



Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative Final Progress Report Narrative

SUMMARY

We believe that the places we live, learn, work and play affect our health. All children deserve to live in places that support health. Our shared vision is, "NE Iowa will be a place where all residents and guests experience, celebrate and promote healthy locally grown food and have abundant opportunities for physical activity and play every day. We believe healthier people make stronger families and vibrant communities. We will make the healthy choice the easy choice for everyone." Achieving this vision requires a long-term focus on systems change. For the past three years we have pursued three strategies in service of systems change:

- A. Ensure that school district policies and practices support healthy living of children, families, and community members.
- B. Ensure that local, health-promoting food is available and affordable in all communities, neighborhoods and institutions.
- C. Ensure that communities have a built environment that supports abundant opportunities for physical activity, play and active transportation to and from school.

Because these strategies align closely with the sections of the narrative report, we will provide a few examples of accomplishments in this section and further detail later.

Strategy A

Ensure that school district policies and practices support healthy living of children, families, and community members.

A significant focus of our work has been to develop active, engaged school wellness teams in each district. As we have consistently mentioned in earlier reports, schools are at the center of rural communities. Vulnerable children in Iowa attend schools, predominately public schools. We believe that creating robust wellness teams is the key to sustainability, ongoing community engagement, and policy and practice change.

School wellness teams are a highly successful aspect of our work. In 2009 we had one active school wellness team in the region. In 2010-11 we had increased that number to 14 active school wellness teams. In the 2011-12 school year we had active school wellness teams in 18 out of 20 public and private school districts in the region. Membership includes 240 individuals serving as active wellness team members in these districts. Fifteen teams are meeting at least six times per year or monthly, exceeding the twice a year meetings

required by the 2010 Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act. Through our NEIF&F Resource Contacts, we worked to assure engagement of community members on School Wellness Teams. Our former county team members have frequently take on this role. The Figure 1 on the next page shows the roles represented among the 240 members.

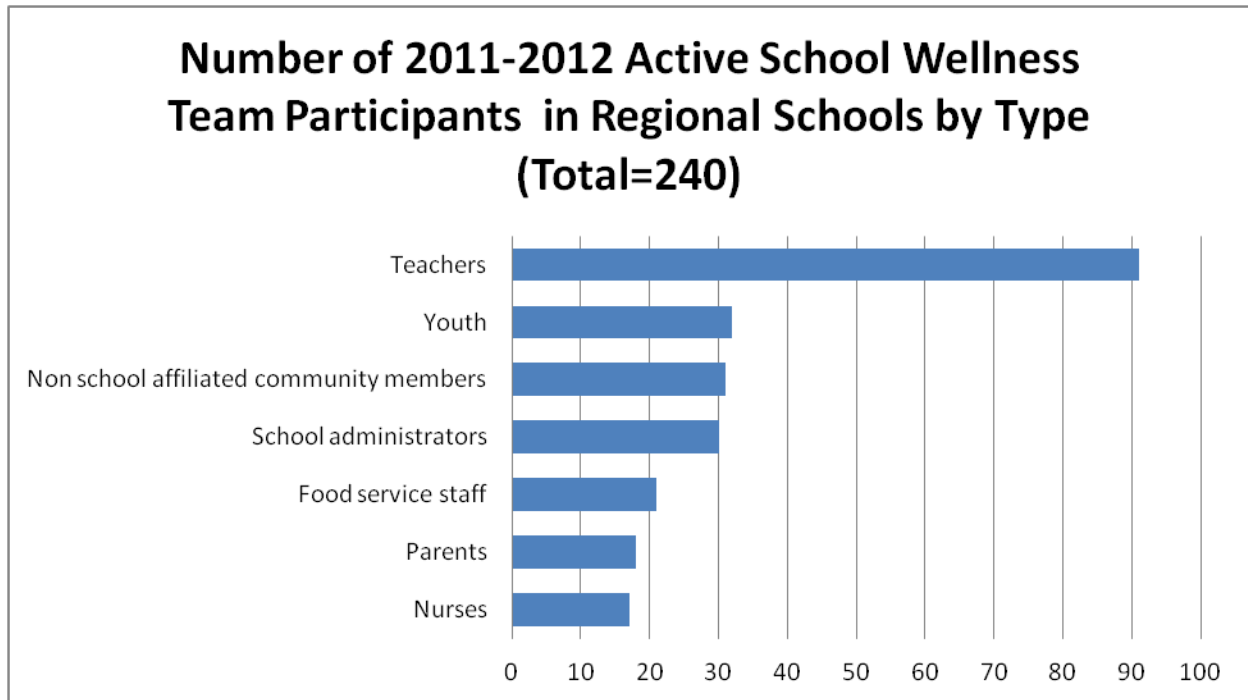


Figure 1

Seventeen teams completed a written 2011-12 School Wellness Action Plan that school administrators endorsed by signature. This compares to 12 in the 2010-2011 school year. Sixteen of the 18 schools set goals that exceeded federal requirements for school wellness. Schools have achieved an average of 72% of the goals they set. More School Wellness Teams are seeking outside funding to support wellness activities. Seventeen teams applied for funding beyond NEIF&F, and 15 received at least one grant. Our investment in school wellness teams leveraged \$73,318 for school wellness work.

A few other outcomes of School Wellness Teams include:

- 9 of 18 schools set goals with a community outreach dimension
- 335 different events were held to conduct wellness programming in 18 districts
- 22 community groups are involved in school gardens in 7 districts
- Community members helped lead at least one project in 12 districts
- 76 events (23%) of school wellness programming events involved parents

Additional outcomes of School Wellness Team work are represented in the school food and active living sections of the narrative.

Strategy B

Ensure that local, health-promoting food is available and affordable in all communities, neighborhoods and institutions.

Our work on the local food system has produced significant outcomes in three years, though we believe the results of our work are just beginning to be visible. From 2009 until 2011, based on the farms that we sampled, local food sales more than tripled. The number of growers of local food has increased significantly each year, as has the number of processors. We are seeing partnerships between local institutions and local producers, such as a dairy. For example, Luther College buys local turkey and chicken, 100% of its yogurt, skim milk, soft-serve ice cream, hard ice cream and hamburgers from local sources. Luther actively sources vegetables and fruit from local producers and expanding campus gardens. The local food coop recently became an approved Sodexo vendor for Luther's food service. Meanwhile, producers and processors are adding product lines to meet the needs of local buyers. For example, the local yogurt producer began packaging individual portions in response to a need identified by Luther.

A few other examples of important outcomes this year include:

- The Luther College VP for Finance and Administration, who oversees food service, hosted lunch with hospitals, nursing homes, other colleges and universities, grocery stores, and an area casino so they can learn from Luther's local food buying experience.
- Twenty food stakeholders in the region began developing a strategic plan for a community based food hub to provide producers and processors access to larger markets.
- The NIFF Coalition (one of our work groups) and the local food coop worked on a pilot project with the Kwik Trip convenience store chain to have a local markets section offering fresh food. We learned through this effort that Kwik Trip is not ready for increased availability of healthy fresh food in prominent places. Originally interested in our branding, "Together We Grow Healthy Kids". We carefully assessed the situation and decided that this was not yet a collaboration that we could support since chips and sodas were going to remain the most prominent item in their stores.
- Iowa State University Extension and Outreach has been influenced by the success of NEIF&F. Both the regional and the state level program identified local food production and development of new producers as high priorities. This development will mean that more resources will be available to support our communities in this work.

Other food system results are outlined in a later section of this report.

Strategy C

Ensure that communities have a built environment that supports abundant opportunities for physical activity, play and active transportation to and from school.

Much of our work in the past three years has focused on expanding rural approaches to Safe Routes to School. We increased the number of districts participating in SRTS from six schools in 2009-10, to 11 schools in 2010-11, to 20 schools in 2011-12. Specific outcomes

related to this strategy are described in a latter section of this report.

