Local Foods Program

2017 Annual Report
Survey: Iowa’s fruit and vegetable growers generate $48 million in economic output

The most recent survey of Iowa’s commercial fruit and vegetable industry showed that these farmers generated more than $48 million in economic output, including $32 million in value-added commerce.

The survey, released in 2017, was conducted by the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) based on 2015 survey data. This is only the third such survey in Iowa’s history (the others were done in 1989 and 2000).

The Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Local Foods Program provided survey design and analysis to IDALS. Our evaluator Arlene Enderton was the staff member involved. A total of 882 producers responded to the survey.

Highlights

- Total edible horticulture sales of survey respondents doubled from about $10 million in 2010 to nearly $20 million in 2015. More than half of farmers reporting in both 2010 and 2015 (nearly 400) saw a 10 percent sales increase.

More highlights from the report:

- The majority of Iowa’s edible horticulture farmers are new (10 years or fewer) to horticulture production, although some may have farmed commodity crops prior to engaging in horticulture production.

- Beginning horticulture farmers are replacing retiring horticulture growers in terms of number (a trend contrary to commodity agriculture).

- Most horticulture farms are 2 acres in size (the median farm size), unchanged in the past 15 years.

- What has changed is the average horticulture farm size, which decreased from 13 acres in 2000 to roughly 8 acres in 2015.

- The top five crops in 2015 based on the number of (responding) farms producing them were tomatoes, pumpkins, cucumbers, green beans, and winter squash. In 2000, sweet corn was the top crop, followed by tomatoes, green beans, cucumbers, and sweet peppers.

- You can see the full 38-page report at this link: [https://bit.ly/2vbR4Q7](https://bit.ly/2vbR4Q7).

“My husband and I are starting our fifth season of running an apple orchard in northeast Iowa,” Arlene said. “We took the survey and fit in perfectly with the majority of the survey respondents, selling most of our product directly to consumers, and using horticulture as a supplement to other sources of income.”

If you have questions about the survey, contact her at [arlene@iastate.edu](mailto:arlene@iastate.edu).

Our projects

The Local Foods Program’s projects and initiatives incorporate the following four priority areas:

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

Throughout this 2017–18 annual report, 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 University to support their efforts. Visit us on the web at [www.extension.iastate.edu/localfoods](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/localfoods) to learn more.
Helping commercial vegetable producers stay in business with food safety training

Mike Buske has been growing vegetables commercially for nearly 20 years. In 2017, he hosted a field day at his father Richard's farm north of Ft. Dodge. The event was designed to share information about the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), high tunnel production, and vegetable packing.

Mike also recently participated in the Produce Safety Alliance Grower training, offered by ISU Extension and Outreach to meet new federal regulations for food safety.

The Buskes grow a variety of vegetables including potatoes, tomatoes, melons, and raspberries. At the training, they learned ways to improve food safety in their operation, and have created a food safety plan as a result.

Arlene Enderton of the ISU Local Foods Program serves as the evaluator for the North Central Region Center for FSMA Training, Extension, and Technical Assistance (NCR FSMA). Teresa Wiemerslage, another LFP team member, is one of the center's trainers.

The center is a collaboration of food safety educators from 12 land grant universities in Midwestern states who are working to prepare fruit and vegetable growers to comply with FSMA. It is housed at Iowa State University.

By the end of 2017, year two of the center’s activities, more than 1,500 producers had attended one of more than 60 produce safety trainings in the region. Learn more on page 12.

Above: Mike Buske (center) operates the potato seed cutter with his brother-in-law, Mike Barkley (left) and father, Richard Buske (right).
Priority 1: BEGINNING FARMERS

According to the most recent USDA Census of Agriculture, 18 percent of Iowa farmers are more than 65 years old, and only 4 percent are less than 35 years old. Everyone engaged in agriculture agrees on the importance of supporting the next generation of farmers. But where will we find these new producers?

The Local Foods Program has leveraged support for programs and resources geared toward beginning farmer training programs, including a refugee incubator farm, a prison gardening program, a beginning farmer network, and more.

Building job skills and improving nutrition for offenders at Iowa’s women’s prison

One challenge to the growth of local food production in Iowa is the shortage of skilled farm labor to support expansion.

