

## Food Fitness Community

### Initiative Name:

Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative

### Primary Contact:

Brenda Ranum, Co-Convener and Project Coordinator  
Iowa State University Extension – County Extension Education Director – Winneshiek County  
[ranum@iastate.edu](mailto:ranum@iastate.edu)

### Project Vision:

Northeast Iowa is a unique place where all residents & guests experience, celebrate and promote healthy locally grown food with abundant opportunities for physical activity and play EVERY DAY. Healthier people make stronger families and vibrant communities.

### Project Emphasis area/Strategies for 2009-2010:

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

### Summary of Your Participation by ISU Extension Staff:

- Brenda Ranum, FFI Co-Convener and Project Coordinator  
Iowa State University Extension – County Extension Education Director – Winneshiek County
- Teresa Wiemerslage, FFI Leader of Northeast Iowa Food and Farm Coalition  
Iowa State University Extension – County Extension Education Director – Allamakee County
- Vanette Grover and Lynette Anderson, FFI Youth Team Advisor & Youth Team Coordinator  
ISU Extension Youth Development Field Specialist & County Youth Coordinator
- Judy Isaacson, FFI Communication Team Leader  
Northeast Iowa External Relations Specialist
- Dr. Cornelia Flora, Dr. Mary Emery & Corry Bregendahl, No. Central Region Center for Rural Dev.  
FFI Evaluators
- ISU Extension Specialists contributing expertise to the work of the NE Iowa FFI work:
  - Cindy Baumgartner, Nutrition & Health Field Specialist for NE Iowa
  - Ruth Litchfield, Cathy Strobehn and Sam Beattie, Nutrition & Health State Specialists
  - Craig Chase, Farm Management Field Specialist
  - Andy Larson, Small Farm Ag Management State Specialist
- Rich Pirog, Asst. Director  
Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture
- Lois Wright Morton, Advisor for community organizational structures  
ISU Extension to Communities State Specialist
- Chris Seeger, Assist with Community Mapping Project

### Important project accomplishments or products:

- **14 School Districts Forming a FFI Regional School Learning Community:** 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. The NE Iowa FFI Regional School Learning Community is an unprecedented partnership comprised of a wide range of regional school staff, faculty, and representatives from cooks to school nurses, principals, teachers, and school board members. Already, this group is integrated with and complementing the efforts of other work groups in the Initiative. For instance, the Northeast Iowa Food and Farm Coalition has begun to work with the Regional School Learning Community to plan for a pilot Farm-to-School

program in 2009-2010. That the Regional School Planning Work Group exists is a tremendous accomplishment.

- **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. Team teams are up and running and two 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 2-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.
- **School Food Service Staff Focus on Nutrition:** Child nutrition food service employees from seven NE Iowa school districts attended a TEAM Nutrition chef workshop in May. The workshop was funded through a Team Nutrition grant from the USDA and hosted by the Iowa Department of Education Bureau of Nutrition, Health and Transportation Services and Iowa State University Extension, in cooperation with the American Chef Federation. Attendees learned to creatively prepare and serve healthy, reimbursable meals that have less sodium, sugar, and fat and increased amounts of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables and to identify strategies that contribute to the school health environment and nutrition education through effective menu planning and procurement strategies.
- **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 conversion of an Ornamental Plant Greenhouse to food growers:** The work of the NIFF Coalition and the FFI heavily influenced the decision of a local greenhouse owner to convert three of eight acres of greenhouse space from ornamental plant production to food production. Mike and

Rachel Gooder of the Plant Peddler in Cresco are growing several types of vegetables and fruits including beets, tomatoes, strawberries, eggplant, leafy greens, kohlrabi, raspberries, green peppers, cucumbers, and several types of herbs. They are also working with local Mennonites to aggregate production to sell to local and regional markets. Gooders already sell and distribute food and horticulture plants to several large Iowa colleges (Iowa State University, Luther College, University of Northern Iowa), regional grocery stores (Hy-Vee, Quillans, Fareway, Festival Foods, Oneota Co-op) and several large horticulture outlets throughout the Midwest. Mike is started conversations with other local producers, including the Mennonite farmers, about aggregating under a regional label to sell and distribute local foods from NE Iowa. Mike is also working on state level to develop food safety practices for local food production.

