

Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Annual Narrative Report

Project Summary

Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness (FFI) continues to make steady progress toward our goals. As planned, we employed four strategies. A brief summary of each follows.

Strategy 1: Establish school district policies and practices that support healthy living of children, families, and community members. As we described in our theory of change, the development of the Iowa Food Hub in northeast Iowa has contributed significantly to the ability of school districts to purchase local foods. School purchases of local food more than doubled in the past school year. Seven schools doubled their purchases, two more than our goal for the year. In the last school year four more schools, for a total of 6 out of 17 schools achieved the bronze or higher level in the Healthier U.S. Schools Challenge. While moving in the right direction, parent engagement on school wellness committees continues to be a challenge.

Strategy 2: Ensure that caregivers and parents of children from birth to 5 provide health-promoting food and active play. We are especially encouraged by the level of participation and demand for FFI programs in early care and education settings. In the last school year, a high percentage of early care and education settings in the six counties participated in Farm to Early Education programs. We reached all low-income children who are enrolled in Head Start or Early Head Start and an additional 31 preschool classrooms in the region.

Strategy 3: Ensure that local, health-promoting food is available and affordable in all communities, neighborhoods and institutions. In addition to increasing purchases by schools, the value of local food purchased by non-school markets increased by 23%. Last year farm businesses and related institutions created 25 jobs, with 10 of those being full-time jobs. Purchases through the Iowa Food Hub more than tripled.

Strategy 4: Ensure that people use the built environment for physical activity, play and active transportation. Head Start children engaged in an average of 70 minutes of physical activity each day, ten minutes more than Head Start policy requires. Twenty-one walking school buses operated in 13 communities. Nine community coalitions are deepening efforts to make their community routes safer and more accessible for all.

One significant outcome for this year is the number of schools continuing their funding or co-funding for FoodCorps/AmeriCorps service members. In a time when rural schools are experiencing significant budget cuts and pressures to focus resources on reading, these schools placed a high enough priority on wellness and FFI programs to assure that a service member would be available to work in their schools. In 2014-15 ten schools had a service member.

Progress Toward Goals

In detail for each strategy, what follows are the results compared to the goal for each indicator last year:

Strategy 1: Establish school district policies and practices that support healthy living of children, families, and community members:

- Double school spending on local food in 2 years, triple in 4 years **ACTUAL: School spending increased from \$33,792 to \$72,020, but in only one year.**
- 75% of schools achieve the bronze or above level in the Healthier US Schools Challenge **ACTUAL: 35% currently meet the standard, compared to 12% last year.**
- Increase engagement and capacity of school wellness committees; 50% of participating schools at a high level of engagement in three years. **ACTUAL: 65% of schools rate as intermediate or high level of engagement on the school wellness team scorecard.**
- Increase capacity of school wellness committees to engage the community in parent education about healthy lifestyles and active transportation to and from school. **ACTUAL: 62.5% of schools have an intermediate level or higher of parent engagement.**
- All schools in NE Iowa have a youth coach and youth NEIF&F team **ACTUAL: During the last school year 14 out of 18 schools have a youth coach and active youth team.**
- **New Indicator:** Number of parent outreach events at schools and early childhood settings. **ACTUAL: More than doubled from 2013-14 school year to the last school year (39 to 82 events).**

Strategy 2: Ensure that caregivers and parents of children from birth to 5 provide health-promoting food and active play:

- 25% of Head Start centers incorporate local healthy food and appropriate daily minutes of physical activity **ACTUAL: 96% of the time (based on documentation) Head Start and Early Head Start centers reported that they met the requirement of 60 minutes of physical activity. On average, enrolled children had 70 minutes of physical activity each day, 10 minutes more than the requirement.**
- Six Head Start centers participate in Farm to Preschool programming (building on the NEIF&F Farm to School model) **ACTUAL: 100% (10 sites, 15 classrooms) participate in Farm to Early Education**

Strategy 3: Ensure that local, health-promoting food is available and affordable in all communities, neighborhoods and institutions:

- Double school spending on local food in 2 years, triple in 4 years; **ACTUAL: Spending doubled in one year.**
- Reaching 78% of schools. **ACTUAL: 14 of 18 schools. Up from 3 of 18 when we started.**

- Institutional purchases in NE Iowa have increased 50%. **ACTUAL: \$1.2M to \$1.8M**
- At least 40 new local food producers (10 of which will be youth or youth organizations) sell food to local markets; **ACTUAL: To date we have 32 new local food producers in the last three years.**
- Five businesses or organizations increase aggregation, storage and processing capacity for local foods in the region **ACTUAL: Seven businesses in the last year**
- Five venues implement programs or infrastructure to increase affordability and accessibility of local food **ACTUAL: Seven in the last year**

Strategy 4: Ensure that people use the built environment for physical activity, play and active transportation:

