

Purpose

Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative adopted Farm to School to help ensure that school district policies and practices support healthy living of children, families and community members.

The national Farm to School network aims to connect school children with their agricultural roots, provide healthier school meals and nutrition education. There are over 2,000 national programs across the United States.

The northeast Iowa Farm to School Chapter is a unique model in that they are spearheading efforts in school districts across multiple counties. In 2009-2010 these districts included Decorah, Howard-Winneshiek, Postville, Oelwein, Starmont, and Turkey Valley.

A group of specialists (Northeast Iowa Farm to School Core Team) collaborate to support regional farm-to-school efforts at the pilots. The team is responsible for providing technical and financial support for the teacher workshops, cross-age teaching, food service trainings and the school gardens.

Lessons Learned: Cross-Age Teaching

What happened?

The cross-age teaching model engages area high school youth as Farm to School educators. High school students become “cross-age teachers” after attending a day-long training offered by ISU Extension where they learned about stages of youth development and benefits of local foods. The training equipped them with the skills necessary to deliver monthly lessons about a local food to elementary school students. Each classroom teacher and lesson recipient received copies of local foods folios. There were 20 second grade classrooms that participated during the 2009-2010 school year.



Why it works?

Cross-age teaching models have been used successfully in a variety of settings throughout the United States. The cross-age teachers who participated in the local food lessons actively engaged in teaching a topic, developing a deeper understanding of local foods in the process. Indicated from self-reporting, these cross-age teachers also built relationships, improved their self-confidence, time management and public speaking skills. In addition, lesson recipients benefited from having role models and learned about local foods in interactive and fun ways.

Frequently asked questions:

What did the cross-age teacher training entail?

Iowa State University Extension has used cross-age teaching in various 4-H Youth Development programs throughout the state. An ISU Extension Youth Development Specialist.



Groups from each of the pilot schools were trained to be cross-age teachers in winter 2010, while five groups were trained in fall 2010. Typically, two school groups attended a cross-age teacher training with a supervisor. The groups ranged in size between eight and 23 high school students.

The cross-age teaching lessons were based on local food folios created by ISU Extension and Food and Fitness Initiative AmeriCorps members. The first cycle of folios included popcorn, greenhouse tomatoes, cheese, pork and leafy greens. The folios include historical information about the product and how it is grown or raised in Iowa. They also include short activities for the students and a script for the cross-age teachers to use in the classroom.



What is the role of a cross-age teacher supervisor?

A champion at the high school supervises the cross-age teachers. In addition to attending the cross-age teacher training, they purchased classroom supplies, helped schedule lessons and sometimes attended the lessons. The supervisors often helped students prepare local foods samples as well.

What is the best length of a cross-age teaching lesson?

A lesson that is 30 to 40 minutes works well for most high school students and the attention span of the recipients.

What if the recipients aren't paying attention?

Cross-age teachers should be prepared before going into the classroom and the classroom teachers should be present to assist with discipline problems. Proper training and practice help them maintain classroom control and effectively deliver the lessons with confidence.

Lessons Learned: Teacher Workshop

What happened?

The goal of the daylong teacher workshop was to expose teachers to ways of integrating food education across disciplines. Teachers learned how to improve student understanding of where food comes from using a variety of interactive teaching strategies. Several of the teachers who attended the workshop also had classrooms participating in the cross-age teaching lessons.

Why it works?

If teachers see the value in cross-disciplinary food education they are more apt to incorporate such education into the classroom and model healthy eating habits.

Frequently asked questions: Who led the Farm to School Teacher Workshop?

The Environmental Outreach Director at Luther College, who also is a member of the Northeast Iowa Farm to School Core Team, coordinated the event along with assistance from another local environmental educator.

Who attended the Farm to School Teacher Workshop?

Thirteen teachers attended the Farm to School Workshop from four of the pilot districts.

What were some of the activities? Teachers participated in a blind-fold taste test with local carrots and dip. They ranked their preference for dips and created a human



graph based on everyone's rankings. This is a way of teaching math skills and incorporating healthy, local foods in class. In another activity, teachers learned how to start and maintain a class worm bin and teach how these decomposers are part of a food system.

The workshop during the 2009-2010 was not offered for recertification credit. However, the goal of future workshops is to offer a two-day workshop for credit.

The Farm to School Teacher workshop aligned with Iowa Core Curriculum.



Lessons Learned: School Gardens

What happened?

School gardens provide schools and communities with fresh produce, while also serving as an outdoor natural laboratory for students. Students gain an appreciation for their food and nature, which encourages environmental stewardship. Each garden took unique form based upon community input and existing resources. The gardens are a proven community engagement tool as well. The most successful models drew on expertise within the school and the surrounding communities. There were six Farm to School gardens planted during the 2009-2010 school year.

Why it works?

Gardens are the most visible element of Farm to School and also a conversation starter. Studies have shown that gardening increases students' preferences for vegetables/fruits and provides an opportunity for physical activity.

Frequently asked questions:

Who was responsible for planning? An experienced horticulturist advised and oversaw planning and planting the school gardens. Each school took a slightly different approach, but all involved students in the plan-

ning (as well as planting) process. The earlier the planning started, the more a school invested. Planning also allowing for opportunities to collaborate and ask questions of the horticulturist. One school created a pre-survey to determine students' understanding of sustainable food practices and involvement in family gardens, a follow-up survey indicated an increase in the awareness of how fresh produce from a family garden can positively improve one's lifestyle.



Where were the gardens located?