Economic Impact

Over the past three years the WKKF investment has created significant economic impact for the region. For example the WKKF investment of \$1,700,000 allowed NEIF&F to leverage \$2,366,639.70 for a total impact of \$4,066,639.70. That total does not include increased local food sales, which are reported separately in the Community Food section of this report.

Food and Fitness work has also contributed to the local economy through job creation since 2009. A total of 28.5 new jobs have been created in farm and food value-added positions and in institutional buyer positions. Thirteen new positions have been created through NEIF&F staff positions. We also have 29 new producers of local food in the region, and three additional positions due to expansion of existing operations. This makes a total of 70.0 new economic opportunities. In a rural region, this number of new jobs significantly impacts the economy.

STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE

Our structure and governance are organized around our strategies and the work we do to implement those strategies. During the final year of this grant period we initiated a comprehensive redesign process for our structure and governance.

With three, and now four, core partners, the co-convenor, vision work group, and existing regional team structures no longer fit our initiative. We restructured to a Core Partners group and one Project Coordinator, Ann Mansfield. With the latest iteration of the Regional Leadership Council, the core partners are members of that council and meet separately if needed during the transition period to a fully-functional Regional Leadership Council. We believe this structure will allow for more effective coordination through a single individual, and more integration among core partners and community members working together on the RLC.

In addition to the Project Coordinator and Regional Leadership Team, we have an operations team, comprised of work group leaders, that oversees the practical work, and work teams that implement strategies and tactics through coordinated activities.

Project Coordinator (Project Director for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation Grant)

The Project Coordinator intentionally cultivates shared leadership among community members and project staff in service of sustainability of the work and outcomes. Specific responsibilities of the Project Coordinator include :

- Spokesperson on behalf of NEIF&F, regionally, statewide, and nationally
- Liaison to Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque
- Lead for fiscal management of the project, including working with the budget and contract systems and fiscal year calendars of four core partners
- Convener of the operations team

- Partner with the facilitator of the Regional Leadership Council
- Primary contact and partner with technical assistance providers
- Lead for reports and communications with primary funders
- Coordinator of teams participating in national conferences, including logistics

Core Partners

Core Partners are the community-based, institutional homes for NEIF&F work. They are the keys to sustainability. Each core partner has a central mission or strategy that is aligned with the overall NEIF&F mission, vision, and values, and supports a major strand of the work. Core partners commit staff, space, and other resources. They agree to seek funding to support the project strategies and outcomes. NEIF&F staff, except the Project Coordinator, are embedded in the staff of the appropriate core partner and supervised by that institution. Core Partners provide the infrastructure upon which community members build their ownership and leadership. They are partners with one another and with communities throughout the region.

Because for the next four years we have added a fourth strategy, providing increased access to healthy food and active play for children from birth to age five, we sought a core partner that could both lead this work and continue it after Kellogg Foundation funding ends. Northeast Iowa Community College came forward to fill this role. In the three years of this grant we have moved from one core partner, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach—Region 4, to four core partners, ISUE—Region 4, Luther College, Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission (UERPC), and now Northeast Iowa Community College (NICC). The purpose of our core partners is to embed food and fitness work in organizations that will sustain it and continue to seek funding for it.

NICC is the ideal core partner to lead our Birth to Age Five strategy and to help us reach the most vulnerable people in our region. NICC offers an Associate of Science in Early Childhood. They operate two licensed Child Development Centers that serve the children of students as well as other community members, providing all-day care for infants through pre-school, and before-school care for school age children. Many of NICC's students are low income, single parents of young children. We will reach them through the Child Development Centers. But we will also reach NICC students in their degree program, most of whom remain in the region and are employed in various childcare facilities, and numerous current childcare providers who receive their continuing education through NICC programs.

Regional Leadership Council

We determined that the community leadership structure that served us well during the first five years must change to be optimal for the next four years. We needed to simplify the structure, maintain significant community engagement and ownership, increase diversity, and focus the leadership on sustainability of the work and results. Conversations began with the Vision Work Group, the group that has been most deeply involved with creating strategy and linking to implementation. That group initiated a plan to end the Vision Work

Group, reduce the size of the Regional Leadership Team (which ranged from 30-55 members over the years), and recruit a more strategic mix of people for the leadership council. Because of the commitment and generosity of spirit of members of both groups, in November we had the first meeting of the interim reconstituted leadership team. A number of long-time members offered to give up their place on the team in order to make room for others. Appendix A shows the biographical sketches for the current Regional Leadership Council. The RLC has committed to identify additional members from vulnerable populations, modify meeting logistics to accommodate their lives and responsibilities, and develop their own, as well as new members', leadership capacities to be effective in pursuing and living racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic equity. We have new RLC members with relationships in vulnerable communities who will help us identify and recruit those additional members and modify our RLC practices to support inclusiveness.

The Regional Leadership Council (RLC) meets quarterly. It is accountable for a regional, integrated approach to the work of the Northeast Iowa Food & Fitness Initiative (FFI) that achieves the highest quality results for children and families in Northeast Iowa. The Council ensures that implementation of the Community Action Plan is creating the intended results, adjusts strategies as needed to better achieve the FFI shared vision, and ensures that all strands of the work are woven together into coherent policy and systems change. The RLC will also focus its attention on sustainability of the work. Specifically, members are responsible for:

- ❖ Supporting the vision of the FFI and ensuring that the activities pursued through the initiative are consistent with the initiative's mission and monitor their effectiveness
- ❖ Becoming a face of the initiative and spreading the message of the initiative's efforts. An important job will be the ability to clearly articulate the initiative's vision, mission, accomplishments, and goals to the public and garner support from the community.
- ❖ Supporting and evaluating the program coordinator. Council members will ensure that the coordinator has the moral and financial support he or she needs to further the goals of the initiative.
- ❖ Selecting the program coordinator, if necessary. Together, members will establish the coordinator's responsibilities and undertake a careful search to find the most qualified individual for the position.
- ❖ Participating actively in the overall planning process and assisting in implementing and monitoring the initiative's goals by attending quarterly meetings, serving on a committee or work group or offering to take on special assignments.
- ❖ Assisting in developing the annual budget and ensuring that proper financial controls are in place.
- ❖ Mentoring new members as they are added
- ❖ Periodically evaluating the Council's own performance

Operations Team

The Operations Team's purpose is to collaboratively plan and guide implementation on a day-to-day or week-to-week basis. With our work distributed across six counties we need the standing face-face time for ongoing relationship building, communications and co-creation of the work in schools and communities. Members of the Operations Team include

the Project Coordinator and representatives of core partners and strategy work teams. We meet first and third Mondays for two hours. Our focus is on assuring coherence of the whole of our work and a generative, adaptive approach to emerging opportunities. Biographical statements for operations team members are also in Appendix A.

Work Teams/Learning Communities

Food and fitness work is implemented through six work teams/learning communities: School Wellness Outreach, School Food, Northeast Iowa Food & Farm Coalition, Early Childhood, Active Living—Safe Routes to School, Youth (a regional youth team). The staff leaders of these teams serve on the operations team to assure alignment among the teams and to take learning from the individual teams to the whole. Community members with a special interest in an area of work are active members of each of these teams.