ISU’s Local Foods Program works with the university’s landscape architecture faculty and students to offer a gardening program at the Iowa Correctional Institution for Women in Mitchellville.

This program provided education and support to more than 40 women who were part of the prison garden crew in 2017. The women learned skills for planning, planting, maintaining, harvesting, and trouble-shooting issues with a production vegetable garden.

Outside grant funding helped purchase grow lights for indoor plant starts. Grants also will fund purchase and development of a greenhouse and high tunnel to grow the production garden program.

More than 700 staff and offenders at the prison benefited from the 7,000 pounds of fresh produce grown and harvested for use in the facility’s kitchen in 2017. The prison cafeteria saw an increase in consumption of salad bar items this season as garden items were added.

Three women who had worked on the garden crew were able to get jobs in landscaping or farming upon their release from prison in 2017.
Fearless Farm Finances course improves profitability for diversified farmers

Dr. Craig Chase is the program manager for the Local Foods Program and led the Marketing and Food Systems Initiative of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture in 2017. He is co-author of the popular resource guide Fearless Farm Finances: Farm Financial Management Demystified (2012, 270 pp.)

Chase regularly co-leads workshops based on the book, often with co-author Paul Dietmann of Badgerland Financial.

The course teaches participants the basics of data collection on the farm business, bookkeeping, how to work with a lender, and how to make product mix, marketing, and pricing decisions that incorporate all costs, including labor.

“After a year of tracking all of our crops, I tallied everything up, and we found it extremely useful as we were planning for the coming season,” said Emily Fagan. Emily owns and operates Humble Hands Harvest farm near Decorah with her business partner Hannah Breckbill.

After taking the Fearless Farm Finances course in winter 2016, she used her new knowledge to develop an enterprise budget for every one of the farm's crops in 2017.

“Knowing how much a unit of each crop cost us to produce helps us know which vegetables are profitable for us to wholesale at a lower price, and which ones it might be better to sell for retail price at the farmers market or through our CSA,” she said.
Priority 2: ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Iowa’s economy depends upon agriculture, particularly in rural areas. Robust local food systems can build up rural economies and offer new business opportunities for farmers and entrepreneurs alike. Iowa’s emerging food hubs are a great example.

The Local Foods Program works with partners all across the state to develop tools and resources to support local economies through thriving local food systems.

Iowa Food Hub generates $815,000 in local food sales for farmers in northeast Iowa

More Iowans are eating healthy, locally grown food, and more farmers are earning a profit selling their homegrown products through the work of the Iowa Food Hub. This innovative partnership among local non-profit organizations and Iowa State University Extension and Outreach is improving the physical and economic well-being of thousands of residents in northeast Iowa.

In 2017, the hub sold more than $815,000 in local products from 60 farmers and food-based businesses within 150 miles of their warehouse in West Union.

Iowa Food Hub began operating in 2013. It serves primarily as a wholesale distributor to food service, schools, grocery stores, and restaurants. They offer a full product line including produce, meat, eggs, dairy, and other grocery items.

The hub is governed by a volunteer board of directors, with extension staff members Teresa Wiemerslage and Kayla Koether serving as technical advisors. They focus their efforts on improving viability of small and medium-sized farms; food access and equality; local economic development; job creation and retention; beginning and established farmers; and food system research and education.

Alice (Topaloff) Runde of Decorah joined the hub’s board in 2017. She was impressed right away by the passion and dedication of the seven-member group.

“The IFH went through a lot this past year,” she said, including management transitions, equipment failures, and significant changes in wholesale buyers.

Despite all this, she said, the IFH exceeded almost all of its 2017 goals before the end of the year, including a 20% increase in sales, a grant to supply fresh-cut snacks to three early childcare centers, an expanded food box program, and helping 10 area farmers become food safety-certified.

The hub was one of 11 projects that received a specialty crop block grant in 2017 from the Iowa Department of Land Stewardship. They were awarded $21,198 to support food safety training for Iowa fruit and vegetable growers.

Partnering community organizations include Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative, the Northeast Iowa Food and Farm Network, and Luther College Center for Sustainable Communities.