Four of the six Farm to School gardens were located on school property and varied in size from 20 x 20 foot to 20 x 70 foot. One of the schools planted their garden at the community garden plot, located several blocks from the school campus. Another school partnered with the local medical center for space.

Who was responsible for the garden during the summer?

Each community relied on different groups of students, teachers and community members to care for their school gardens. One school had students who were involved in summer school programs cared for the garden. Other schools relied on students and their families to adopt the garden for various timeframes.

Where did schools get seeds? Most of the schools applied for a seed donation from Herman's Gardens a program funded by Seed Saver's Exchange (Decorah, IA). Several of the schools used their existing greenhouses to start seedlings. In one of the more ethnically diverse communities seeds native to Guatemala and Eastern Europe were planted, other crops included peanuts, Guatemalan blue squash, jack-o-lantern pumpkins, kohlrabi, pink popping corn and different varieties of peppers. The other Farm to School gardens had cantaloupe, leeks, lettuce, basil, winter squash, potatoes, summer squash, gourds, tomatoes, sweet chard, kale, eggplants, carrots, dill, parsley, dried beans, tomatoes, and carrots.

How has the produce been used? The produce was used in a variety of ways. In early fall, food service employees used produce in school meals including in school salad bars. Garden produce was also processed for later use as part of a 5th Season Workshop. In this case "fifth season" refers to using excess vegetables nearing the end of a growing season, processing, and storing for later consumption.

How were the school gardens into classroom curriculum? One of the pilot schools engaged a high school botany class to plan a garden. These students coordinated with food service staff to decide what produce could be utilized in the school cafeteria. The botany students started seedling indoors, transplanted in the spring, and several students tended the garden in the summer. At other pilot schools students in family and consumer science and vocational agriculture classes were responsible for planning and planting.



Lessons Learned: Food Service

What happened?

The Northeast Iowa Farm to School Chapter invested in educational opportunities for food service employees. The focus for 2009-2010 centered on food safety, as having a basic understanding of proper handling of foods is foundational in any school kitchen. Food safety trainings equip food service employees with necessary skills to properly handle and use local foods. Two nationally accredited courses, *ServSafe*® and *SafeFood*, were offered. In order for schools to streamline the use of local foods procurement policies have had to be researched, defined and interpreted. Throughout the year there have been several bidding and procurement meetings with area food service directors.

Why it works?

Across the country school food service employees receive meager reimbursements for school lunch and have felt affects of budget cuts. This has meant fewer professional development opportunities for food service employees. Area food service employees have appreciated the opportunity to network. By educating food service employees and providing them with networking opportunities, they have been more willing to purchase and incorporate healthy, local foods into their meals.

What trainings were offered?

There were three food service trainings offered in 2009-2010. A *ServSafe® Training* included 14 participants with five pilot sites represented. A *SafeFood Training* included 28 participants with five pilot sites represented. A *5th Season Workshop* included 14 participants with three pilot sites represented.



What have the barriers been to using local foods in schools?

There is still a general sentiment that local foods take too much time and labor to procure and prepare. At this point, the systems are not in place to quickly and easily procure and prepare local foods. In Iowa procuring local foods requires a transparent bidding process. Members working with the Northeast Iowa Farm to School Chapter and the Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative are working towards, and support policy changes, that would enable schools to use local foods easily and affordably.

What local products have food service employees used?

There have been several meetings with area food service directors and they indicated which local products they could use in school kitchens. Here are their preferences: apples, snapped green beans, snow peas, cherry tomatoes, shredded carrots or carrot coins/sticks, shredded zucchini, red or green cabbage, potatoes, heads of cauliflower, cucumbers, peppers, red or green onions, cherry bell radishes, kohlrabi, fresh broccoli, spinach, lettuce or mixed-greens.

Can area farmers meet the demands of area schools?

In northeast Iowa there is a vibrant farming community. The Northeast Iowa Food and Farm Coalition (NIFF) is a diverse group of farmers and community members and has identified food production as strength in the region. NIFF works to increase local food production. Producers have been able to extend their growing season with high-tunnels and greenhouses. Farmers are interested in selling food to local schools and educating students about local food.

What did schools do for Home Grown School Lunch Week?

Eleven schools participated in Home Grown School Lunch Week in 2009 and 13 schools participated in 2010. Schools featured a variety of local foods. Food service employees marketed the local options indicating they were fresh from the local producers. Many schools highlighted farm fresh produce on salad bars. One school served school-garden potatoes in their mascot colors of red, white and black (used a deep purple potato). Several teachers reinforced the connection between farm and fork, discussing growing cycles and local food systems.

Budget

Each of the six pilots received \$1,000 and \$500 mini-grants with funding from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in 2010. In addition, teachers and food service staff were compensated for professional development opportunities.

The \$1000 grants were intended for any purchases related to Farm to School. Some purchases included:

- Food processing equipment like fruit and vegetable wedgers, food dicers, food processors, food sectionizers.
- Local food used in family and consumer science classes
- Field trips to local farms
- Additional garden supplies including materials for fencing, signage, and tools

The \$500 grants were intended for any purchases related to Farm to School gardens. Some purchases included:

- Fencing materials- including cattle panels, trellises, and wood
- Gardening equipment- including potato forks, hoes, hand tools for students
- Fruit trees
- Composting unit

Northeast Iowa Food & Fitness Initiative

www.iowafoodandfitness.org

Iowa State University Extension - Region 4
911 South Mill Street
Decorah, IA 52101 • (563) 382-2949