Diagram of Northeast Iowa Food & Fitness Structure

(See the next page)

Sustainable, Healthy Communities

Policy & System Change Drives Our Work

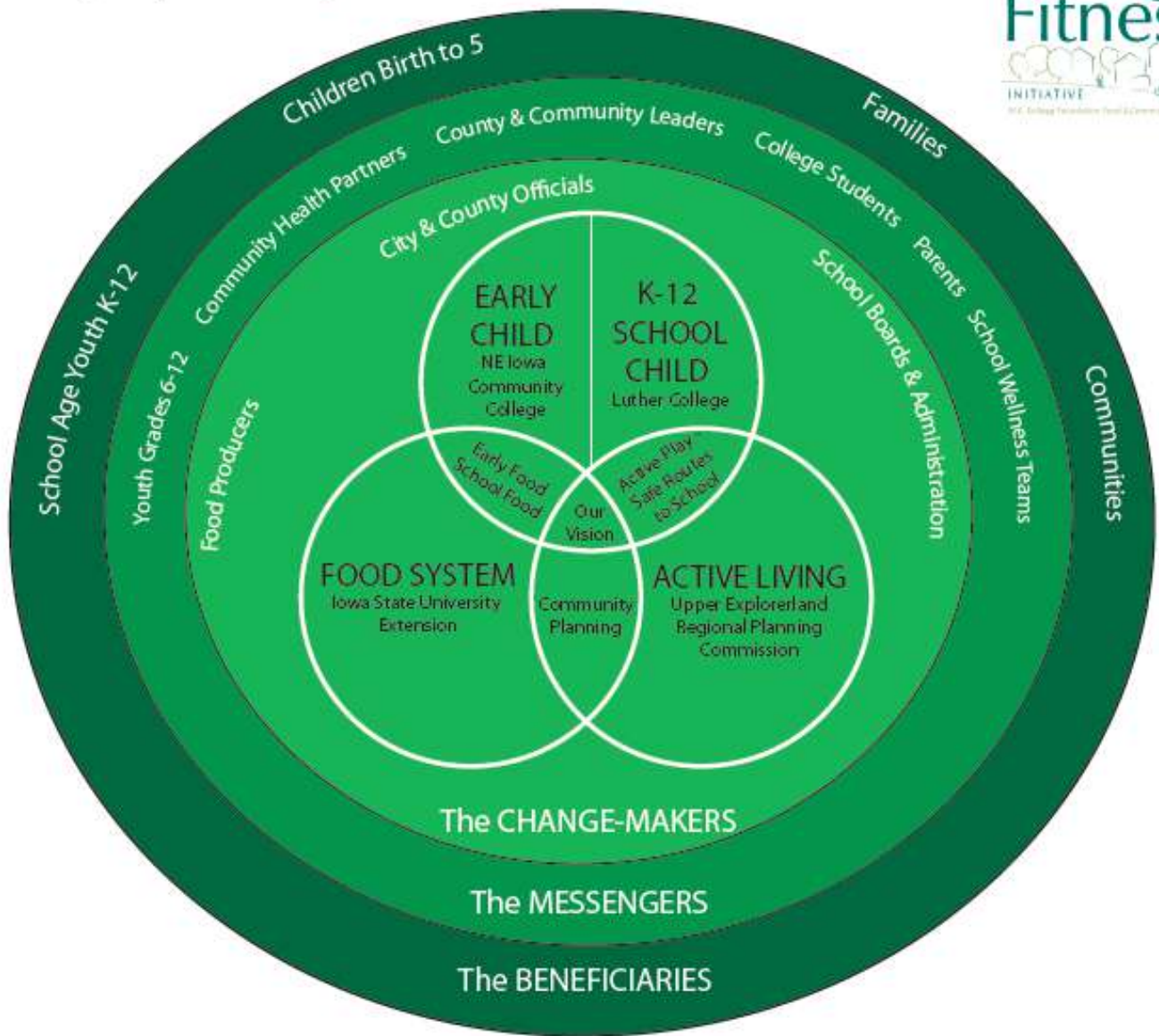


Figure 2

PROGRESS TOWARD IMPROVING SCHOOL FOOD

We have spent most of the past three years creating the readiness for procuring, preparing, and serving local food in our schools. We have already described our work with school wellness teams. All 18 include school food service staff, 17 include school nurses, and 16 include school administrators. We have taught food preparation skills to school cafeteria staff. Currently we have six AmeriCorps and FoodCorps service members supporting the work of wellness teams at schools throughout the region.

In the past year we have seen progress as judged by the following indicators:

- Seventeen school districts are now sourcing local foods, compared to two districts that were purchasing modest quantities of local apples when we began this work.
- Twenty-three producers are selling to schools in the region compared to 21 in 2011 and 21 in 2010.
- Fifteen out of 20 school districts had school gardens in 2011-12 compared to only one school district with a garden in 2009. There are 23 schools with gardens among the 15 districts.
- Six schools harvested a total of 4,720 pounds of produce from school gardens last year, valued conservatively at \$5756, and used that produce in school meals
- Seven school districts acquired new kitchen equipment to handle and store fresh food. Considering the economic challenges facing our rural districts, this is a significant commitment.
- Six school districts are collaborating to develop a shared regional seasonal cycle menu (meeting the gold standard of the HealthierUS Schools Challenge) for the upcoming school year to incorporate more local food into school meals and meet new federal regulation.
- The Postville CSD Food Service Director position description was rewritten to include serving as head of the school wellness team, cooking from scratch, and using local food in school meals.
- In August 2012, the NIFF Coalition launched a school food procurement pilot project to help schools secure bids for locally grown food. The NIFF Coalition is gathering price quotes, volume, and producer profile information needed to meet state and federal procurement guidelines. Schools will review the quotes and contact farmers to arrange for order and delivery information.
- In Riceville, the school board approved moving the school garden to a new location on school grounds; the goal is to provide increased accessibility and visibility.
- Students in 10 elementary schools, 5 middle schools, and 8 high schools are working with school gardens. Parents in 11 CSDs are involved in school gardens (29 elementary school parents, 18 middle school parents, and 3 high school parents).
- A local after-school club was created for elementary students at West Central Consolidated School District.

- Three districts have defined “local” for purchasing (those definitions vary) compared to only one that had defined it last year. A definition of “local” is required in order to apply geographic preference to school food purchases.
- Seven elementary schools, five middle schools, and six high schools are using school garden produce in school food programs.
- Food served at extracurricular school-sponsored events has changed to include healthier options in four schools.
- Riceville District is increasing healthy food choices in vending machines.
- South Winneshiek District is including healthy snacks in the milk machine and healthier foods in concession stands at sporting events including turkey sandwiches and yogurt.
- The Turkey Valley district removed candy bars from concession stands. They also added chicken breasts to offer a healthy option.
- In the Turkey Valley district the student council no longer sells doughnuts on Fridays
- New after school and summer programs are reaching more kids and in new ways. For example, the Wisdom and Wellness summer program was established in Postville for K-5 children and in the Howard Winn district for K-8th graders. An AmeriCorps or FoodCorps service member (our Resource Contact) taught 40 students cooking skills and basic nutrition.
- School food services are changing to include healthier meal options. Turkey Valley district changed to whole grain breads in school lunches and smaller portions. This is now a requirement of the new nutrition standards for 2012. Regional schools started making those changes before the new nutrition regulations went into effect.

Still, we aren’t there yet. School purchases of locally grown food decreased by \$174 from Year 2 to Year 3. However, taking into account the produce from school gardens, the total value of locally grown food served increased by \$5582. One of the most significant impediments to local purchases is procurement regulations and interpretation of those regulations. School food services are apprehensive about a lawsuit between two suppliers—one accusing the other of unfair business practices. The lawsuit emphasized the need for competitive bidding and put the process back into the spotlight and on the radar of school staff and auditors. The extra attention and focus on bidding made food service directors apprehensive and reluctant to use food not provided by their main vendor. Aggregation of local food exacerbates this problem since aggregated products qualify as one bid. Schools with limited budgets require low margins on food, which makes them an undesirable market for food hubs. We are working on this issue and will continue to pursue it in the next four years.

Impact on vulnerable children

Throughout the implementation grant period we have worked to increase access to healthy food for all children in Northeast Iowa, while always staying mindful that vulnerable children and families are central to our work. We focused our work on schools because in our region a high percentage of vulnerable children attend public K-12 schools. In rural

Iowa communities, schools are hubs of activity that unite community members of all backgrounds.