Photo: Locally grown kohlrabi sticks packaged for delivery through the hub.
Iowa’s food hub managers benefit from Financial Management Boot Camp

Our program team and partners created the Iowa Food Hub Managers Working Group (FHMWG) in 2015, to support the emerging cohort of businesses linking local food producers with institutional buyers across the state.

Through regular meetings, about a dozen hub managers have formed relationships, collaborated on projects, built trust, and established a peer learning community. Last year, they identified a need for skilled consulting on food hub financial and operational management.

Enter Tera Johnson, director of the Food Finance Institute at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Tera started the institute three years ago to share her business management expertise with mission-based food businesses.

Local Foods Program team member and FHMWG co-coordinate Kayla Koether attended one of Tera’s trainings last year. She recognized that Tera was just the resource Iowa’s food hub managers had been hoping to find.

Then the stars aligned. Tera got a grant from the USDA’s Local Food Promotion Program to provide Food Hub Financial Management Boot Camp to food hub managers. But, she hadn’t yet identified a community of food hub managers to train. Iowa’s ready-made peer group volunteered to be her first hub trainees.

For hubs that had financial data and a few years of operations, a two-part, four day intensive training was just what they needed to take a break from day-to-day operations, learn the material, and apply it to their businesses.

Participants came away with a financial plan, and a pitch to present to a potential investor.

Every participant felt they would adjust their management practices as a result of the boot camp, and all identified ways it would improve their business.

“Helping food hubs get to the next level in business and financial planning is important to their future success,” said participant Penny Brown-Huber, president and CEO of Iowa Choice Harvest, LLC.

“The Food Finance Institute had great experts who helped move all of us forward in reaching our planning goals.”

Left: Tera Johnson (right) of the Food Finance Institute works with James Nisly of Organic Greens, Washington, Iowa, to evaluate his food hub’s financial statements.
Priority 3: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Iowa’s community leaders play key roles in facilitating the development of local food systems. These leaders come from diverse backgrounds, such as teachers, local government officials, extension educators, community activists, gardeners, faith-based groups, and community organizers.

Through our Community Food Systems Program, we partner with coalitions around Iowa to address diverse challenges within communities, such as childhood wellness, social and economic inequality, small business development, and more.

Cass County rocks farm to school with Community Food Systems Program help

Our Community Food Systems Program (CFSP) is a three-year process that guides a community’s residents to identify their top food systems priorities. Then they work with our staff to plan and accomplish projects. Cass County in southwest Iowa is a great example of a CFS success story.

The local foods coalition working in Cass County finished its second year in 2017. The group had identified farm to school as one of its five priority project areas in year one. A steering committee now meets quarterly, and includes representatives from all three school districts in the county.

Each district also has individual projects underway, including curriculum mapping and site-planning for school gardens and outdoor learning spaces.

The group won a USDA Farm to School Planning Grant, which runs July 2017–December 2018. Kate Olson is a program coordinator for Cass County Extension and Outreach who helps lead the coalition.

She says the grant is funding an evaluation of readiness in each of the three school districts in the county. They are looking at facilities both for serving local food and teaching about food. The coalition also is working on outreach to partners and local producers, and planning curriculum trials.

Kate said the group is working with the Cass County Master Gardeners on the School Garden 101 project to support that part of the grant.

They also plan to do some taste testing featuring local producers and their food. They also may do a food waste audit in the cafeterias, she said.

The group also works with local vocational agriculture teachers on many projects, involving students in planning and building gardens. They’re also exploring a cafeteria mentor program that would pair older kids with younger ones to encourage them to try more fresh fruits and veggies.

Left: Elementary students in Cass County learn about pollinators.
Making healthy food more accessible to lower-income families in Dubuque County

Making healthy locally grown food accessible to all community members is a continual challenge for most local and regional food systems.

In Dubuque, the Local Foods Program has worked with the Dubuque Eats Well coalition since 2016 to increase food access for lower-income residents through the Double-Up Food Bucks program.

The initiative allows Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program recipients to match each SNAP dollar — up to $10 per week — with an additional dollar that must be spent on fresh fruits or vegetables at the Dubuque Farmers’ Market.

Dubuque’s market is one of several DUFB pilot sites across Iowa. Dubuque Main Street program specialist Michaela Freiburger said that in its first year, the program attracted 400 new SNAP clients to the market. In 2017, another 293 new shoppers came downtown on Saturday to use their food bucks, and total SNAP transactions climbed to 572.

