

Farm to School and Local Food Day

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SPEAKERS

Speaker 3, Christa Hartsook, Tammy Stotts, Olivia Hanlon

Christa Hartsook 00:15

Hello, and welcome to the Small Farms Podcast, a production of the Small Farms Program at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Our podcast covers the opportunities and challenges associated with rural life.

Olivia Hanlon 00:29

In this episode, I visit with Tammy Stotts, Marketing Specialist with the Iowa Department of Ag and Land Stewardship (IDALS), and talk about the focus Iowa Farm to School and Early Care programs as well as the Iowa Local Food Day. I'm Olivia Hanlon, Education Extension Specialist, and we hope you enjoy the show. Tammy, this is your first time here on our podcast. So why don't you start by telling our listeners a little bit about yourself and what your role is at IDALS.

Tammy Stotts 00:58

Thank you very much for having me, Olivia. I am Tammy Stotts, and I've been working for the Department of Ag for about 28 years. So I've served in a lot of different roles. I currently am the Program Administrator for the Farm to School program for the state, and I also am the Program Administrator for the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, and that those roles fit very well together and encompass a lot of specialty crops and horticulture programs. So it's been a great, great role, and I love it.

Olivia Hanlon 01:31

Awesome. Well, we're very glad to have you on today, Tammy, as part of your role, you mentioned you work a lot with the Iowa Farm to School program, and then you also work with early care programs as well as the Iowa Local Food Day. So can you share a little bit with us about what these programs are and a little bit about their history here in Iowa?

T Tammy Stotts 01:50

Yes, I would love to. These programs all just really fit together. And the Farm to School programs started in 2007 through legislation. Legislators set out with a goal to link schools with Iowa farmers provide schools with fresh and minimally processed Iowa grown food and encourage children to develop healthy eating habits and provide them with hands on learning activities. And since then, the program has seen steady growth, we've done a lot of different things. And it started with simple classroom initiatives such as, A is for Apple, just different focuses on different fruits or vegetables, and allowing teachers to get those possibly snacks at the time, give them some money to buy from local growers, and then give them the classroom supplies to support those lessons and teach kids about Iowa products. We've worked in different things such as there's been ongoing initiatives with the FFA school gardens, taste tests, it's all just really been about teaching Iowans how to make healthy food choices and what we actually can grow in our state. You know, it's easy for Iowans to see we know about the corn bean and we know about the different things that we produce, the commodity crops that we produce, but I don't think all Iowans really realize the extent to which our agriculture covers food crops as well. So this has been a great thing to focus on and teach kids about.

O Olivia Hanlon 03:25

Yeah, I would agree with you there Tammy. I think there's a lot of things grown here in Iowa that some people don't even know are grown here in Iowa.

T Tammy Stotts 03:31

Yeah, I've learned a lot along the way as well. So that has been great.

O Olivia Hanlon 03:35

So how has the Iowa Farm to School program really been successful so far in our state?

T Tammy Stotts 03:41

Without a doubt the success that we've achieved has been through our partnerships. You know, when we look at other states, every state has Farm to School programs. And the focus is a little different in every state. But in Iowa, our school calendar and our harvest season do not match up perfectly. So it has been a goal and a challenge and with those challenges, if we did not have the partnerships that we do, there's no way we would have the success that we have. We've got just different state agencies, federal agencies, nonprofits, we've all kind of recognized early on where the similar goals cross, whether it pick a better snack or some of the other programs that fit into this same Farm to School, local agriculture and food education. And so we have over the years created partnerships, and we have a Farm to School and Early Care Coalition. So we've expanded Farm to School to include early care sites as well and try to help educate children in the daycare centers and help them also get the buying capacity and make those connections to get local food to those kids and start at a young age. So this Farm to

School and Early Care Coalition really has evolved in the last year, and we meet regularly, we have strategy teams, and we have shared work across the state, which includes yearly conferences, Farm to Summer Program, Choose Iowa Food of the Month, and then of course, Iowa Local Food Day that we're going to talk about in a minute. We also have a shared website that has a wide range of resources from multiple contributing organizations, so that people can go to one site and have access to a lot of different things involving Farm to School and give them the tools and resources they need to make it as easy as we can.


O Olivia Hanlon 05:39

Okay, so let's really jump into that Iowa Local Food Day now. Do you want to tell me a little bit about what that day involves and when it normally is?


