. At left: Northeast Iowa students enjoyed locally sourced meats in school lunches during a pilot project coordinated by Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative. Photos courtesy of Luther College and NIFFI.
Eat Greater Des Moines is a non-profit organization working to provide access to healthy food for all Iowans. Their mission is to identify, develop, and connect resources with the broader community to support the entire food lifecycle in central Iowa. They partner with food resources within the metro to improve the production, development, distribution, access and waste management of food products in Central Iowa.

Executive director Aubrey Alvarez said she thought of the Local Foods Program right away when she decided to apply for a USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program grant — in particular, evaluators Corry Bregendahl and Arlene Enderton. “We had worked with Corry and Arlene before, and that was why we wanted to work with them again,” she said.

The proposal was funded, and the two-year grant — which ran from 2014 – 2016 — has helped connect Iowans to locally grown and healthy food through the various farmers markets in Polk, Dallas, Marion, and Warren counties. There are more than 20 different markets in Des Moines alone, Aubrey said. A consumer can find a place to buy local food almost every night of the week!

Eat Greater Des Moines provided market managers with free marketing materials through the grant. Vendors got help expanding their customer base through free programs allowing them to accept food assistance programs through the Iowa Wireless EBT system funded by the USDA’s Farmers Market Nutrition Program. Aubrey said that the evaluation team helped her staff stay on track with surveys of market managers and vendors, and analyze and report on the resulting data.

To learn more about the evaluation tools and services available from the Local Foods Program, visit our website at www.extension.iastate.edu/localfoods/evaluation.
HOW CAN THE LOCAL FOODS PROGRAM HELP YOU?

Our program team can assist your community with:

**Leadership and Professional Development**
We provide opportunities for food systems professionals to improve skills and expand knowledge through workshops, webinars, and networking.

**Research**
We create needs-driven, research-based tools and publications on topics related to local foods, such as food hubs, economic impacts, urban agriculture, and more.

**Coalition Development**
We help connect diverse partners across the state to move local foods work forward.

**Facilitation and Outreach**
We help organize and facilitate statewide and regional meetings with stakeholders, including local food coordinators and food hub managers.

**Education and Youth**
We support youth programming around local foods through our work with FoodCorps, 4H, FFA, and other organizations.

**Evaluation**
We gather data on the context, processes, and outcomes of local food systems work so that our community partners can effectively evaluate their own work.
LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS WORK CAN CHANGE LIVES

The ISU Extension and Outreach Local Foods Program sees students as leaders and essential collaborators in the development of Iowa’s local and regional food systems. Here is one great example of how this work can change a variety of lives.

Landscape architecture major Kayla Volkmer (at left) has worked with the ISU Redesigning Prison Landscapes project for three years. She and other students have partnered with the Iowa Correctional Facility for Women under the direction of ISU landscape architecture professor Julie Stevens to design and build outdoor spaces where offenders can learn gardening skills and reap the benefits of outdoor work therapy.

“This work has helped me understand the importance of community involvement in projects,” Kayla said. “Working on this project has helped me gain a better understanding of the healing aspects of landscape architecture. The women feel calmer when working in the dirt and we all feel a sense of pride watching our work grow into vegetables that can be shared with the rest of the women or given to a food bank to help the greater community. As I look forward to graduation, I’m looking for firms that value social justice and working with communities to create designs.”

Learn more about the prison garden project on our website in this blog post: [www.extension.iastate.edu/localfoods/2834-2](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/localfoods/2834-2).

Hannah Fisher is an undergraduate student at Iowa State University pursuing a major in agriculture and society. During her time on the Local Foods Program team in 2016, she focused on increasing outreach and awareness of local foods through different communications strategies, including maintaining the team’s Facebook page, writing blog posts, and creating a photo archive of local-foods related events and places.

Hannah is also researching societal perceptions of genetically modified crops and foods, as an undergraduate research assistant in Iowa State University’s Department of Sociology. She is an ambassador for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. A northeast Iowa native, Hannah operates her own freelance photography business.

“By working with the Local Foods program, I have developed a greater sense of professionalism and expanded my knowledge,” said Hannah. “This has allowed me to excel academically and develop a greater interest in the role of local foods in communities, environment, health, and policy. My studies at Iowa State University are interdisciplinary and I feel that local foods touches on everything.”
For more information about the ISU Extension and Outreach Local Foods Program, visit our website at www.extension.iastate.edu/localfoods, or email us at localfoods@iastate.edu.