Our Mission

The mission of the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Local Foods Program is to support resilient food systems and healthy communities through research, education, and community engagement with diverse partners.

Contact Us

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Website: extension.iastate.edu/localfoods
Facebook: Local Foods - ISU Extension and Outreach

Why is Iowa State University Extension and Outreach investing in the development of local food systems?

Healthy food systems are at the core of each of Iowa State University’s four signature issues:

1. Food and the environment
2. Health and well-being
3. Economic development
4. K-12 youth outreach

Robust local food systems in our communities offer new options for Iowa producers and consumers by:

- strengthening local economies
- creating opportunities for beginning farmers
- diversifying opportunities for established farmers
- revitalizing urban and rural communities
- reconnecting producers and consumers
- promoting healthier eating habits
- supporting good land stewardship
- helping create a more equitable food system

“At a spring 4-H leader’s meeting, I had a local foods taste testing for snacks. Sampling food was a great way to get the conversation started for learning more about local foods.”

~ Ann Torbert
4-H Youth Development, After School, and Community Club Program Specialist, Linn and Benton Counties
How can the Local Foods Program team help you?

We can assist you 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.

“It takes good land, farmers who can make a living farming, and citizens who appreciate good food and good land stewardship to sustain a culture. ISU’s Local Foods Program is a state resource for all who wish to get busy in this important work.”

- Kamyar Enshayan, Director, Center for Energy and Environmental Education, University of Northern Iowa

ISU Extension and Outreach county staff are already leading in local foods by:

• Helping initiate farm-to-school and farm-to-institution projects
• Initiating and participating in developing a local or regional food hub
• Providing educational programing such as workshops on seasonal menu planning and cooking
• Creating a regional food identity with branding and marketing campaign
• Supporting the creation of an incubator farm for beginning farmers
• Increasing food access for low-income populations by initiating and supporting garden donation efforts
• Planning “farm crawls” showcasing local producers

Kate Olson (left), Cass County, offers samples at a Produce in the Park event, along with area Master Gardeners.
Resources on our website: extension.iastate.edu/localfoods

• Information for many types of local foods practitioners, from producers to youth educators to consumers
• Research-based publications and toolkits
• Information about the Iowa Regional Food Systems Working Group and the Iowa Food Hub Managers Working Group
• Our blog and monthly e-newsletters, with updates, profiles, events, and much more
• Staff contact information and specialty areas

“Master Gardener groups and ISU Research and Demonstration Farms around Iowa are participating in a new ISU Extension and Outreach SNAP-Ed initiative to enhance healthy food access and security for Iowans by increasing the amount of locally grown fruits and vegetables donated to area food pantries. I see an opportunity for more county offices to get involved in this important work.”

- Carrie Chennault, Iowa State University graduate research assistant

Coalition Development and Training

The Local Foods Program hosts and facilitates regular meetings at which food systems practitioners from across the state can meet, network, receive training, share knowledge, and be inspired. Find archived presentations and webinars on our website.

Economic Development

Local food systems build local economies. Our Community Food Systems Program can help you work with community stakeholders to design impactful local foods projects. We also teach business planning and financial literacy to farmers and rural entrepreneurs.

Community Development

Farm to school programs connect communities with local food producers by changing food purchasing and education practices at schools and preschools. The Local Foods Program team provides many resources for farm-to-school programs and other community projects.
Recent Publications from the Local Foods Program

For community groups and extension staff
- Supporting Local Food System Development in Your Community
- Agriculture Urbanism Toolkit

For producers and food-related businesses
- Resource Guide for Beginning Farmers
- Shared-Use Kitchen Planning Toolkit

For local food coordinators
- Local Food Organizational Toolkit
- Food Hub Development in Iowa

For working with youth
- Cafeteria Coaching Toolkit
- Make Food Safety a Priority in Your School Garden

For consumers
- Iowa CSA Farms Directory (updated annually)

For a complete list, visit our website and click on Resources > Our Publications.

“As a small non-profit working to support the local food system in central Iowa, Eat Greater Des Moines has benefited from the knowledge and experience of the ISU Local Foods Program team. Working with them to evaluate our work has helped us better understand our impact and where we can better focus our time and effort. They are a valuable partner as we continue to drive positive change throughout our foodshed.”

~ Aubrey Alvarez, Executive Director, Eat Greater Des Moines