

FFI County Profiles- Fayette County



Why Food and Fitness?

The North Fayette Food service staff conducted healthy breakfast taste tests this spring. As a result, they added whole-wheat vegetable muffins, strawberry banana smoothies and banana burritos to the menu.

A fitness trail is under construction at the Starmont Community School.

School Spotlights

The Oelwein Community School District has successfully created wellness programs for families. The following wellness events were incorporated into the school year: 1) Fall Harvest Festival, 2) Spring Safety Fair, and 3) Parent and Grandparent days. In addition, Oelwein has had a lot of success with their "Fitness Fridays" for kindergarten students.

West Central's Farm to School program last included taste tests featuring local food, such as roasted kabocha squash and spiced squash cookies and a visit from a farmer from Gordon's Gardens. They also have an after school local foods cooking club and a garden.



The Northeast Iowa Food & Fitness Initiative (FFI) is a six-county effort dedicated to creating healthy places where all children and families can thrive. We are working to increase access to affordable, healthy, locally grown food and opportunities for physical activity and play for all. The FFI is one of nine Food & Fitness collaboratives supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation Food & Community Program.

Obesity is a growing problem all over the United States. Obesity has been linked to common diseases, including diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, and some cancers. In fact, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention the cost of obesity related illnesses in Iowa in 2003 was \$783 million. It is estimated that obesity and related diseases cause an annual loss of productivity in the U.S. worth \$73.1 billion¹. In contrast, there is "irrefutable evidence" that physical activity is effective at protecting against cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer,

hypertension, obesity, depression and osteoporosis². Similarly, high fruit and vegetable consumption is linked with lower incidence of cancer, stroke, and heart disease.

Experts agree that the best chance of reversing obesity trends include community interventions to change environments and policies. Communities can create a culture where the healthy choice is the easy choice— making available healthy food and space and time for exercise.

To make this a reality FFI works in three areas: school wellness, the local food economy, and active living. This report highlights FFI's achievements in Fayette County in these three areas.

¹Finkelstein, EA, DiBonaventura M, Burgess SM, Hale BC. "The Cost of Obesity in the Workplace." *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 52(10): 971-976, 2010.

²Warburton, D. E. R., Nicol, C. W., & Bredin, S. S. D. (2006). Health benefits of physical activity: The evidence. *CMAJ*, 174(6), 801-809.

Fayette County Food and Fitness By the Numbers...

33.5% of adults in Fayette County are obese, the state average is **28.4%**

18.1% of children grades 3-5 in Iowa were overweight in a 2005 study

\$46,745 in grants awarded to Fayette County schools for wellness efforts.

\$824 spent by Valley Community School service on local foods

18 staff members and school teams participated in Walk Across Iowa at Oelwein School in 2012.

92 individuals from Fayette County and **661** stateside partners are connected to FFI's work



The Northeast Iowa Food & Fitness Initiative is grounded in the work of these core partners:



IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
Extension and Outreach



Active Living Spotlight

Turkey River Corridor Supports Exercise and Economy

The Turkey River Recreation Corridor (TRRC) is an Iowa Great Place and an FFI success. When

FFI began in 2007 each county formed a team. The Fayette County team included several people interested in trails to promote fitness and boost the economy in Fayette and Clayton Counties. They formed a work group called the Trails Committee. They broke off from FFI with a solid plan and used their affiliation with the movement to leverage grants and make their plan reality.

In 2009 the Recreation Corridor was named an Iowa Great Place. Including the towns of Elkader, Elgin, and Clermont and the counties of Fayette and Clayton the TRRC was the first region to be named so. Eighteen projects are included in their Iowa Great Place plan. Two projects span across both counties- a water trail, which was dedicated in July, 2011, and a land trail. Phase one of the land trail, connecting Clermont to Elgin will be dedicated on August 25, 2012, at 10 a.m., at the bridge near Valley of Elgin School. The TRRC has raised over three million dollars for their projects!

There is already evidence that local businesses may benefit from the TRRC as it draws visitors in. This summer Clermont has seen visiting bicyclists and kayakers. On July 4th, 49 cars were parked in the lot near the new bridge by Valley School.