- **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 the new Northeast Iowa Funder's Collaborative, a collaboration composed of the region's five community foundations and several larger regional foundations, came together to build a common vision and better align the efforts of the five county foundations. An analysis of community foundation funding shows that since the beginning of the NE Iowa FFI, foundational grant making has increased around food and fitness issues. The Iowa Council of Foundations has even inquired in how they might get involved. On April 2, 2009, the Funder's Network held their first meeting and have plans to continue meeting. This effort, spurred by the Initiative, will increase both the capacity of regional funders to engage in strategic grantmaking and of community and regional groups to develop successful proposals to undertake strategic initiatives.
- **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 established a partnership with the Iowa Center for Transportation Research and Education (CTRE) to facilitate planning opportunities to build a regional trail plan around active transportation to schools and to work.
- **Request For Activities from Communities:** The Northeast Iowa FFI Regional Team put out to communities a "Request for Activities" to address the 3 primary strategies and 8 essential elements to activate the Vision for the NE Iowa FFI. This request solicited 52 pre-proposals totaling requests for \$1.1 million. This process successfully managed to prompt community residents to think about the work in an integrated fashion. More than one-third of the pre-proposals (35%) addressed all three strategies that integrate school food and physical activity, food systems, and the built

environment. Forty percent addressed two of the three strategies. As the work groups review these proposals during the extension period, we will begin to learn the myriad of ways community residents are planning to integrate food, fitness, public health, and the built environment into their future activities in Northeast Iowa.

- **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."
- **Things that are happening as a result of this engagement so far**:
  - There are now working relationships between schools across the region that did not exist before the creation of the Regional School Work Group.
  - New understanding of the importance of policy and system change focused on the food and fitness environments in schools.
  - Regional commitment to collaborate and learn from each other; person-to-person, school-to-school and community-to-community.
  - School Administrative continue their support to continue building capacity for school system and policy change. Ten school districts have given financial commitment to send representatives to the Regional School Planning Team during the 2009-2010 year. This is in the midst of the country's very challenging **economic** downturn.
  - There is evidence of a commitment to the FFI vision for our children accessing local healthy food and being physically active every day in our schools and community.

**Projects or project components pending or underway:**

- The NE Iowa FFI is working on the organizational structure, positions and job descriptions required to support the work of the NE Iowa FFI's Community Action Plan for Implementation, as well as policies and procedures for the new NE Iowa FFI organizational structure.
- Susan Roberts has been working with the NE Iowa FFI to develop a policy change plan. The plan outlines the policy targets and who the NE Iowa FFI leaders need to work with to reach the policy targets for each of the three strategies identified. On the next page is one of seven tables Roberts and the co-conveners developed. This example addresses the policy target for increasing production of health promoting foods that schools can purchase (along with the related tactic and strategy). In the coming weeks Angie Tagtow (WKKF Food & Society Policy Fellow) will work the NE Iowa FFI co-conveners, evaluators and Vision Team to identify key indicators and appropriate measurements of change.

**Strategy A: Ensure that school district policies & practices support healthy living of children, families and community members.**

**School Food Tactic:** Farm to School: Grow a Farm-to-School program incorporating healthy local foods into school food programs while teaching people about nutrition and the local food system.

**Policy Target #2: Production of health promoting foods schools can purchase**

What is the Change?	Local Questions	Potential Key Players Local	State Questions	Potential Key Players State	Federal Questions	Potential Key Players
<p>Farmers are producing enough local food to meet demands of school districts which are now specifying and buying local foods for school food programs.</p>	<p>How much of the school food is currently from local producers?</p> <p>Is there enough food being produced if purchase demand increased?</p> <p>Are there barriers in production and with farmer working with schools? IF yes, what?</p> <p>Are there County incentives to increase food production for schools?</p> <p>If a school(s) has addressed this, how did they do it?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School board members</li> <li>• Food Service Director</li> <li>• School Administration</li> <li>• Wellness Policy Team</li> <li>• Local producers of food</li> <li>• County Extension</li> <li>• County Farm Groups such as Farm Bureau</li> <li>• County Government: Board of Supervisors, Ec. Dev. groups</li> <li>• Private economic development such as Bankers</li> </ul>	<p>Are there barriers to production of local food for school food programs? If yes, what?</p> <p>Are there state incentives to increase production of local food for school food programs? If not, can there be?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Iowa Dept. of Education (Julia Thorius), Agriculture (Maury Wills), and Economic Development (Stephanie Wisenbach)</li> <li>• State Legislators</li> <li>• Iowa Farm to School Task Force</li> <li>• Farm Groups – Iowa Farm Bureau, Iowa National Farmers Union, Iowa Network for Community Agriculture, Practical Farmers of Iowa</li> <li>• ISU Extension</li> <li>• Iowa Food Policy Council</li> <li>• Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture</li> <li>• Drake University Agricultural Law Center</li> </ul>	<p>What federal policies are in place to increase production of local foods for school food programs?</p> <p>Is there a need for more policies?</p> <p>How are federal incentives from 2008 Food &amp; Farm bill for increased local food production being implemented in Iowa?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nat'l Sustainable Ag Coalition</li> <li>• National Conference of State Legis.</li> <li>• USDA</li> <li>• Staff of Senators Harkin and Grassley; Rep. Braley</li> </ul>

