

Northeast Iowa School Foodservice Director Survey: Farm to School

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IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
University Extension

About this survey: This survey was developed by the Northeast Iowa Food & Fitness Initiative (FFI) and the Northeast Iowa Food & Farm Coalition (NIFF) to gauge the interest of northeast Iowa's K-12 Foodservice Directors in serving locally grown food. The results, summarized below, will inform the work of the FFI Farm to School project. Funding for this project was from the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship Farm to School program.

The survey was conducted via mail over a one month period from mid-April to mid-May 2009. Roughly 69% of the School District Foodservice Directors in northeast Iowa (18 out of 26) responded. For the purposes of this survey, "local" was defined as food that is grown or raised in Iowa or a county adjacent to Iowa.

About the organizations:

The NE Iowa Food & Fitness Initiative is working to create community environments that support access to fresh, locally grown, healthy, affordable food and safe environments for physical activity and play.

For the past two years, the Northeast Iowa Food & Fitness Initiative has assessed their access to food and places to be active and play. Over 500 people in Allamakee, Clayton, Fayette, Howard and Winneshiek counties have been involved in some way.

They are one of nine projects nationwide supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to be models of change. Each project received a 2 year planning grant. Support for long-term implementation will be based on the community action plan recently submitted.

Strategies . . .

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

Every day all people
experience, celebrate & promote
healthy locally grown foods



abundant opportunities for
physical activity and play



More information can be found at www.iowafoodandfitness.org and www.iowafreshfood.com.

Key Highlights:

- 44% of respondents say they purchased local foods directly from a grower during the 2008-09 school year. Nearly all reported having had a positive experience. Among those who purchased local food, local food purchases in the 2008-09 school year averaged about \$853.
- Overall interest in buying local foods is high. 50% of respondents say they are “very interested” in purchasing local food.
- A desire to “Support the local economy,” “Support Iowa farms / businesses,” “Know the sources of products”, “Good public relations” and “Increase student access to fresh fruits and vegetables” were the top four reasons to buy local foods. Each was selected by more than 50% of the respondents.
- Respondents are most interested in buying local fruits and vegetables.
- A strong majority obtain their produce primarily through Martin Brothers and H&H Foodservice.
- The top barriers for buying local foods were product costs, adequacy, reliability and quality of supply, liability and safety concerns, and logistical challenges with backdoor deliveries. Each was selected by more than 50% of the respondents.
- The motivators to increase the use of local foods in schools were “More products available partially processed”, “Assurance of food safety”, “Financial incentives for purchasing local food” and “One place to order from multiple farmers.”

Survey of PK-12 School Food Service Providers

Responses to individual questions.

1. How many PK-12 schools are in your school district?

- 18 surveys were returned: 13 public schools and 5 parochial schools
- 11 schools had one school building
- 1 district has four school buildings
- 5 districts had five school buildings
- 1 district has six school buildings

2. How is your school food service operation managed?

All schools self-manage their food service.

3. What is your annual food service budget?

- Food budgets ranged from \$9,456 to \$250,000. The average budget is \$108,660.
- Labor budgets ranged from \$10,500 to \$238,560. The average budget is \$91,590. The labor numbers do not include benefits.
- Total Operating Costs ranged from \$23,354 to \$624,900. The average is \$250,200.
- The percentage of the budget spent on food ranged from 23% to 57% of the total operating budget with a median of 43%.

4. During the school year (September through June), approximately how many reimbursable meals are served each day?

- 15 schools serve breakfast. The number of breakfasts served ranged from 12-300.
- 16 schools reported lunch counts. The number of lunches served ranged from 48-1680 per day.
- No schools serve dinner.

5. How many after school snacks are served each day?

- 6 schools serve after-school snacks with a range of 5-147 snacks per day. Some snack programs are not part of the school lunch program.

6. What percent of students are eligible for free/reduced meals (district)?

- Free and reduced lunch rates ranged from 20% to 62% with an average of 34%.

7. What is the price charged for a full-price meal in your:

Breakfast: \$0.50 - \$1.50; average \$0.92

Lunch: \$1.35 – \$2.25; average \$1.73

8. Did your district provide a summer feeding program in 2008?

- Four schools offer a summer feeding program: Howard-Winneshiek, Postville, Oelwein and Decorah.
- The total number of meals served during summer session ranged from 100-4397 meals.
- All four schools plan to offer a summer feeding program in 2009.