- Triple the number of communities with regularly scheduled walking school buses (WSB); **ACTUAL: In the last school year the number of WSB increased from 19 to 21, which is triple the number in the 2011-12 school year. 13 communities have a WSB; up from 9 in the previous year.**
- Double the number of walking school buses in current communities, and add three new communities with regularly scheduled walking school buses; **ACTUAL: Four new communities with WSBs this year.**
- 5 communities within the region incorporate elements that support active transportation into significant infrastructure projects; **ACTUAL: 3 projects in 3 counties, in addition to the 10 in 6 communities from the previous year.**
- 5 communities within the region engaged in community planning and development efforts incorporate active transportation as a central consideration in their strategies; **ACTUAL: 2 communities this year, in addition to the 7 in the previous two years.**
- Youth leaders participate in planning, advocating and implementing active transportation activities and community efforts **ACTUAL: 84 youth leaders participated during the past year**

We are seeing significant progress in all our primary areas of work. Building on the foundation of school wellness, local food system development, and built environment work, the early childhood strategy has moved more quickly than we anticipated. We are finding that the thirst for approaches to integrate healthy living into early childhood settings has created readiness for what FFI has to offer. This year we provided training to 230 early childhood teachers and staff and 24 early childhood education students. We are building their capacity to make environmental, policy, and curriculum changes to promote wellness and engage parents. We conducted Farm to Early Care celebration events at these sites, engaging 880 parents, grandparents, and other adults of significance to the children. We have developed a Farm to Early Childhood Education curriculum that has been adopted by many of our settings and incorporated into the Northeast Iowa Community College curriculum for early childhood education majors.

The Iowa Food Hub (IFH), a non-profit food hub that emerged out of the NIFF Coalition and the FFI, continues to aggregate and distribute foods produced in Northeast Iowa, lessening the effects of poverty. In 2014, IFH purchased \$236,518 from local farmers, more than three times as much as in 2013 (\$74,419). By July 2015, 64 farmers or farmer groups were selling their products to the IFH. The Allamakee New Beginnings Board, the host organization of the IFH, created a new vendor policy, which outlines the requirements for vendors to sell to the IFH and lists additional and exceptional attributes which the IFH would like from their vendors in the areas of geographic location, production practices, and social/economic impact. This allows the IFH to evaluate how well it is meeting its goal to distribute food produced on small, local, sustainable farms. Finally, the IFH moved to its own space in 2014.

In Active Living/Safe Routes to School we have focused on creating community partnerships to sustain programs. For example, Police departments have partnered to conduct Bike Rodeos in several communities (public safety/active living). All three IWALK projects in 2015 had support from city council, mayors, and city administrators. IWALK is a program administered by the Iowa Department of Public Health. It provides county offices with a mini-grant with which to form an IWALK coalition to assess a community's walking infrastructure and identify its strengths and weaknesses. FFI partners with local public health departments to obtain and implement these grants. The Walking School Buses are managed by the local community coalition and the Regional SRTS Coordinator. Volunteers, teachers, seniors, invested community members and older siblings, champion the day-to-day walking efforts.

We continue to work through FoodCorps/AmeriCorps service members for our work in schools. Schools have allocated funds to secure these service members. The service members are now located in more communities throughout the region, rather than being located just in Decorah but serving schools elsewhere. We believe this approach integrates the service members into their communities, and thus makes them a more integral part of the schools they serve. Evaluation interviews with outgoing RCs reflected this. Three schools updated their wellness policies in the last year.

FFI and Luther College collaborated with ten school nurses in the region during the summer of 2015 to collect BMI data from student records. The data are being used to better understand the weight status of children in the region to inform schools' work and create community conditions where the healthy choice is the easy choice. Reflection on results generated concern that schools cannot achieve health outcomes alone and need the broader community to engage. The overweight/obese rate was much higher than expected and it helped school administrators, teachers and nurses see that their effort alone was not having a significant impact on student weight status. As a result, the FFI is convening a regional collaboration for community health in December, 2015 with commitment from public health and community hospital administrators that they will attend.

We have noted some of the opportunities in our environment—early childhood readiness, partnerships for active living, Iowa Food Hub growth, and emerging interest in the work

from public health and hospitals. One continuing challenge is the lack of a backbone organization for the work. As is true in many systems, our greatest strengths—collaboration among four core partner organizations, and true community ownership—are also our shadow weakness. Because we do not have one central organization as a home, we also do not have an FFI office location, support staff, and basic equipment. This has meant that more of our funding goes into direct work with the community. But it also means that our ongoing administrative needs are not met efficiently, which results in our Project Coordinator adding these responsibilities and taking time from higher leverage activities.