T Tammy Stotts 05:47

Yes, I would love to so one of the largest celebrations of local food in the state is the Iowa Local Food Day. This started in 2018, I received a grant, a USDA Farm to School Support Service Grant. And really the focus was to help all schools regardless of size, or staffing, or location, to get involved in Farm to School. And the goals of that day were to provide a strong support network to aid food service directors and local food procurement to engage farmers in growing and selling to schools, help farmers ramp up school sales by working on smaller scale with the Summer Food Service Program, and allow Farm to School activities to expand beyond fruits and vegetable, and also to raise awareness about Farm to School across the state. So this project took on, again, we worked in partnership, to really promote this. To participate, schools must serve at least two local items and since then, we've had hundreds of thousands of meals served. We get a governor's proclamation and in recent years, the Secretary of Agriculture and the Governor go and have lunch with these students and really celebrate Iowa and the food that we can produce. And through this, we give resources for schools, they have promotional materials, so they can promote it with banners and posters across their state. And we provide them with some of the tools they may need to serve those items and a lot of just attention drawn to that day to celebrate the food. We try to get farmers involved where we can and the things that have come through this, there have been some amazing growth, I think through work with the food hubs, and I'll talk about that a little bit later. But the food hubs really are a great resource for schools looking to buy local food products. We've seen participation increase through positive feedback from schools sometimes its parent driven, the parents love seeing local food in schools. And sometimes in counties that you know, the pork producers or the beef producers will get involved and come to those schools and help serve local meat that day. And it's just really been a positive thing. And what was written as a one time event through that grant has now taken on legs and is a yearly event. And so it is celebrated currently the second Wednesday of October. October is Farm to School Month, and we celebrate Farm to School Month, obviously all October but we don't keep it just that day. If schools aren't able to participate that day, then any day they choose is a great day to celebrate. And it's the Healthiest State Initiative 5210 also promotes the Farm to School, and you know, the healthy eating and healthy choices and exercise through schools. So it is a great month and it is a great time to celebrate Iowa agriculture and Iowa farmers. So we look forward to another great year there is a sign up, and so you can go and see what schools are participating. And then again, we give you resources so you can look and find recipes and how information on where to get


the food how to work with growers for schools, you know, food safety information. It's all available in an easy to find location. And we're trying to just like I said support schools to start Farm to School or expand Farm to School and to celebrate in October with us.

 Olivia Hanlon 09:43


Yeah, you know Tammy October is coming up way quicker than we all think it is. So looking forward to that.

 Tammy Stotts 09:49

Yeah.

 Olivia Hanlon 09:49

We've got quite a wide variety of listeners here on our podcast ranging from producers but even maybe have some school folks in on here. So how can our listeners get involved in either the Farm to School Program or the Iowa Local Food Day?

 Tammy Stotts 10:04

Okay, so there's different ways you can get involved. If you go to the IowaLocalFoodDay.org, it's all spelled out one word, it gives you more information about the program as well as the recipes or the resources, it gives you information on how to sign up. And again, it gives a map of the schools that are already signed up or early care centers, colleges, universities, we welcome everyone. And we already have we just opened it up, and we've already got schools starting to sign up and early care center starting to sign up. So go to that site and check it out. To get involved, we have also a webinar there's additional information that will be available through a Local Food Day webinar, and that's for schools, childcare sites, local growers, everyone's invited to participate. It's with the Iowa Department of Education. And we also have ISU members that will be presenting it's September 9, at two o'clock, and participants will learn how to register for the Local Food Day, and again can find those menu suggestions and learn where to buy those local items that they may be seeking. And it will highlight the opportunities through the Choose Iowa Food of the Month program. There's a campaign Iowa Department of Education received a grant in 2020 to support the Choose Iowa Food of the Month campaign, and that builds off of the Iowa Department of Ag and Land Stewardship campaign that was created to support drive and demand for farmers and the products that they grow and raise in the state and generate excitement in general about Iowa agriculture. There's also sub grant opportunities to support local level implementation for both schools and early care centers that participate in CACFP. And then there's Food of the Month promotional resources that are free to those sites that help promote what they are doing for farmers, we encourage you to get signed up in the Farm to School and Early Care Producer Directory. That gives schools an easy access point to go and find the products they're looking for and it lists it by product or location so they can find what they need and get those requests sent out to growers to source that local food. We also have a fresh connect database that's new that was launched last year to help people across the state market their food is they have food that they have not got a market for.

Farmers can list that on there, or schools or food banks or restaurants, other people can also access that available food, it does have a timeliness component. So it falls off or comes off after so many days to make sure it's fresh. It also offers logistic options for farmers on how to get food transferred around the state. There's also a Farm to School local purchase report that I would encourage both farmers and people trying to purchase local food to go on and take a look at it's voluntary and it reports school purchases. It's only just a fraction of what's actually being purchased, and it is anonymous, but it does show what's being purchased by schools and the price range being paid. So I think it helps farmers set you know, make that decision if they're interested in selling to schools, and at the same time it helps schools you know, can I include this local product? Will my budget sustain this? So I think is a great resource. And we're really trying to expand that as well.

O Olivia Hanlon 13:42

Yeah, it sounds like there's plenty of ways for folks to get involved Tammy. When you mentioned the webinar, how would people find information to join in on that webinar?