We estimate that through our focus on changing school food and providing education about healthy eating in 18 school districts we have reached over 5470 vulnerable children who are enrolled in the free or reduced lunch program. In 2011 38% of K-12 students in northeast Iowa qualified for free or reduced lunch, ranging from 20% to 71% by district, with a total of 5206 qualifying students enrolled in schools participating in food and fitness. In Postville, for example, 71% of children participate. We also know that these are conservative estimates of need. Principals in the region have told us that a significant number of children who qualify are not enrolled due to a norm of self-reliance that pervades much of the rural Midwest. In the region we have a high percentage of students who buy school lunch. In data collected during Fall Semester 2012, 75.2 % of students in northeast Iowa participated in school lunch and 18.6% in school breakfast. On average 4,358 free or reduced meals were served per day in October, 2012. Because participation in school lunch is high, we know that vulnerable children are gaining access to healthy food in the schools without stigmatization, and where the healthy choice is the easy choice.

PROGRESS TOWARD TRANSFORMING COMMUNITY FOOD ENVIRONMENTS

In Northeast Iowa, transforming community food environments predominately means increasing the quantity of food produced for human consumption and sold locally to individuals and institutions. This is one of our areas of most significant progress. A few of our accomplishments in the region include:

- In our region total local food sales is growing. In 2011 (the most recent year for which we have data) among the sample of farmers we surveyed, food sales increased \$1.5 million from the previous year. For that sample, 2011 sales of local food totaled \$3,602,608 (25 farms/farm groups reporting). In 2010 the total for 16 farms was \$2,050,000, and in 2009 17 farms reported \$1,120,000.
- To address the concern that we are seeing an increase simply because we have more farmers reporting this year, we tracked the 10 farmers who reported in both years. In 2010, sales from these 10 farmers were \$1.773 million. In 2011, sales for those 10 farmers were \$3.257 million, an increase of \$1.484 million, almost 84%.
- The number of farmer's markets/food stands accepting coupons for fresh local fruits and vegetables increased by 1 to 10 in 2012 compared to 9 in 2011, and none in 2009. This in combination with the markets accepting EBT for payment has increased access to fresh local foods for our most vulnerable families.
- In 2012 there were 18 new local food producers, joining 2011's 11 new producers.
- Five new food processing licenses were issued in the region in 2012, for a total of 21 licensed food processors, according to the IA Dept of Inspections and Appeals. This represents a 31% increase in one year, and a 62% increase over 2009. Total food processing licenses in 2009: 13; 2010: 12; 2011: 16; 2012: 21.

- Local food purchases by local institutions in 2011-2012 were \$1,197,195 up \$73,195 from 2010 and an increase of \$365,195 over the 2009 sales of \$832,000. Twenty-six institutions reported local food purchases in 2011-2012 compared to 20 in the previous year.

Impact on Access to Local Food

We estimate that 8527 people who receive SNAP benefits in our six counties (2010 data) now have seasonal access to fresh, local food at farmer’s markets. However, we do not know the actual level of participation. We also know that CDC’s Modified Retail Food Environment Index gives Northeast Iowa the lowest score for access to healthy foods. With the exception of Fayette County, about half the land area in the remaining counties have no healthy retail food outlet. Surprising to some people, Winneshiek, where Decorah is located, is one of those counties where half the land area has no healthy food outlet. See figure 3 for details.

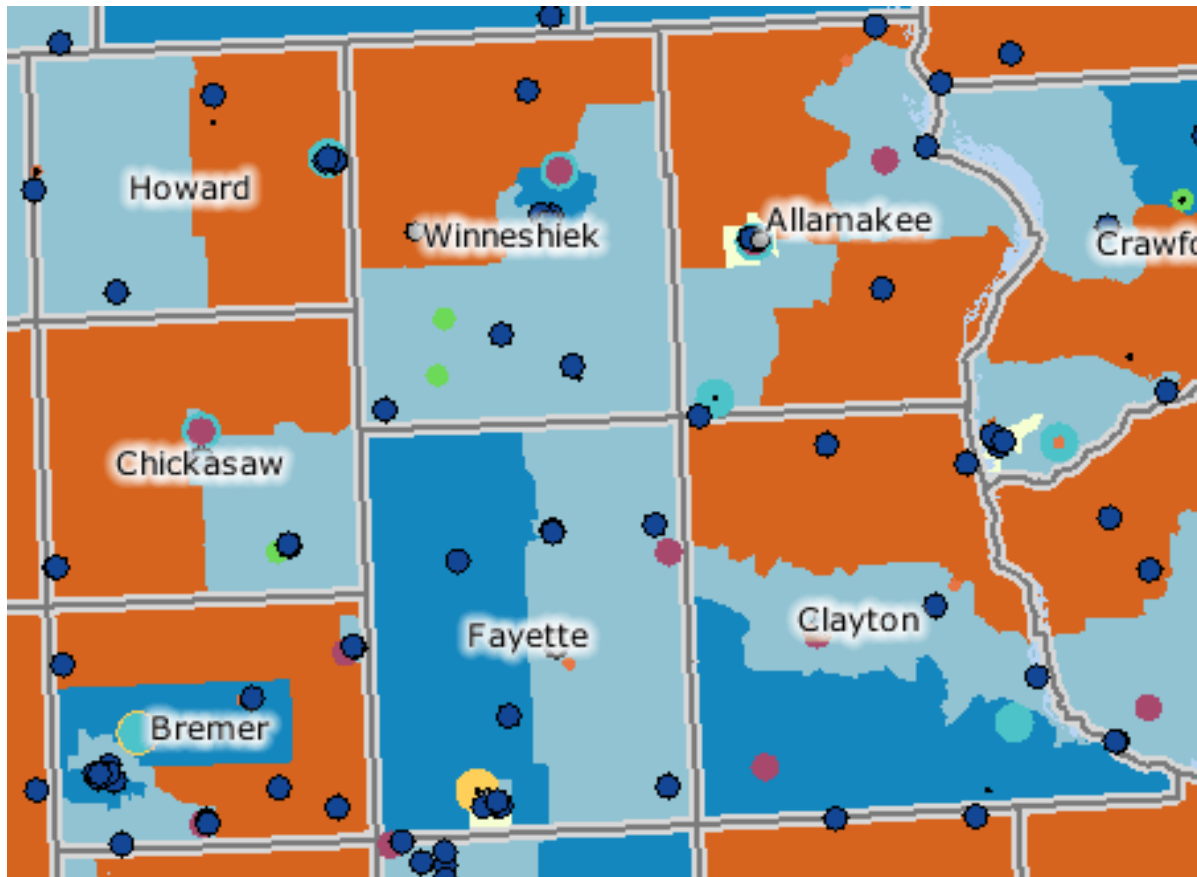


Figure 3 Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention *Modified Retail Food Environment Index 2011*

The areas in orange are those with no retail food access. The dark blue dots indicate the locations of schools. Locations of grocery stores are shown in various brightly colored dots. The Modified Retail Food Environment Index, a measurement created by the Centers for Disease Control to gauge access to healthy foods, takes into account both retailers that

typically sell less healthy food, such as fast food, and those that sell healthier food, such as grocery stores. Much of northeast Iowa has received the lowest score, indicated by orange. With the exception of Fayette County, about half the land area in the remaining counties in Northeast Iowa has no retail food outlet. With public schools being located prominently in the areas shown in orange, we have begun to explore alternative ways to provide access to healthy local food for vulnerable families in these areas.

Nick McCann, our Food Value Chain Coordinator, has initiated a few small pilot programs to test direct market arrangements that have the potential to be scaled up to best deliver local food to vulnerable families. We are early in the testing of a pilot program in which a box of local foods is delivered weekly to work places that employ moderate-income people. Nick is working to expand the program to Postville Community School (where our most vulnerable families and children reside) and early childhood education centers. We are laying the groundwork to create a healthy food access and distribution system that serves the broader community but can be targeted in schools, workplaces, or locations frequented by high numbers of vulnerable families or their children. This work is especially important because the percentage of people receiving SNAP assistance has risen dramatically in from 2007-2010. For example, in Howard County that number has increased 81% in just three years, with four others increasing 40-45%. Thus, our work is challenging in that we have an increasing number of vulnerable children and families in geographic areas without retail food outlets, at the same time we are working to increase access to healthy, local food. The food box pilot program and others will inform our work with local farmers, grocers, and businesses to create a sustainable business model for local food in Northeast Iowa. Once the infrastructure is in place it will serve many people who did not previously have access to healthy, local food.