In 2015, the first year the Dubuque Farmers’ Market accepted SNAP benefits, they sold $3,784 in produce to clients. In 2016, when the Double-Up Food Bucks program began, that figure rose to $11,220. In 2017, SNAP clients leveraged their DUFB dollars to purchase $12,528 in produce at the market.

“Through our partnership with the Community Food Systems program, we were able to customize the statewide Double Up Food Bucks program materials and create materials specific to the market in Dubuque,” said Danielle Day, program director for Dubuque County Extension and a member of the county’s local foods coalition.

Courtney Long, coordinator of our Community Food Systems Program, helped the coalition create promotional materials for the project. She designed a Dubuque Farmers Market map highlighting the vendors who accept Double Up Food Bucks, step-by-step instructions for users of DUFB at the market, and adapted materials to accommodate vendors from out of state.

“No matter what your income, it’s really important to go out and meet the farmers and ask questions,” says market vendor Sheila Merfeld of Dobie’s Flowers and Produce in Durango. “It’s our life; we love to share it!”
Developing leadership skills among food systems practitioners in Iowa and the US

Local food leaders from around Iowa attended the second annual Iowa Local Food Leader training in February 2017 at Reiman Gardens.

The training, coordinated by the Local Foods program, was developed to deliver professional development to beginning local food practitioners on foundational practices for food systems programming. Topics included basics of food systems, facilitation, coalition development, and general project management skills.

Throughout the day, attendees developed 2017 goals and had the opportunity to start a plan of work, an evaluation plan, and a professional development plan.

The Community Food Systems Program received grant funding from the Agricultural Marketing Resource Center to develop and pilot national trainings and certifications for the Local Food Leader and Community Food Systems Programs in 2018.

For the Local Food Leader Certification program, participants will attend a one-day foundational workshop. They will then gain access to five online modules including food systems 101, capacity development, equity, tools and resources, and evaluation.

For the Community Food Systems Certification program, attendees will attend a two-day intensive training. They will then have access to three online modules covering design thinking, economic development, and food systems assessments.

Both certification programs will be piloted in 10 states across the country beginning in March 2018.

The Local Food Leader and Community Food Systems Program trainings can be offered individually or in conjunction with one other.

Community Food Systems Program manager Courtney Long also participates in a Local Food Resource Mapping project funded by the USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) as a technical assistance provider in mapping for decision-making around food systems.

Food systems advocates and practitioners from all across Iowa gather each January to network and learn about best practices for creating a thriving community food system. In January 2017, more than 100 people spent a fruitful day together at Reiman Gardens.
The Local Foods Program continued to serve as the state partner for FoodCorps in 2017. FoodCorps is a national volunteer service program that connects kids to healthy food in schools.

Service members are a team of dedicated AmeriCorps leaders who serve in high-need schools to make sure students learn what healthy food is, fall in love with it, and eat it every day.

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.

Last fall, our 12 new Iowa service members began serving in 7 school districts across the state, including Wapello County, Postville, Oelwein, Cedar Rapids, Davenport, Waterloo, and Des Moines.

FoodCorps Iowa Fellow Chelsea Krist says, “When students are directly connected to the processes of planning, planting, and growing food, they are more likely to try new foods, and develop long-term positive relationships with food.”

Our team also works on farm to school projects through our Community Food Systems Program, helping Iowa communities identify food system priorities and design projects to reach their goals.

In 2017, we began piloting a farm-to-early care and education project in three Iowa regions: Johnson and Linn Counties, Wapello County, and Cass County. In partnership with the Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children, our team is helping develop a collection of strategies for connecting young children with healthy food and opportunities for physical activity through their preschools and daycares.

Our program also was selected as the Iowa core partner for the National Farm to School Network from 2017–2019.

Photo: Students at Dr. Walter Cunningham School for Excellence in Waterloo designed and built garden beds on their school’s grounds last fall. While planting and tending their new gardens in 2018, they also will learn about soil science, plant parts, and how to prepare and eat the fresh produce they grow.
Priority 4: EVALUATION

Collecting and analyzing information on the context, processes, and outcomes of local food system work is crucial to effectively plan, publicize, and fund the efforts of our program and those of our partners.