T Tammy Stotts 13:52

They can email me Tammy.Stotts@lowaAgriculture.gov. They can also find it on our website at lowaAgriculture.gov. And also through the Department of Education, they are actually hosting the webinar, and they can find that through the Department of Education as well. We are just starting promotions on that. So that information is coming out now. And Patti Delger with the Department of Education is the host of that.


O Olivia Hanlon 14:23

Perfect so looking forward Tammy, what comes next for the Farm to School Program in the state of Iowa?

T Tammy Stotts 14:32

We have all kinds of things that we're working on. And I think one thing last year COVID really taught us the importance of our local food system and our Regional Food Network. It was a real struggle to get food and transportation, and so I think that emphasis has really changed the landscape and the future of local food. Through that opportunity last year we received money through the Cares Act. So we had a local produce and protein program, we received \$600,000 and that was to assist schools in overcoming obstacles of sourcing local food, including the cost of purchasing. We had equipment grants for those schools, small equipment grants to get items they needed to process local foods. And then we also had equipment grants for growers, again, a small up to \$5,000. So they could get the equipment needed to work with schools, including packaging supplies, or coolers or you know, sanitizing, those types of things. And through that effort, which was, we only had a couple months and it was not obviously something anyone planned for. But to have \$600,000 go to this effort really showed the demand and the need. I had requested several years ago legislation for Farm to School to offer a reimbursement for schools purchasing local and it's a small amount it's up to \$1,000 for \$3,000 spent on local


produce or protein. But that was passed this year, it's Senate file 578 Establish a Farm to School fund. And this fund expands Farm to School program by establishing that fund that allows the department to reimburse schools that purchase locally grown or raised food for school meals and snacks. The fund can accept private and public sources. We don't have funding for it currently, we are working on that as well as the rulemaking process. But there are some opportunities and the specialty crop Block Grant Program has HR 133 stimulus funding this year, it's COVID related, and it allows for money for states to implement things to help network this food system. And so one of the things that we're doing with that is we are seeking funds for this Farm to School fund. So that would not start until next year, but we're working on that now, so we do hope funds are available next year to support that. It also expands the Double Up Food bucks number of markets, offering opportunities for the number of markets to take those Double Up Food Bucks. It offers food hubs support as well to help expand the food hubs. They have a couple projects that will expand services, then pick up sites and locations as well as logistics to get food moved around the state with our we currently have nine active food hubs covering the state. And they source local food and offer delivery. It's a one stop shop for schools. Schools really have started using food hubs in the last couple of years. And it's a great way for our state to get local foods across the state. We also have through different programs, there's local food procurement coaches, that will be trained local food consultants to help schools and early care sites create local food procurement goals. The Department of Education is working on local procurement guide for schools. And we also have through the Choose Iowa Food of the Month competition that was a culinary competition for students in school and they developed 12 different recipes were developed by students. And they will be building those out to make those available for food service directors. And then also there will be four regional culinary training programs offered in 2022. As well as we have Farm to School producer regional trainings that will be available soon as well. So you can learn about all of this on our different sites, the Iowa Farm to School Coalition, that site will offer all of this information as well as the LocalFoodDay.org site.

 Olivia Hanlon 18:52

Perfect, and I will put both of those in the show notes below Tammy, just so that it's a little bit easier for folks to access. Is there anything that you didn't mention today that we didn't cover that you'd like to add?

 Tammy Stotts 19:04

I think that pretty much is everything I wanted to get out there today, I guess for Farm to School, if you're considering it, if you're thinking about it, if you're a producer, you know, it may not be your primary market, but it certainly is a great market to add to help diversify your operation. And if you're a school that's been thinking about it, the Local Food Day is a fabulous way to get started. There's a lot of support that day, and once you've been through it, I think it'll make it easier for you to be engaged in the future. And at the same time, you know, we encourage you to start small and find success and we just encourage everyone to give it a try. There's a lot of resources out there to help right now. So don't be afraid to reach out. Help is available.

 Olivia Hanlon 19:50

Yeah, that sounds like a really awesome program Tammy. I know I enjoy when I get to work with it. So thank you so much for joining me today, Tammy and we look forward to having you on again in the future.

T

Tammy Stotts 20:00

Great. Thank you so much.

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Speaker 3 20:01

Websites talked about throughout the episode include: Iowa Farm to School & Early Care Coalition: <https://www.iowafarmtoschoolearlycare.org/>, IDALS Iowa Farm to School Program: <https://iowaagriculture.gov/agricultural-diversification-market-development-bureau/iowa-farm-school-program>, Iowa Local Food Day Webinar: <https://educateiowa.gov/event/local-food-day-webinar>, and the Iowa Local Food Day: <https://www.iowalocalfoodday.org/>. This program is brought to you by Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. This institution is an equal opportunity provider for the full non-discrimination statement or accommodation inquires, go to www.extension.iastate.edu/diversity/ext.