PROGRESS TOWARD CREATING SAFE ENVIRONMENTS FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

School Wellness Teams continued to support SRTS efforts in Northeast Iowa during the 2011-2012 school year. Furthering these efforts, the region was successful in hiring a SRTS Liaison through an Iowa Department of Transportation grant. The Liaison incorporates SRTS education, encouragement and engagement into the schools. The work of the Liaison, Resource Contacts (AmeriCorps and FoodCorps service members), and School Wellness Teams, resulted in significant increases in SRTS and active living program participation.

The number of walkers and bicyclers to and from school has increased from 15% to 22% since the region's first Transportation Tally during the 2008-2009 school year. Beyond this figure, schools in the region are promoting lifelong healthful habits among children through daily integration of SRTS and active living efforts.

Postville and Oelwein are two examples of districts that have improved practices and outcomes. These two schools with the most vulnerable children are also the schools with the highest percentage of walkers and lowest percentage of children transported by family vehicle. Wings Park Elementary in Oelwein had the highest percentage of students walking or biking to and from school; 47% of students walk to and from school. In Postville 25% of

children walk to school while 35% walk home from school; only 24% go to school by family vehicle and 16% ride home.

In Postville

79% of students qualify for free or reduced price lunches in the 2012-13 school year.

- The Postville Food & Fitness 4-H Youth Team organizes active living events such as annual Tour de Allamakee bike ride and Park It, an active transportation and play event.
- Students have 20 minutes of physical activity before school starts. Volunteer school employees lead students in 20 minutes of physical activity instead of passively waiting for school to start.
- The school held a Wellness Workshop with a main focus of Walking School Buses.
- They have incorporated Animal Yoga and Stories in Motion into classrooms.
- They participate in the *Live Healthy Iowa 100-Day Wellness Challenge* .

In Oelwein

64.4% of students qualify for free or reduced price lunches this year.

- In the district, since the 2008-2009 school year, the percentage of walking and bicycling trips has more than doubled (from 18% to 46%).
- Wing Park has a very low rate of transportation by family vehicle (7% to school, 20% from school).
- Students can arrive early to school and perform circuit activities .
- The school participated in the *Live Healthy Iowa 100-Day Wellness Challenge* .

Other Examples of Accomplishments

We have active living successes throughout the region. A few examples include:

- Northeast Iowa has nine regularly scheduled Walking School Buses and variations
- New Hampton Community School District has two Walking School Buses and a weekly Walking Wednesday event for middle school students. Their Middle School students have the option of playing organized games in the gym after lunch.
- Decorah Community School District has five Walking School Buses (three go to and from school and two go to after-school activities)
- Riceville Community School District has a monthly school-wide Remote Drop-off Location. One Wednesday per month is designated Walking Wednesday; students are dropped off at central location. Parents must send a note why their child is NOT participating.
- North Winneshiek fourth grade students sit on “ball chairs” for a period of time during classes and take “brain breaks” periodically throughout the day.
- West Central’s Wellness Team is hosting Monday recreation nights; community members are invited to use the school gym and to participate in active play and games with their families.
- The Youth Team at Central of Elkader has a bike safety program for elementary

- school students. They make a fleet of bikes and helmets available during recess time.
- Riceville Schools completed Wildcat Trail (almost 1 mile) on school grounds for use by students and the community.
 - A new fitness trail is nearing completion at Starmont schools.
 - In North Fayette the high school started a morning walking club for staff, students and community members.
 - 913 people (488 children and 425 adults) participated in the Safari program, a free county-wide scavenger hunt that encourages families to become active in the parks

Historically, SRTS efforts have been designed for the urban setting. While much of our population is now living in or near metropolitan areas, it would be remiss to overlook our rural populations. Children in rural settings face the same general health issues of obesity and inactivity as do their urban counterparts. The lack of access to resources in rural areas may even heighten the intensity of these issues.

Rural settings, such as that of Northeast Iowa, face unique SRTS challenges. Safety, a major concern for all geographical locations, is also on the top of the list for Northeast Iowa. In many instances, it is just not safe for children to walk and bicycle to school. Distance between home and school is a primary concern, as rural students could easily live 10 or more miles away. Location of the school is another safety concern. The majority of school districts in Northeast Iowa serve multiple towns. Many of these schools are located on major highways and a handful are located in the middle of the countryside, miles away from the nearest town. These situations make walking and bicycling nearly impossible and not advised. These challenges, in addition to any number of other concerns, may deter students from using active transportation, but also present unique opportunities for those working within rural settings to be creative in approaching SRTS programming.

The Northeast Iowa SRTS program is paving the way for developing a rural, regional SRTS model to bring the benefits of SRTS to serve the wider population by breaking through this geographical barrier. With the development of such a model, the SRTS message will begin to reach more sectors of our population, ultimately increasing the health of our youth now and for years to come.

ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

We have described how we have built on our legacy of community engagement and we have begun to develop an even stronger, more diverse Regional Leadership Council. We have noted that community members participate on specific work teams. We described the depth of community engagement on School Wellness Teams. We believe that by having broad community leadership for school wellness we will sustain engagement, ownership, commitment, and leadership for continuing focus on health and wellness of children and families. Community engagement has been a hallmark of our work. We are known for it

regionally, within the state, and nationally. In Northeast Iowa the community owns the NEIF&F Initiative, because community members created it, lead it, and implement it.

Youth Engagement

In addition to the 32 youth members of school wellness teams, 16 of 20 school districts have Food & Fitness youth teams, with a total of 240 members. Youth teams have had significant influence in schools where change is underway and their influence is tangible. For example:

- Central School District wrote its job description for a new Physical Education teacher includes responsibility to serve as the FFI youth coach because of the influence of youth in their district
- Youth led at least one wellness team sponsored project in 8 districts
- Youth implemented the FEEST model in two pilot schools
- Youth in four districts were involved in youth-led concession stands
- Youth in six districts continue to participate in a three-year pilot project on cross age Farm to School teaching where HS students learn to teach prescribed local food and nutrition related content to elementary students. Four *additional* schools have adapted this concept and are teaching lessons on other food and fitness topics. A total of 110 youth learned to be cross age Farm to School teachers.
- Students in the West Central district are involved in planning school lunch menus; each classroom submits a potential lunch menu to the food service director. The director then selects a menu from each grade and incorporates the selections on a rolling basis throughout the year.
- Also at West Central, FFI youth team members are making daily “Food and Fitness Announcements” over the school intercom.
- Students at the West Union Elementary School donated school garden produce to the Fayette County Food Bank.

Realigned Partner Resources

Each of the core partners has realigned resources, as have other partners in the community. We have mentioned changes in position descriptions in two districts (food service director and physical education teacher). Other redeployed resources include:

- The ISUE Region 4 counties allocated resources to support the Food Value Chain Coordinator position.
- ISUE Region 4 counties budgeted .8 FTE for a Regional Program Coordinator support local food system work.
- ISUE Region 4 counties budgeted 0.5 FTE youth coordinator to support FFI youth teams
- At Luther College the Director of School Outreach expanded her focus to include capacity building for school wellness teams
- At Luther College the Sustainable Foods Educator expanded the focus of Luther’s farm-to-institution efforts to include regional institution outreach (including schools, nursing homes, hospitals, community college, etc.)