<b>What might success look like?</b>	<b>How might we measure the impact?</b>	<b>What Activities will help us activate our Tactic, leading to policy and system change?</b>				
Increased number of schools (or increased % in each school) procuring locally grown healthy foods	Student consumption of locally grown, healthy foods in schools  \$ used for local food in schools	Research and gather information which answers questions  Meetings with key players				

Source: Susan Roberts, Brenda Ranum, and the NE Iowa FFI

### Challenges:

- **Floods that have diminished built, financial, and natural capital** – In June, devastating floods receiving nationwide attention ravaged the region, damaging roads, bridges, buildings, cropland, and recreational facilities. The status of the outdoor built environment, documented by the NEI FFI built environment work group, quickly changed as floodwaters either washed away or structurally compromised existing infrastructure such as trails, ball fields, and park facilities. Sand volleyball courts lost their sand to rising waters and ball fields located on a flood plain or close to a river were contaminated with "black water" as raw sewage found its way into the watershed. Topsoil used for row crop and vegetable production also either washed away or became contaminated. The FFI cancelled June meetings because the assault on the region made travel logistically impossible. The transportation infrastructure was so damaged that roads became impassable and if meeting locations were not flooded, they were turned into public shelters. Regardless of whether people had a place to meet and could actually find a way to get there, many simply could not make it because most FFI volunteers and leaders were occupied with protecting their own property or helping their neighbors and communities. For example, one FFI leader who owns a farm equipment implement dealership put new inventory to use pumping water in locations at risk of flooding. Not surprisingly, public authorities entered emergency management mode, engaging in only those activities that met the most basic, pressing needs. These events disrupted the FFI temporarily, but efforts have recommenced at the speed and pace experienced before. The floods brought residual challenges with which the Initiative is still coping (such as addressing the question of when the recreational infrastructure will be rebuilt and who will pay for it). However, floods are bringing more attention to the promise of local markets.
- **Postville raids that have made any kind of outreach difficult due to increased levels of distrust and distress among local families** - Natural disasters aside, human-led disasters have also caused turmoil in the region which affected the progress of FFI. A month before the floods in May 12, 2008, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement raided Agriprocessor's Inc. in Postville (Allamakee County), the largest kosher slaughterhouse and packing plant in the country, bringing social unrest and economic hardship to a town already struggling to support its most vulnerable populations. The immigration raid led to the arrest of 390 workers. The FFI has also seriously impacted by this event. The raid redirected the work of one of the Initiative's liaisons to the Latino community, a lay minister affiliated with a local church, to serve people displaced by the raids. The FFI finds itself at a pivotal point in determining who to include in their efforts and how to reach them when the social fabric disintegrates and trusted institutions such as churches and schools are drained of human and financial resources. There is no doubt the Initiative will move forward but the path forward will be different as a result of the raid and the floods in the region. The Initiative used both crises to inform the way in which they do their work to ensure people have access to healthy, locally grown food and opportunities for physical activity and play. The region is recovering but healing takes time.
- **Budget cuts that have decreased the resources many partners can offer including Public Health, Extension, Education, and other agencies** - Many schools in the area must lay off teachers and cut activities because of the economy. The economic downturn has also directly affected progress of the Initiative by hampering a clear delineation of roles participating organizations will take in the future. ISU Extension has undergone a \$4.5 million budget cut and will be restructuring over the next several months. Public health is also expecting budget cuts. The role of schools is another unknown given the current budget crisis in the state. A new report shows that Allamakee County has the highest unemployment rate in the state and enrollment is down by 35 students in the middle school. The school is looking at laying off teachers with the reduction in enrollment and reduced support from the state, while South Winneshiek schools are considering removing the art curriculum from elementary and middle schools. Leaner budgets in the schools, Extension, and Public Health are expected to reduce the capacity of each organization to take on leadership roles, but the degree to which this will happen is still unknown. Despite this, the Initiative has not experienced a downturn in participation or enthusiasm for the work.
- **Ripples from the economic downturn, have limited the human and financial resources of those supporting the Collaborative.**

### Grant funding questions/concerns:

- The work of the NE Iowa FFI has been grounded in support by Iowa State University Extension at the local county level and has utilized regional and state program specialists in ISU Extension to families, agriculture, youth & 4-H and communities. The NE Iowa FFI is concerned how recent budget cuts will impact the work. Two primary staff persons positions were recently eliminated (Brenda Ranum and Teresa Wiemerslage), two positions or more positions will be eliminated due to early retirements (Judy Isaacson and Dan Burkhart) and those positions remaining will take on

additional responsibilities. Local counties are trying to reorganize to determine if they can reallocate local funds to support the NE Iowa FFI work and keep key staff positions to support the on-going positive work. Already the restructuring of the ISU Extension staff has diverted their programming time away from the NE Iowa FFI support to meetings required for restructuring.