Future Plans

We will continue employing four strategies to achieve our vision for children and families in Northeast Iowa. Those strategies and the updated/revised indicators are:

Strategy 1: Establish school district policies and practices that support healthy living of children, families, and community members

- 14 school districts buying local food
- \$100,000 in local food purchased by schools in the region
- 5 new schools achieving bronze level in the Healthier U.S. School Challenge
- Maintain the numbers of school wellness teams rated as high or intermediate capacity on the assessment
- Add parent volunteers to school wellness teams in all schools where there is readiness
- 14 Schools engaging 200 students on FFI youth teams

Strategy 2: Ensure that caregivers and parents of children from birth to 5 provide health-promoting food and active play

- 265 early childhood education providers participating in FFI capacity building workshops
- 100% of Head Start centers participating in Farm to Early Childhood Education
- 100% of Head Start centers incorporate 60 minutes of physical activity every day for children
- 1400 parents of WIC children reached with 5-2-1-0 messaging twice (2800 contacts)
- 2 additional early childhood care institutions in the region institutionalizing access to healthy local food and physical activity through policy change

Strategy 3: Ensure that local, health-promoting food is available and affordable in all communities, neighborhoods and institutions

- \$3 million in local food sold
- \$450,000 in IFH purchases from local farmers and processors
- 15 new local food producers selling food to local markets
- 10 additional venues implementing programs or infrastructure to increase affordability and accessibility of local food
- 70 local producers participating in IFH

Strategy 4: Ensure that people use the built environment for physical activity, play and active transportation

- 2% increase in active transportation to school, using the annual travel tally
- 21 walking/biking school buses operating
- 1000 students reached through bike rodeos
- 6 projects, 1 per county, that incorporate active transportation
- 75 youth leaders participating in planning, advocating, and implementing active transportation activities and community efforts

In addition to these strategies, we will take a number of steps in the next year to assure sustainability of our progress and FFI. Our intent is to form a partnership among FFI and the community hospitals and public health in the region in service of the FFI approach and health of children and families.

We believe that early childhood is the time we must intervene to assure health of children over their lifetime. Currently too many children are entering Kindergarten already overweight or obese. We will be seeking support to provide additional emphasis on this age group. In the long run, having kids arriving at school at a healthy weight will mean that the outcomes are more likely to be sustained. With conditions changed in schools, we can focus on maintaining the health of children rather than attempting to address health problems.

The IFH is on a good trajectory. We are confident that it will continue to grow and provide healthy local food to the region and beyond. We need to be certain that the connection among schools and IFH can be strengthened. To build toward that sustainability, this year we will build on the food hub/school delivery project to possibly include early care settings.

We have been working toward sustainability in the school wellness work by asking schools to pay an increasing share of FoodCorps/AmeriCorps service members. We have made progress and will continue to do so. Once schools experience the value they get for a very modest cost, they become more willing to invest. However, school budgets are extremely tight and school consolidation continues. Therefore, we must work doubly hard to help districts realize the importance of these positions.

Dissemination

Core partners and others have given numerous presentations, both nationally and throughout the state of Iowa. A few examples of presentations and other dissemination include:

- Spring 2015 Forums featuring FFI in 6 communities across the region
- FFI is a featured innovation on the Rural Assistance Center website.
- FFI was featured as an example of cross-sector collaboration for a state-wide food systems and community health project.

- On their October 5th national radio show, *Inside School Food* profiled the Iowa Food Hub and Decorah School Chef Chad Elliott on how food hubs and schools are working together to connect kids to local food in rural Iowa. <http://insideschoolfood.com/episode/iowa-food-hub/>
- On October 19th, during the topic of Talk of Iowa radio show the conversation included local food and season extension. At the 32-minute mark, Teresa Wiemerslage discussed how food hubs can help keep local food moving even in the winter months. <http://iowapublicradio.org/post/harvest-proving-plentiful-across-iowa#stream/0>
- NE Iowa Farm to School headlined the October 22 blog post by the National Sustainable Agriculture Network, <http://sustainableagriculture.net/blog/building-on-farm-to-school-success-act-today/>
- Partners presented at the state and national Safe Routes to School conferences
- Farm to Early Education was the focus of several state presentations
- Our youth coordinator and youth presented at several state-wide Iowa State University Extension and Outreach conferences.
- Our conversations with the Regional Food Systems Working Group and Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Regional Directors about our systems approach resulted in both groups engaging Kathy Zurcher to develop their systems thinking/systems leadership capacities.
- Project Coordinator participated in 6 month inaugural Fellow program sponsored by America Walks and the CDC; numerous presentations about NE Iowa FFI given during the 6 month program including the National Walking Summit in D.C.
- Project Coordinator provided presentations to 8 community hospital leadership teams and 5 county public health departments to foster regional collaboration with the upcoming CHNA-HIP and potential focus on healthy eating and physical activity.

People are most interested in how we have gone about creating and sustaining this work in the region. In some cases, people are seeking shortcuts to systems change. We are always clear that there are no shortcuts. Community engagement is central to all we do, and that engagement takes time. One of the systems thinking axioms, “Slower is faster”, is what we tell them. Unfortunately, too many other approaches suggest recipes (“Implement these 5 things and you will be healthy.”), which sound like quick fixes. The message we give is, “People will only support what they help to create.”

We have secured a Telligen grant to hold a dissemination workshop for interested leaders throughout the state of Iowa and adjacent Midwest states. We will implement that workshop in Summer 2016. The basis of the workshop will be the systems approach we have used to achieve innovation in community health. We intend to develop the capacities of those leaders in a way that will increase their ability to lead an initiative like FFI.

We are uploading one attachment to supplement this narrative report: FFI CAP Planning Worksheet for Year 7