- At Luther College the Center for Sustainable Communities launched with Wellness and Sustainable Foods Initiative as one of their core programs; Director serves as core partner in NEIF&F
- At NE Iowa Community College the Associate Degree Faculty for Early Childhood Care providers incorporated NEIF&F curriculum to increase healthy food and physical activity options in childcare settings.
- At Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission the Senior Transportation Planner role was expanded to manage a non-infrastructure SRTS grant and supervise a regional SRTS Liaison
- All core partners allocated office space and associated resources to this work

Additional Information

Lessons Learned

- Relationships are primary—everything else is secondary. It is through strategic relationships that we have built community engagement, core partnerships, and sustainability.
- Changes in practice, policy, and mental models are inextricably intertwined. This requires a systemic approach. Therefore, building capacity of School Wellness Teams that focus on school food and active living is a high leverage intervention.
- Apply the “both/and” principle to engagement. Be aware of potential false dichotomies that can undermine engagement of key groups. In our region, carefully engaging people from all parts of the community has resulted in broad-based support for our initiative. We intentionally avoided setting up a false dichotomy of traditional agriculture/local food growers. Some of our most engaged community members are traditional producers who came to the table because they care about the health of their children and grandchildren.
- Evaluation results are effective leverage points for adjusting strategies within the initiative. We have learned from what worked well and from what didn’t work as well as we had planned.

Greatest Challenges

Without a doubt our greatest challenge has been increasing procurement of local food by school districts. The combination of requirements for multiple bids, severe school budget constraints, uncertainty about possible school consolidations and closures throughout rural Iowa, and the equipment, storage space, and skills needed for storing and preparing fresh food has been a formidable challenge. While we have laid the groundwork, we know that making a significant difference in the quantity of local food purchased will continue to require focus and innovative approaches. We also believe that continued policy work at the federal level is essential. Ten of 18 school districts are forging ahead. In eight others, we’ve seen major turnover through retirements, budget cuts, and resignations. It can be like starting over providing resources, engagement, encouragement, and support. For this reason, we realize that policy change and creating a culture of local healthy food, as well as creating the larger food system that will make local food more affordable, are critical to sustaining the results.

Mental models are deeply held, at a subconscious level. For example, school food staff have participated actively in skill-building workshops and learning communities. And yet, when their backs are up against the wall in terms of budget or student “happiness” they resort to serving food that makes kids happy in the moment instead of serving healthy food that students will learn to like over time. One mental model is, “Kids love us because we make them happy. Therefore, we will serve whatever makes them happy.” Another mental model is, “A meal isn’t complete without a sweet dessert.”

Beyond happiness, too many food service staff and other school personnel hold the mental model that, “Any food is better than no food. Anything is better than a child going hungry. Therefore, as long as we serve them food they will eat, we are caring for their health.”

Finally, we have spent three years striving to, “make the healthy choice the easy choice.” In school food service that is a complex shift. The prevailing regulations combined with budget constraints tend to make the unhealthy choice the easy choice. If an otherwise healthy meal is below the minimum number of required calories, the easy and cheaper choice is to bake a batch of pre-mixed chocolate chip cookies and add one to each tray—and to make kids “happy” at the same time.

The implication for our work is that food service staff must have parent and administrator support and expectations to act differently. We need to help them positively embrace what they can do to contribute to healthy development of kids. And we need significant policy change to assure the healthy choice is the easy choice.

Local & WKKF Technical Assistance Resources and Results

We do not have sufficient local TA resources in our rural region. The TA we have engaged from outside the region has made a huge difference. We have learned that we cannot sustain “good will” and regional community engagement without expert guidance and coaching. Technical assistance has helped us elevate the community voice and self-determination and give it credibility. We have been fortunate to have significant assistance from both WKKF technical assistance providers and those in Iowa beyond our region.

- ***Systems Thinking.*** WKKF offered capacity building at the earliest moment of the planning grant and generously funded several on-site work sessions for our leadership groups. Between 2009 and 2012 we continued investment with our local WKKF funds. Using a systems thinking approach has fundamentally shaped the way we work in communities including engagement, planning, and implementation of community-driven plans. The capacities we developed and ongoing consultation have given us a framework for focusing on relationships and navigating the dynamic environments we are working to change. This collaborative is remarkably adaptive and resilient.
- ***Communications.*** The expert guidance and capacity building in planning for strategic communications early, mid-way and again recently has been essential to focus our efforts in an ever-changing environment of information overload and

communications delivery modes. We have refined our messages and increased our level of sophistication.

- **Evaluation.** We have learned to integrate evaluation and to work in an inter-connected way with our evaluators so that we are constantly in a loop of feedback and reflection, informing the work as we proceed. We see the connections among our theory of change, the feedback provided by evaluation data, and adjustments we make to keep our actions aligned with our strategies and vision. We have developed the connections between evaluation and communication in ways that strengthen our messages and focus our evaluation.

Impact of Participating in WKKF Grantee Meetings

There is no question that the opportunity to bring an expanded group of community members into this discussion and networking has created a broader foundation of understanding and value of creating healthier communities. To have the experience of being connected to the national movement has given the local work very meaningful context. Grantee meetings have added value by validating our work, helping local stakeholders to see the common ground, and inspiring all of us by learning about amazing work around the country. Grantee meetings are a rich space for gathering ideas that we have brought back and applied directly to our work in NE Iowa. Most of all, because we are spread out over 6 counties – the size of the state of Connecticut – grantee meetings have been a tremendous opportunity to build regional relationships to sustain our efforts.

Unanticipated Outcomes

In planning and early implementation of the community action plan, we have had a significant focus on providing mini-grants to schools. It has been a valuable way to authentically engage schools in education and awareness. Over the last year as we have worked intentionally towards local commitment for policy and environmental changes to support healthy choices in schools, we have seen a growing need for FFI outreach, support and coaching in the schools verses additional funds for projects or activities. We fully realize that the work we have been doing over the last three years will continue to require the presence of FFI outreach – resource contacts in schools – to be sustained.

We have also realized that in order for the schools to make a sustained commitment to wellness with greater access to local healthy food and physical activity opportunities, we must have the parents deeply engaged, actively supporting school efforts and advocating for policy change. Parent engagement will also advance active transportation to and from schools.

Intended Work Not Undertaken This year

The new federal school food regulations impacted the school food work in ways that we could not have predicted. The new menu requirements have been mandated without adequate support and capacity building for school food services across the state. The emphasis of strict nutritional standards and compliance was a barrier for food service to incorporate new local food recipes that they had created together in workshops in the previous school year. We developed a plan to provide support for the co-creation of a

regional cycle menu that met the new federal guidelines and integrated local food options. This effort took precedence over the emphasis of the earlier plan for menu changes with local food. The new school food regulations, coupled with school district trepidation over bidding processes, impacted the advancement of local procurement for this school year. However, the new requirements also positioned us to use more local food by creating a new cycle menu. This would have been much harder to implement without the mandated change. We believe that in the long run the new regulations will support the outcomes we seek to create.

Recommendations to others working in this area

- Invest in the relationships of your core community leadership group. It must be a high priority.
- Build your collective capacity to use a systems approach—and use it in all of your work.
- Connect the work with partners/organizations that are aligned with your mission; seek mutual contribution of resources that are complementary.
- Stay focused on what you are trying to create. Seek only funding that clearly aligns with your vision and strategies. Avoid the trap of chasing any and all funding in ways that will take you off course.
- Learn to integrate and use your evaluation efforts to inform the work as you go.

**APPENDIX A: Organizational Structure
NE Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative**

**Regional Leadership Council Bios
November 27, 2012**

Sue Burrack

I am a Starmont School District administrator. I began my career in education in 1980. I have worked as a high school language arts teacher, at-risk coordinator, principal and work experience coordinator. Through my work in education, I have facilitated teams which have secured over \$2.5 million in grant funding for various projects. I understand the challenges faced by today's youth and want to be part of helping youth have healthier lifestyles.

