



LINKING FARMERS, FOOD SYSTEMS, EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION, AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES: IOWA FARMERS UNION FARM TO EARLY CARE POLICY INITIATIVE

GOAL OF PROJECT:

Work with farmers, early childhood providers and partner organizations throughout Iowa to develop policies and practices to improve access to locally grown, healthy food for all Iowans, especially children and their families.

WK KELLOGG PARTNERS:

- ★ Northeast Iowa Food & Fitness
- ★ Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children (IA AEYC)
- ★ Iowa Farmers Union
- ★ Procurement Pilot Project
- ★ Policy Development & Advocacy - SPPG

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT WITH INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS TO IDENTIFY BARRIERS:

- ★ Early Childhood Education
- ★ Farm to School Pilot Projects
- ★ Farmers
- ★ Food System Policymakers
- ★ Food Hub Leaders/RFSWG
- ★ Leaders in Agriculture

THIS INITIATIVE WILL:

- Generate** ★ A picture of the current landscape of farm to early childhood policies and practices through research of national, state, and local best practices and identification of obstacles through individual interviews, stakeholder conversations, food system networks and secondary research.
- Convene** ★ Stakeholder discussions to help formulate policy recommendations and build the will to change the status quo through action.
 - Build** ★ Stakeholder relationships that build a foundation for continued support and action to promote collaboration between local food producers and childcare providers.
- Develop** ★ Policy recommendations for growing local farming opportunities and encourage partnerships between farmers and early childhood providers that support healthy communities in the long-term.
- Promote** ★ Supportive policies by utilizing different networks across the state to build awareness and raise the profile of this issue and get people to change obstructive policies and encourage adoption of best practice.

2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION:

Bring policy recommendations to the Legislature that create opportunities for Iowa farmers and better access to healthier food for all Iowans.

THE PROJECT IS DESIGNED TO ADDRESS MANY INTERSECTING NEEDS IN IOWA.

HEALTH

- ★ **We have a large and growing problem with childhood obesity and preventable diseases.** Iowa ranks number 13 in the nation in childhood obesity with 15.2 percent of 2-4 year olds in WIC considered obese. Among children 10-17 years old, 16.4 percent are considered obese.
- ★ **Obese Children may grow into obese adults.** 35 percent or more of adults in the state of Iowa are obese, which falls in the highest percentage bracket tracked by the CDC. Iowa is the 7th most obese state in the nation.

EDUCATION

- ★ **Young children, but especially the most vulnerable children and their families, in Iowa communities need early education environments that promote learning and healthy lifestyles.**
 - In 2017, 242,970 children ages 0-5 in Iowa were receiving assistance to attend child care.
 - 88,000 of Iowa's children live in poverty. 141,000 children live in families that lack stable employment.
 - 41.3 percent of children in Iowa are eligible for the Free or Reduced Price Lunch program.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- ★ **Many Iowans, especially vulnerable children and their families, lack access to healthy local food in their communities.**
 - Between 1976 and 2000, Iowa lost more than half of its grocery stores. Only about 63 percent of census tracts in Iowa have a "healthy food" retailer within a half-mile, 9 percent lower than the national average.
- ★ **Rural, agricultural communities face significant economic challenges and farmers face growing barriers to find viable economic models. Expansion of local food production and distribution could be a boon to many communities across Iowa.**
 - A 2017 USDA survey found that 4,068 Iowa farms sold local food in 2015 (through all marketing channels), with aggregate sales of more than \$194 million. This means about 5 percent of all Iowa farms are engaged in local food production. If Iowa farmers met just half the existing demand for locally grown food, it would create \$1.67 billion in annual sales and support 12,000 Iowa jobs.
 - Meanwhile, the farm to school movement in Iowa shows great potential for growth. USDA figures show Iowa schools spent \$940,843 on locally grown foods during the 2017-18 school year, compared to \$659,802 the prior year.
 - As an example, fresh fruit and vegetable growers retain 25 to 38 cents, respectively, for every dollar spent on their products. This compares with only 17.2 cents of each dollar retained by commodity market farmers. Research also shows that farms selling direct-to-consumer have a higher survival rate than other farms – up to 10 percent higher in some cases.
 - Many farmers growing local foods are new or beginning; more than half (59 percent) of respondents in the 2015 Iowa Commercial Horticulture Survey for Food Crops have been growing fruits or vegetables for 10 years or fewer. Although some of them also have been growing commodity crops for longer.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



For more information on this initiative, please contact Robyn Mills at SPPG at rmills@sppg.com.