10. Do you have salad bars in your district? 72% of schools have salad bars.

11. Do you sell fresh fruits and vegetables a la carte in your school district?

- 44% of schools sell fruit and vegetables a la carte.

12. Do you sell fresh fruit and vegetables in vending machines in your district?

- None of the schools sell fruit or vegetables in vending machines.

13. The following is a list of equipment helpful in preparing and serving fresh fruits and vegetables. For each piece of equipment, please select the appropriate response for your primary kitchen.

Equipment	Number of Schools reporting			
	Don't have	Don't have, but need	Have, but need more	Have enough
Sinks	0	0	1	16
Oven	0	0	3	14
Cutting boards	0	1	4	12
Industrial mixer	1	0	0	16
Knives	1	0	3	13
Slicer	2	2	2	11
Salad bar	5	0	1	11
Fruit/vegetable wedger	5	6	1	5
Apple corer	7	4	3	3
Industrial food processor	7	5	0	5
Floor or countertop vegetable chopper	10	4	1	1
Fryer	16	0	0	1

- Cutting boards, ovens, knives and apple corers were cited most often as tools that kitchens already have but could use more.
- Produce wedgers, industrial food processors, apple corers and vegetable choppers were cited most often as tools that school kitchens don't have but need.
- Most of the schools do not have fryers.
- Most of the schools report that they have enough sinks, mixers and knives.

Any Additional equipment you find helpful: Have choppers—staff won't use.

14. Do you purchase any food items through a cooperative bid process?

- 56% of schools purchase food through cooperative bids. Of those schools,
 - 60% purchase fresh fruits and vegetables in this manner
 - 80% purchase dairy products in this manner
 - 50% purchase meats in this manner
 - 70% purchase canned fruits and vegetables in this manner
 - 40% purchase breads in this manner

15. Do you have a prime vendor from whom you purchase a majority of food items?

- All the schools have a prime vendor they purchase the majority of their food items.
- 56% use Martin Brothers
- 22% use H&H Food Service
- 17% use H&H Food Service and Reinhardt Food Service or Martin Brothers
- 6% use Hawkeye Food Service

16. Do you purchase any fresh fruits and vegetables from this vendor?

- 89% of the schools purchase fresh fruit and vegetables from their primary vendor.

17. Does your district purchase fresh fruits and vegetables from any other sources?

- 78% of the schools purchase fresh fruit and vegetables from other sources. Of those schools:
 - 50% from farmer (includes a school FFA chapter)
 - 36% from local grocery store
 - 36% from produce vendor
 - 14% from donations

18. In your district, how many schools do all, part, or none of the meal preparation on site?

- There are 42 school buildings represented in this survey.
- 74% of the school buildings prepare all of the meals on site.
- 26% of the school buildings prepare part of the meal on site.

19. What were the top 5 WHOLE FRESH FRUITS OR VEGETABLES purchased?

- Apples, bananas, melon, grapes, kiwi, and oranges.
- Lettuce/salad mix (shredded), Baby Carrots, Broccoli florets, Cabbage (shredded), Cauliflower florets, Corn (frozen), Green beans, Baby Spinach
(Items are shown in decreasing order)

20. What were the top 5 PREPARED OR PROCESSED FRESH FRUITS OR VEGETABLES purchased?

- Applesauce, mandarin oranges, mixed fruit, peaches, pears, pineapple.
- Carrots, Baking potatoes, Tomatoes, Lettuce (heads), Broccoli (heads), Celery (heads), Cauliflower (heads), Cucumbers, Radishes
(Items are shown in decreasing order)

21. Many school food service directors purchase local foods either directly from a farmer or from their usual vendor. Have you ever purchased local foods?

- 44% responded yes. Of those schools, they purchased the following products:
 - 100% Tomatoes
 - 75% Apples, Cucumbers
 - 63% Grapes, Peppers, Watermelon
 - 50% Melons
 - 38% Broccoli, Cabbage, Carrots, Lettuce, Onions, Baking Potatoes, Strawberries
 - 13% Green Beans, Corn, Pears

22. How much did you spend on local food this year?

- Five schools spent \$50 to \$3000 on local food.

23. How likely are you to continue purchasing local vegetables?

- 88% of schools are Very Likely to continue to purchase local vegetables
- 12% of schools are Somewhat Likely to continue to purchase local vegetables.
- 50% of schools are Very Likely to continue to purchase local fruits
- 38% of schools are Somewhat Likely to continue to purchase local fruits.