Lori Egan

I have served as the Health Programs Director with Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation (NEICAC) in Decorah, Iowa since January 2003. NEICAC advocates for the attainment of "self-sufficiency" of individuals and families residing in Northeast Iowa. In my position as Health Programs Director I administer the majority of the health related programming for the agency. I have been committed to the work of this initiative in an effort to keep the needs of our most vulnerable populations in mind when working to improve the health and well-being of our communities.

Brandon Friedlein

My name is Brandon Friedlein and I have been with FFI since its first meeting was held. In December I completed my degree in Ag Business at Upper Iowa University. I am employed by Windridge Implements in Elkader and will be moving back to the Guttenberg area this coming May. I am making this continued commitment to FFI because I truly believe it is a good cause and will benefit not only the entire region, but someday my children as well. I am willing and excited to continue to be a part of such an important group in our area.

Lindsey Gaul

I am a junior at the New Hampton High School. I have served as a member of the New Hampton Food and Fitness 4-H Youth Team, FFI Regional Leadership Team, and the NE Iowa Food and Fitness Regional Council. I was actively involved in Food and Fitness conversations with local legislators to help bring awareness to work of NE Iowa. I serve as a Wrestling Manager at the New Hampton High School.

Elaine Govern

I love Iowa. I graduated from the University of Northern Iowa. My first teaching assignment in English/Speech with a drama emphasis was at Columbus High School in Waterloo where I directed 11 plays including *Oklahoma!* and *Pirates of Penzance*. Later I earned an MA in Library Administration. I was granted a scholarship at the College of Theatre Arts in Pasadena. I have taught for 19 years, including at NIACC for College Composition and Public Speaking courses. Volunteering is a necessary entity in my life as evidenced by chairing the citizens committee for the past 25 years to develop the Wapsi-Great Western Line Trail in Howard and Mitchell Counties. I was the Project Coordinator to build and raise funds for the Riceville Public Library. Presently I serve as an officer on the Riceville Area Economic Development, Howard County Economic Development Board, the Foundation Boards of the NE Iowa Funders Network and Howard County Foundation, the Fine Arts Council of Mitchell County, and the Northeast Iowa Food & Fitness Initiative. I chair the local SRTS

committee and work with the K-6th graders at Riceville in The Healthy Kids Club and Walking Wednesdays.

Sam Iverson

I am a junior at the Decorah High School. I serve as a member of the Decorah Food and Fitness 4-H Youth Team, Decorah School Wellness Team, FFI Regional Leadership Team and the NE Iowa Food and Fitness Regional Council. I am also a Farm to School team teacher reaching elementary students once a month with a focus on local foods. In addition to my Food and Fitness involvement, I work at Amundsen Clothing in Decorah, IA and I am active in my church youth group.

Jon Jensen (Representing Luther College as a core partner)

I am Associate Professor of Philosophy and Environmental Studies at Luther College and direct Luther's Environmental Studies program. I have been active with Food and Fitness for several years, especially with NEIFFI's work with school wellness teams. I am active in the movement to promote sustainability on college campuses. My current research focuses on education for sustainability. I live with my wife Rachel, and two young daughters, Sylvia and Lily, on an acreage east of Decorah.

Mary Koopman

I taught English and drama for over 30 years at Postville High School and was Director of religious education at church for as long. Retirement brought involvement in Retired Seniors Volunteer Program (RSVP) which led to the Food and Fitness Initiative. Postville, Iowa, became my focal point after the town and school endured many traumatic changes after the infamous raid. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative not only brought to Postville and the school wonderful changes in health and fitness, fresh food availability, but also better health for children and their families. Youth have always been a priority for me, especially their ability to have a positive and healthy impact on their future—and mine. The FFI has carefully and constantly widened and embraced more people, and more cultures in Postville. My greatest hope is to continue the Food and Fitness Initiative's work as a vital part of all of our communities and schools which will lead to a healthier Northeast Iowa and world.

David Lester

I have over 15 years of retail food experience in the Decorah area. I was the Luther College Dining Services Retail Manager for twelve years where I helped start the Luther College Gardens and increased Luther's commitment to more local purchasing. In 2010, I became the General Manager of the Oneota Community Food Co-op and continue to work on building the local food economy in northeast Iowa.

Pedro Lopez-Vega

I am a senior at the Postville High School. I serve as a member of the Postville Food and Fitness 4-H Youth Team, Farm to School teaching team, the Postville School Wellness Team and the NE Iowa Food and Fitness Regional Council. I am also serving as a youth leader with the Food Empowerment Educational Sustainability Team (FEEST) for Postville youth and adults. In addition to those activities I am in speech & drama, serve as a Peer Helper in Postville and work at the local grocery store.

Scot Michelson

I am a Park Ranger with the Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources at Volga River State Recreation Area near Fayette. I have been with the DNR since 1980, and at Volga River since 1986. I have a Bachelor's Degree from Upper Iowa University in Conservation Management and Public

Administration. I have been working with Food & Fitness since it started in 2007, mainly with the Active Living Work Group and the Vision Work Group. I feel that getting exercise is very important to our health, and where better to exercise than using the great outdoors in our State Parks?

Eric Nordschow

Having been in Food System and Food and Fitness discussions across many successes throughout the regions engagement, and in helping with developing our own future opportunities throughout, I will continue to bring systems perspectives and new learning through collaborative leadership and learning communities to help create more of the success we will all be a part of and find so rewarding to us personally, through our families and across our communities.

Karla Organist (Representing UERPC as a core partner)

I joined Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission (UERPC) in September of 2011 as the program manager for regional transportation and community planning. In this role I work closely with community stakeholders and residents to create public transportation plans, general transportation plans, comprehensive plans, hazard mitigation plans and more. Prior to joining UERPC, I worked briefly for First Children's Finance as a business consultant and financial trainer for childcare businesses. Before working for First Children's Finance, I had substantial experience in business planning, nonprofit management, grant writing and private sector engagement as associate director for Fayette County Economic Development (FCED). In her position with FCED, Karla provided direct assistance to businesses from entrepreneurial start-ups to established business expansions. I also bring entrepreneurial experience as a small business owner having owned and operated a successful coffee shop and café in New Mexico for five years. I have a Bachelor of Arts degree in elementary education with later coursework in business, math and statistics. I am currently enrolled in a Master's program in community development with a focus on nonprofit management and economic capacity building.

Teri Orr

In my current role as a Child Care Consultant/Supervisor with Child Care Resource & Referral of NE Iowa, I supervise the Decorah, New Hampton, and Independence offices as well as work with the centers and preschools in the Howard, Allamakee, Winneshiek and Clayton Counties (HAWC). This includes giving on-site support, technical assistance, and training to providers so they may meet state guidelines and work toward higher quality initiatives. Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) is a program to support quality child care throughout the State of Iowa. CCR&R is available to assist families in selecting child care providers who best meet the needs of a child and their family. Child Care Consultants provide on-site consultation to licensed preschools, centers, non-registered home providers, and Child Development Home providers. I live in Elkader with my husband, John, and three children, ages 16, 11, and 8.

Mary Schrandt Prouty (Representing the ISUE-Region 6 core partner)

I grew up on a dairy farm in Winneshiek County and have degrees in Family Environment & Family Life Education from Iowa State University and Kansas State University. My positions include Iowa State University Extension, Chickasaw County Extension Director from 1992-2004, Iowa State University Extension, Northeast Iowa Area Extension Education Director from 2004 until my retirement in 2010. However, from May 2012 – June 2013 I served as Iowa State University Extension & Outreach, Interim Regional Extension Education Director, serving Allamakee, Chickasaw, Clayton, Fayette, Howard, and Winneshiek counties. I currently live in New Hampton, husband Bill and son Zach. I've been aware of the Food & Fitness Initiative since its inception, serving as supervisor for ISUE staff back when NIFF was first organized, the Leopold Grant that preceded the WK Kellogg grant was obtained and the work began. It's been a rewarding experience

to watch it grow to encompass a larger geographic area, to engage more partners and citizens in the process.

