

## **NE Iowa FFI Major Accomplishments in Year Two:**

**14 School Districts meet to discuss local foods and active living:** School districts in our five counties learned it could be possible to plan together as a region to change the food and fitness environments in our schools. Administrators from 14 of the 18 local school districts agreed to send representatives to participate in a Regional School Planning Team to explore options for getting more local healthy foods and increased physical activity into the daily routines of youth and their families. Schools realized if they collaborate together they may be able to purchase food together, share ideas that work, and connect with community resources through the NE Food and Fitness network. The NE Iowa FFI is excited because through this collaboration we could start to help the school system change their system so children and their families can have access to healthier food options and more opportunity for physical activity and play.

After just five planning meetings, here is what was reported by the FFI Regional School Team when they were asked the following question: "Tell us about one item, either personally or professionally, that has happened since our meeting a month ago."

### **Schools reporting changes and activities to support Physical Activity:**

- 5 Schools reported that their high school FFI Youth Teams attended the FFI Youth Conference on April 2. They were so excited. They helped organize and are going to help lead "Go-The-Distance Days" at their schools this spring to promote being physically active!
- Our school is holding a "Walk & Roll Day on May 13<sup>th</sup>" and a Retreat for our FFI Youth Team to plan for next year.
- We took the idea that was shared here and we now have recess before lunch. Our elementary principal has started to make healthy policy changes based on the information we're bringing back from these meetings!
- Riceville Schools held a bike rodeo and we had 140 students participate.
- A "Safe Routes To School" community meeting was held in Ossian and several other communities by the Bicycle Safety Coalition.

### **Schools reporting changes and activities to support Healthy Eating**

- Our school has an Open Lunch campus and our Wellness Committee is going before the school board next week to request they change this policy to a closed campus for lunch. (Their youth often go to the local Casey's convenience store and purchase unhealthy choices.)
- Our kids took the lead to initiate a Salad Bar in our school! They completed school surveys, found out what the high school youth wanted to eat and they worked with our food service staff to and administration to make the changes happen. Our kids wanted healthy, fresh foods. I'm so proud of them.
- Our youth team attended the FFI Youth Conference and they are building on ideas from the information learned. We are planning to open our concession stand after school to offer healthy snacks to our athletes and students riding the bus home.
- Fruit is less expensive right now so I've been able to purchase more fruits into our school lunch program and the kids LOVE THEM! I also had a H.S. student approach me and ask if

he could work as a “lunch lady” for a day. He wanted to participate in the experience and have two students videotape part of the experience. It was a very good experience and even though he had some restaurant experience through his family....he went away saying how his lower back was hurting. He was a lot of fun to have for the day and he went away with a new understanding of how food service works in a school setting.

- Luther College and Upper Iowa University Campus have gone to a no-tray campus. (Less food waste.)

### **School reporting changes to Health Education in the Classroom**

- I’ve been focusing on “wellness” topics in my classroom and the youth seem really positive about the information being shared.
- I’ve been teaching cooking labs and my kids are more open to veggies since the FFI Youth Conference.
- In the next two weeks our school will be charting our 9-12 BMI stats and taking the information to our School Board so they understand why supporting the efforts of the FFI Youth Team and the Wellness Committee are so important.
- I was asked to present what I’m doing in my Family & Consumer Science classroom to our school board and I highlighted the NE Iowa FFI.
- We are working to align our curriculum around health issues (i.e. if they’re talking about healthy bones in health, the PE teacher will lead the students in activities that support healthy bone development.)

**Youth Engagement Coordinator Hired:** Youth engagement has been a key component of FFI from the start. A Youth Engagement Coordinator was hired in August 2008 to guide this component. This past fall school-based Food & Fitness youth teams started forming. Five teams are up and running and six more are forming.

### **Youth Conference**

On April 1, 2009, the youth held a student conference and 111 youth attended from throughout the five county region. The conference also provided youth and adults alike the opportunity to network with each other and educate others both locally and from other parts of the state on work youth are doing in the food and fitness arena in Northeast Iowa. Learning workshops, cooking demonstrations, nutrition jeopardy, fitness activities, and food sampling were all part of the program, as was a session on connecting their work with policy change. The conference was funded in large part through local business donations secured by FFI youth, two of whom decided to make good use of a snow day to circulate around town and ask businesses to support the conference. Their efforts that day landed them \$200 and eventually \$1200 used to support the conference. Photos of the event are online at

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/iowafoodandfitness> .

See the following two links to the FFI Youth Conference short videos:

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/webcast/twominfoodfitness.html>

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/webcast/twominfoodfitness2.html>

Link to the newest forming FFI Youth Team and they’re upcoming 5K Community Fun Run

<http://www.central.k12.ia.us/Food%26Fitness/Page%201.html>

### **Youth-led System Change in Schools**

These youths' actions are leading to system change in our schools. Some youth surveyed students and families on food choices available at School Concession Stands. People responded they not only wanted healthier options, but were willing to pay more. Youth have shared the survey results, along with research-based information on the rising obesity rates of children with their local booster clubs. In one district, the booster club is now working to put healthier food options on their menu. In another school, the food service director has gotten rid of unhealthy options based on FFI youth calculating fat and sugar content of a la carte items. The youth are setting up informational displays at parent teacher conferences, making and displaying posters around the schools with healthy food facts to educate students and teachers, and working to change school policy that will allow PE to count toward students' GPA instead of sufficing as a pass or fail. Students also took an innovative approach to conducting a survey on what students like to eat by distributing two months' worth of school lunch menu calendars to students and asking them to circle the lunches they like best. From this, they learned students actually prefer healthier food options.