Prior to the completion of the land trail, Valley School forbid students to walk or bike to school, although 39% of students live within two miles, because of the danger of the highway. With the new trail, the school is changing the policy. The Safe Routes to School liaison, an FFI partner, is working with Valley School prepare students to walk or bike to school, including having a bike rodeo and pedestrian classes.

TRRC uses events to introduce residents of Fayette and Clayton Counties to the TRRC. The 2012 Turkey River Safari lasts from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day. Registered participants pick up a free Safari Adventure Kit at any public library in Clayton or Fayette County or at the Osborn Nature Center. The kit includes a draw-string backpack, a safari map, a guidebook, a pack of crayons, and a Turkey River water trail map. The safari map shows 20 locations along the TRRC included in the safari.

Destinations include Goeken County Park, Gouldsburg Park, the Lincoln Statue, the Big Springs Trout Hatchery, the Motor Mill National Historic Site, and more.

Once at each site, families use their guide book to locate a post with a plaque on top and make a rubbing of the plaque in their guide book using a crayon. Families that visit 15 of the 20 sites return their guidebook to the location from which they received their Adventure Kit and register for a chance to win a T-shirt. By the end of June, 2012, 49 families had joined the Safari.

The TRRC is also partnered with Iowa Rivers Revival to plan the Turkey River Rock on August 11, 2012. Canoers and kayakers float down the Turkey River from Elkader to the Motor Mill Historic Site. During the float, they learn to be 'river barometers' who assess the health of the river as they float down it. A local meal of fish and sweet corn follows the float along with live music at the Motor Mill.

More information on the TRRC and current events can be found at:

www.turkeyrivercorridor.com

New Greenhouses in Fayette County Meet Demand for Local Veggies

The Northeast Iowa Food and Farm Coalition has been working to create opportunities for local food producers since 2007. Their goal is to create a healthy food culture which demands high quality local food.

Two new greenhouses have since opened in Fayette County, taking advantage of increasing demand for local vegetables. J&J Produce opened near Hawkeye in January 2010. Jon and Janet Halverson first got the idea of starting a greenhouse from their neighbor who started a greenhouse a few years earlier. The Halversons farm with Jon's parents, custom feeding hogs and growing corn and soybeans. After researching the market they decided that a greenhouse rather than buying more land for row crops was the best way to expand their operation.

Similarly, Eric and Fern Unruh had always dreamed of having a greenhouse even when they were row crop farmers in Greensburg, Kansas. Their opportunity came when they moved back to their hometown, West Union. They found there was a good market for local food in the area. They opened the Rolling Hills Greenhouse in March, 2011.

Both producers found they could complement, rather than compete with other growers in the area. The Halversons chose to grow grape and cherry tomatoes so as not to compete with a friend growing large tomatoes. The Unruhs found space in the market for high quality local lettuces and herbs. The Rolling Hills Greenhouse's most popular products are a lettuce mix and an arugula mix. They also sell Boston Butter Bibb lettuce as a live plant. They harvest the plant with the root and package it in a bubble package that acts like a crispier. Using their certified kitchen and packing facility they are able pick, process, and cool

their lettuces and herbs within minutes of harvest, ensuring a high quality product.

Both growers sell the majority of their products to HyVee stores in northeast and east-central Iowa. They have also sold to hospitals and universities, such as Luther College in Decorah.

The community has responded positively to the greenhouses. In Fern Unruh's own words, "I find it thrilling to see their enthusiasm." The Unruhs sell their products to the rest home, hospital, grocery store, and Shell station in West Union; local businesses want to buy from one another. In addition, the Unruhs coordinate with other producers to make their deliveries. The Halversons have also experienced a positive community response. Grocery stores are eager to purchase local vegetables. In addition, neighbors and friends often ask when their tomatoes will be in the stores following a break in winter.

Fayette County has benefitted from jobs created at the new greenhouses. Rolling Hills Greenhouse employs four part-time people on packing days. J&J Produce has eight part-time workers, including John Halvorson's parents and the Halvorson sons.

Both greenhouses are Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certified. They participated in ISU Extension workshops on preparing Farm Safety Plans, which are required for GAP certification, and went through mock audits prior to their official USDA audits. Johnice Cross, an FFI consultant, also coordinated the greenhouses and others to hold their GAPs audits on the same day so as to split the cost of bringing in the USDA inspector. FFI is proud to be able to offer services that help farmers access local markets.

Local Food Economy Spotlight