The evaluation team of the ISU Extension and Outreach Local Foods Program continuously evaluates the effectiveness of our programming. We also assist community groups, university researchers, and state agencies to design and conduct their own evaluations of their local foods work.

ISU Local Foods Program helps farmers meet federal produce safety regulations

The North Central Region Center for FSMA Training, Extension, and Technical Assistance (NCR FSMA) was created at Iowa State in 2016.

A collaboration of on-farm food safety professionals from 12 Midwest land grant universities, it’s designed to help produce farmers comply with the federal Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) of 2011.

Local Foods Program team member Arlene Enderton is the evaluator for the center. She and her colleagues continually evaluate the center’s work to learn how they can improve it.

Arlene conducted interviews and surveys with more than 500 people in the region in late 2017–early 2018 to analyze the impact of the center’s programming as it came to the end of its second year.

Results showed that the center was a valuable resource to the 12 state leads tasked with implementing FSMA training in the region. The center’s website functions as a one-stop shop for FSMA information and training, with more than 4,000 visits in 2017.

Needs identified in the annual evaluation included clearer communication of expectations to state leads, and better outreach to farmers in each state.

See page 3 to read about some Iowa producers who have gone through our FSMA produce safety training.
2017 HIGHLIGHTS BY THE NUMBERS

We hosted 97 events for 3,774 attendees.

The 2017 ISU Local Foods Festival in September was the highest-attended event of the year, with an estimated crowd of 2,500.

We leveraged $262,445 in funding for our partners.

We leveraged $496,213 in funding for our own work, with partners in and outside of ISU.

We consulted with 402 Iowans in 2017.

We serve as a resource for educators, producers, community and economic developers, and Iowans in the environmental, policy, health, and other sectors.

We connected 70 additional Iowans to another resource provider.

Our staff members get engaged.

Our 10 staff members served on 28 unique steering committees and advisory boards, and participated in 90 board and coalition meetings.

Visit us on the web at www.extension.iastate.edu/localfoods, or email us at localfoods@iastate.edu.
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 events.

**Research**

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

**Farm to School and Early Childhood**

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

**Evaluation**

We gather data on the context, processes, and outcomes of local food systems work, to help our community partners effectively evaluate their own programs.

"ISU’s Local Foods Program builds upon existing resources and collaborates with non-profits, schools, businesses, and higher education institutions to ensure research-based programming that promotes economic sustainability across Iowa and the US."

Dr. Angela Shaw
Associate professor of food safety, ISU
**Growing Together**

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. Unfortunately, few pantries regularly are able to offer fresh fruits and vegetables to their clients.

Iowa State’s SNAP Education and Master Gardener programs 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.

Our team collaborates with this project, especially on equity and food access.

**An Adventure in Eating**

In September 2017, around 2,500 people visited the third annual ISU Local Food Festival on central campus.

The event features educational displays, food samples, recipes using local foods developed by Iowa State dining chefs, and locally grown and produced products for sale by area farmers, West Ames Hy-Vee grocery store, Wheatsfield Co-op Grocery, ISU clubs and others.

**SARE mentorship program**

In 2017 the Local Foods Program began a local food coordinator mentorship program. Funded by a grant from North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCR-SARE), the project matched three of Iowa’s new local food coordinators with more experienced LFCs for a year of networking and training.

All six participants, mentees and mentors, reported positive experiences, with learning and networking benefiting both sides.

“In helping the mentee understand her work, we had to make our work clearer,” said one mentor. “Working with someone makes you explain why you do what you do.”

**Iowa CSA Directory**

Our website maintains the only continuously updated directory of the 100+ community supported agriculture (CSA) farms serving the state of Iowa.

Visitors can easily find farms in their area that provide boxes of fresh, locally grown produce each week of the growing season.

Being listed is free for farmers. Farms are listed by extension region and county.
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Front cover photo: FoodCorps service member Nathan Spalding with a class of kindergarten “chefs,” Garfield Elementary School, Cedar Rapids.

Back cover photo: Tom, Nicole, and Amy of West Ames Hy-Vee at the store’s 2017 ISU Local Foods Festival vendor booth, central campus, Ames.