Terry Rex

I was an Elementary Teacher and coach for 25 years. (5 in New Hampton, 20 in Oelwein). I am the Fuel Up TO Play 60 program advisor for Wings Park Elementary and was named Iowa's Fuel UP to Play 60 Program Advisor of the Year for 2011-12. My wife Kristina and I, and have four children and three grandchildren.

MJ Smith

I joined the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque in 2007 and currently direct affiliate foundations in the four-county rural region of northeast Iowa. I am a philanthropic advisor serving county affiliate foundation board members, donors, non-profits, and community leaders. Previously I was a freelance writer serving clients in health, religion, Mississippi River advocacy and community news. I am a fellow of the American Dietetic Association. My first career as a Registered Dietitian included authoring 14 books on food and nutrition.

I am married to Dr. Andy Smith, a family physician in Guttenberg, and we have two grown children. I was drawn to my current professional role through my experience as a donor, and I love assisting boards, donors, and organizations as they address today's most compelling needs with philanthropy.

Angie Tagtow

A former Fellow with the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy's Food and Society Policy Fellows program, I operate Environmental Nutrition Solutions, LLC, a consulting firm aimed at leveraging partnerships, communication and policies to build resilient and sustainable food systems that advance public health. My motto is *"Healthy soil, healthy food and healthy eaters – nourishing our natural resources is the optimal health insurance plan."* I am the Co-founder of the Iowa Food Systems Council and is the Coordinator of the Iowa Food Access and Health Working Group. I am also the founder and managing editor of the *Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition* and serve on the editorial board of *Childhood Obesity*.

I have almost 20 years of experience working in public health nutrition and food system arenas. My work with the Iowa Department of Public Health focused on researching food environments and the extent of food insecurity and hunger among WIC participants, integrating food system indicators into community health needs assessments, developing health improvement plans, and establishing public health performance standards. I currently serve on the Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics House of Delegates and I am co-chair of the Academy's Standards of Professional Practice on Sustainable, Resilient and Healthy Food and Water Systems Work Group. I am a past chair of the Hunger and Environmental Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group of the Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics. I recently moved to Northeast Iowa.

Fernando Vaquero

I am an industrial engineer with fourteen years of experience in food industry and agribusiness (Coffee, Palm Oil and Dairy products (cheese, protein drinks and natural cheese). My work experience is a mix of private sector and NGO's. In my NGO (www.technoserve.org) experience I help in the implementation of programs for small farmers in Honduras and Central America in order to improve yields and access to technology (give value added to their primary production). Also help them with the introduction of their product to the global market such as Coffee, Vegetables and Coco. In the private sector I had mainly work on the dairy industry and Palm oil. In

the United States I have worked on the production of Cheeses, Protein Drinks and Lactose Free Milk. (For worked for Lepino Foods and Swiss Valley Farms). I am married with two Daughters. We have been living in Calmar Iowa for almost 15 month and we lived in Roswell New Mexico prior of moving to Iowa. I enjoy playing volley ball and roast coffee. I am really excited to join this initiative and hope I can help on the implementation of this program.

Liang Wee (Representing NICC as a core partner)

I serve as president of Northeast Iowa Community College. I believe that every member of a community can impact its vitality. One way to achieve that is through supporting the work of the Food & Fitness Initiative (FFI) that aims “to achieve the highest quality results for children and families in Northeast Iowa.” By agreeing to serve on the Regional Leadership Council, I envision the synergy of our collective efforts lifting children and families in the communities we serve.

Duane Willhite

I am in my third year here at North Fayette. Previously I was Supt at Lynnville-Sully for 7 years. Prior to that I served as HS Principal at Denver, (IA) and spent 14 years in the classroom as a HS science teacher. I am interested in FFI because it is such a great idea for generating knowledge and resources for healthier eating and lifestyles. Since it also heavily supports local foods it is a win/win situation, supporting local farmers as well as our children and their families.

Nancy Yeldon

My bio is very short as I have worked at Clayton Co. VNA for the past 35 years. I am currently the Director and continue to work in all areas of public health and home care. I graduated from St. Luke’s School of Nursing in Cedar Rapids, and then worked one year at University of Iowa on a cancer surgery floor before starting with Clayton Co. Public Health. In 1997 Clayton Co. PH merged with Dubuque VNA to become Clayton Co.VNA.

Home care and public health are my passion and I do enjoy what I do. Every day is a new challenge and it is exciting we can work with community partners to improve the health of our county residents.

Northeast Iowa Food & Fitness Operations Team Member Bios

Ann Mansfield - Project Coordinator

Ann has 30 years experience in health care and facilitation utilizing process improvement, multidisciplinary teams and systems thinking to achieve desired outcomes. Her degrees include BA-Nursing from Luther College and MSN from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is a life-long resident of the region.

Teresa Wiemerslage - NE Iowa Food & Farm Coalition

Teresa is the Program & Communications Coordinator for Iowa State University Extension in northeast Iowa. Half of her time is spent coordinating the work of the Northeast Iowa Food & Farm Coalition (NIFF). She holds a BS in Biology and Microbiology from South Dakota State University and a Masters in Plant Pathology from Iowa State University. She has a strong background in plant science including horticulture and agronomy. She lives on a fourth generation cow-calf operation along the Minnesota border where they finish 180 head of beef annually.

Emily Neal - School Outreach Coordinator

Emily is the Director of School Outreach for Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. She has a Masters in Science Education and an undergraduate degree in Exercise Science, both from the University of Iowa. Emily has over 18 years of experience teaching people of all ages about integrating concepts of wellness, sustainability and stewardship into their lives. She is responsible for supervising FoodCorps and AmeriCorps members that serve in over 18 school districts throughout Northeast Iowa. Together, they help districts foster healthy environments for students, staff and the communities they serve.

Lynette Houser- Youth Engagement Coordinator

Lynette is the Regional Youth Coordinator for ISU Extension and Outreach in Region 4. She has a degree in education from Northeast Iowa Community College and was the county youth and 4-H coordinator in Howard County for 13 years. She coordinates youth engagement for the Initiative by supporting school-based 4-H youth teams. 4-H is a community of young people across America who are learning leadership, citizenship and life skills.

Haleisa Johnson - Early Childhood Program Coordinator

Haleisa has 30 years of experience in healthcare and healthy lifestyle education and has served as co-leader of the Community Health work within FFI since 2006. She holds degrees from Winona State University in Communications and Sociology. She looks forward to working with parents and providers of young children to encourage a healthy environment for them now and in the future.

Ashley Christensen - Safe Routes to School Liaison

Ashley is a northwest Illinois native with two Bachelor of Science degrees from Iowa State University in Kinesiology and Health, and Animal Science. With a passion for active living, in addition to her background in community and public health, she is very excited to join the UERPC team. Ashley is available as a SRTS resource throughout the region.

Maren Stumme-Diers - Food Sustainability Coordinator

Maren is the resource contact for school gardens and institutional food buyers. She works with the Food and Fitness Initiative and Luther College as a Sustainable Foods Educator. At Luther Maren

works on edible landscaping, campus gardens, community gardens and the facilitation of education opportunities related to food. On behalf of Food and Fitness she provides support to school gardens and food service directors throughout the region as they work to incorporate more local food into the menu. Maren graduated from Luther College with degrees in Environmental Studies and Spanish.

Nick McCann, Food Aggregation Hub Business Development

Nick joined Iowa State University Extension and Outreach as a regional Food System Value Chain Coordinator. Nick helps farmers develop new products, lead discussions on product aggregation and distribution, and identify new partners and urban markets for those products in the Driftless Region. Nick was previously a Sustainable Agriculture Business Specialist at the Des Moines office for the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT). He holds master's degrees in business administration and sustainable agriculture from ISU, where he focused on efficiencies at small meat plants in Iowa.