**Farm to School Project:** The Leopold Center approved a \$30,000 two-year grant to FFI to begin a "Farm to School" project. The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship selected the NE Iowa FFI as an Iowa Farm-To-School State Chapter and awarded them an additional \$5,000. The project will build connections between local food producers and distributors to educational institutions, identify barriers to purchasing local foods, and assist with a year-long school menu that utilizes local foods. The goal is to support school gardens and use the gardens to reinforce healthy eating and active living.

**Mini-grants encouraged food growers:** Partnering with the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, the Iowa Community Vitality Center and local organizations, one of the FFI work groups, the Northeast Iowa Food and Farm Coalition, awarded \$10,485 in \$250 mini-grants to 34 local agriculture and food entrepreneurs to initiate or expand local food production and businesses. In two years, this has leveraged over \$745,965 in food and fiber infrastructure and resources for the region. By tracking just 4-5 institutions in the past two years, there has been an increase of more than \$377,595 in local food purchases.

**The formation of a food education related non profit.** In response to the Kellogg Foundation Food and Fitness Initiative, Northeast Iowa resident and Seed Saver's Exchange board member David Cavagnaro, founded a new nonprofit called the Pepperfield Project northeast of Decorah. This new non-profit will coordinate with other efforts such as school and community garden programs that arise from the Food and Fitness Initiative, with education opportunities offered by Oneota Co-op and Luther College. Pepperfield will connect with local chefs to assist families in improving their diet, managing their food budget, and learning how to cook fast, easy meals from healthy ingredients. The Pepperfield Project will be offering a wide variety of classes and internships in gardening, seed saving, food preservation, and easy healthful cooking ideas.

**Northeast Iowa Funders Network established:** In April 2009 a collaboration of leaders, community foundation representatives, and others came together to build a common vision and better align the efforts of the five county foundations.

**Northeast Iowa Resource Conservation and Development (RC & D) Safe Routes to School was funded due to partnership with FFI.** The RC & D received a \$78,000 grant to coordinate a Safe Routes to School project. They are working with 12 school districts to identify safe routes, barriers on walking routes, and strategies for improving safe walkable routes to schools.

**Walkable Bikable Communities** Chris Seeger, Iowa State University landscape architecture department, and Iowa State students worked with youth and community members to identify interesting places to walk, how many steps for segments, and finding routes without barriers. Four communities were mapped.

**Barrier mapping** Youth and adult volunteers in Postville and Waukon walked the sidewalks and identified barriers for walkable routes. This data, also mapped by Seeger, will be used to make a plan of priority areas to address.

**Extensive Use of Technology enhances FFI communication:** Work groups and individuals were connected via a highly developed website where all communications were posted. List serves, and Adobe Connect for web-teleconferencing also facilitate communication.

**Healthy Kids Healthy Communities invites FFI to make proposal:** FFI submitted a preliminary to proposal to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Healthy Kids Healthy Communities program. FFI was one of 140 out of 550 proposals invited to submit a full proposal. The proposal will partner with RWJ to identify environmental and policy changes designed to enhance active living in the FFI area.

**Partnerships with State and Regional Organizations:** FFI expanded partnership with Iowa Department of Public Health, Iowa State University, State Legislators, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowans Fit For Life, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission, Northeast Iowa Community Action, Helping Services for Northeast Iowa, and school districts, among others.

**Potential to develop Built Environment** – FFI has begun conversation with the Center for Transportation Research and Education (CTRE) about opportunities to build a regional trail plan around active transportation to schools and to work.

### **Recognition for Excellence**

- **Brenda Ranum** was recognized by ISU Extension for Visionary Leadership and ISU Extension's Outstanding Leadership for her work with FFI
- **Teresa Wiemerslage** received an award from ISU Extension for Communication Excellence in webcasts and communications. The webcast on the Local Food System recently won the State Communications Award for Computer Generated Presentation.

- **Eric Nordschow** was recognized by ISU Extension for Outstanding Community Leadership and as a Friend of ISU Extension.

### **Policy Change**

Policy change is an important driver to improve our food system and built environments. Because of the increased discussions surrounding these issues, several policy changes have already occurred:

- **Policy Scan** – Consultant Susan Roberts developed a Policy Scan for FFI. The Policy Scan helped FFI members to identify policy targets that tied to their Strategies and Tactics, as well as who to work with at local, state, and national levels.
- **Public Health** was focused on assessments and now is focused on Community Health, messaging, and outreach.
- **The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship clarified the policy on the use of local food by institutions, including schools**, care centers and hospitals. Because of this change, many local institutional buyers are again buying fruits and vegetables at Farmer's Markets or directly from local producers.
- **Sidewalks addressed:** Several local city councils are responding to information presented in county meetings by addressing sidewalk issues before the Community Action Phase commences.
- **Cattlemen's Association Supports local food:** The Winneshiek County Cattlemen's Association took a proposal to the Iowa Cattlemen's Association to create a policy to support "further research, development and engagement by the beef industry as local food systems and local processing grow to larger markets for our future."