24. If you are NOT LIKELY to purchase local foods again, please indicate why:

- One school selected inconsistent quality, unreliable source, too much effort, too expensive.

25. From your observations, when you served local fruits and vegetables, did student intake increase, decrease, or stay about the same?

- Two schools reported increased vegetable or fruit intake
- Five schools reported the same level of vegetable intake
- One school did not answer question

26. Do you have any interest in purchasing local foods?

- 50% of schools are interested in purchasing local foods.
- 50% of schools were not sure about purchasing local foods. Reasons cited included price, did not know who to contact, delivery logistics, order small quantities, convenience needed.
- Ten schools indicated the local food products of most interest to them:
 - 80% - Tomatoes and cucumbers
 - 60% - Melons, apples
 - 50% - Peppers, onions, melons, carrots, cabbage, broccoli, grapes
 - 40% - Potatoes (small), lettuce, kohlrabi, strawberries
 - 30% - Baking potatoes, corn, pears
 - 20% - Peas, green beans
 - 10% - Summer squash, rhubarb, plums, pork

27. In your opinion, what are the potential benefits to serving local food in your district? (Please select all that apply.)

- 89% - Schools support the local economy and the local community
- 72% - Schools know the sources of products
- 61% - Local purchases result in good public relations
- 50% - Students gain greater access to fresh fruits and vegetables
- 39% - Students have healthier diets
- 33% - Transportation costs are lower
- 22% - Schools can purchase variable quantities
- 17% - Schools can purchase special varieties
- 0% - In my opinion, there are no benefits to serving local food in my district

28. What would motivate you to increase the use of local foods in your district? (Please select all that apply.)

- 67% - More products available partially processed (baby carrots, salad mix, chopped onions, etc.)
- 67% - Assurances of food safety
- 67% - Financial incentives for purchasing local food
- 61% - One place to order from multiple farmers (i.e., farmer cooperatives)
- 44%- Farmers contacting me and showing me their products

- 39%- More producers in area from whom to purchase
- 33%- Regulations that make it easier to purchase directly from farmers
- 28% - Additional facilities and/or equipment in the school district to prepare food
- 28% - Classroom teaching about local foods and agriculture
- 28% - Support from district board of education
- 22% - More products available canned or frozen
- 22% - Interest from parents or community members
- 17% - Additional food service staff
- 11%- Programs for food service staff to increase culinary skills

Other comments: If cost made it feasible. As food service directors/managers, we need to weigh a possible higher cost against any increase use of local foods. Where do we draw the line for cost increase?

29. What concerns do you have about purchasing local foods? (Please select all that apply.)

- 83% - Product costs
- 72% - Adequacy of supply
- 67% - Food safety
- 61% - Reliability of supply
- 61% - Delivery considerations
- 56% - Quality
- 33% - Ordering procedures
- 33% - Payment procedures
- 33% - Consistency of packaging
- 11% - Seasonal availability of local fruits and vegetables
- 11% - Potential threat to relationship with usual vendor

30. How important is each of the following to increasing the use of local foods in your district? (4 = very important, 1 = not important at all)

- 3.7 - Regulatory information (procedures for buying from farmers)
- 3.6 - A list of local farmers willing to sell to schools
- 3.6 - Health and safety information about using local foods
- 3.6 - A list of when local foods are available in Iowa
- 3.5 - Vendor indicates on order sheet where foods come from
- 3.2 - Examples of how other school districts use local foods
- 2.9 - Information and newsletters to share with families
- 2.7 - School-tested recipes and menus that use local foods
- 2.6 - Promotional materials about local foods to display

31. Which of the following steps has your district taken to link students with local farms and agriculture in the last three years? (Please select all that apply.)

- 28% - Did not check any answers to this question
- 28% - Visited the Iowa Farm to School Program website
- 28% - Taken students to visit a farm or farmers' market
- 22% - Planted a school garden
- 18% - Served meals featuring Iowa products
- 11% - Provided education about Iowa food and agriculture
- 6% - Shared information about local foods with families (i.e., *IA Food of the Month*)

6% - Invited a farmer to school

0% - Held a harvest fair or farmers' market at school

32. Certified kitchen facilities to process local fruits and vegetables have been identified as a need in our region. Would your school willing to open their kitchen facilities for producers to process their product on weekends or during the summer months?" (Select all that apply)

- Yes – open to any producer. Would need to have school staff member present. Producer may need to pay for time of staff member especially if on a weekend.
- Yes – only certain, approved producers.
- Yes – if they bring their own equipment.
- 12 schools replied no.