

Iowa Farmers Union

Linking Farmers, Food Systems, Early Childhood Education and Healthy Communities

Call for Project Proposals

Project Summary

The Iowa Farmers Union (IFU), in partnership with organizations throughout Iowa, seeks to convene stakeholders and explore opportunities to develop and promote policies and practices to improve access to healthy food for all Iowans, especially vulnerable children and their families, through enhancing local and regional food systems.

Organization Summary and Context

The mission of the Iowa Farmers Union (IFU) is to strengthen the independent family farm through education, legislation, and cooperation and to promote economically sustainable production, safe food, a clean environment, and healthy communities. IFU is a state chapter of the National Farmers Union and communicates and cooperates with other chapters across the country. IFU policy clearly supports the advancement of local and regional food systems in Iowa. Connecting farmers and the local/regional food system with early childhood education centers will result in stronger and healthier communities.

The Iowa Farmers Union is considered a state-wide leader in efforts to promote policies that support sustainable agriculture and the local and regional food system. While other organizations provide excellent education and outreach services in this area, IFU is uniquely designed to promote and advocate for effective policy development. At the urging of the Iowa Farmers Union, in 2010 the Iowa Legislature passed legislation mandating the development of a Local Food and Farm Plan for the State of Iowa by the Leopold Center of Sustainable Agriculture. In addition, in an era of decreasing state budgets, IFU has been instrumental in securing a modest but significant state appropriation for the Iowa Local Food and Farm Initiative (LFFI). IFU has been the only state-wide policy advocacy organization to participate on the LFFI program council. Iowa Farmers Union is also represented on the Advisory Board of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University.

Background and Qualifications of the Key Team Members.

Aaron Heley Lehman, IFU President, will oversee the project. Aaron is a fifth generation farmer from central Iowa and has served as IFU Vice-President before being elected president in 2016. He has represented IFU on the Advisory Board of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University since 2006. He served as Legislative Director and Executive Director of the Iowa Farmers Union from 1995 until 2002.

Laura Funk Kopecky is the Communications, Education and Outreach Specialist for the Iowa Farmers Union. In addition to local food projects, she works on cooperative, conservation, and food safety projects.

Overview

Iowa Farmers Union will join two existing entities that are part of the Iowa state/community partnership to advance farm to early childhood education efforts to increase access to healthy food, increase the quality of the learning environment, and support local farmers and the local food economy. The Iowa Farmers Union will work closely with the Iowa Association of Children and Families and Luther College that houses the Northeast Iowa Food & Fitness collaborative.

Key Outcomes Expected

The Iowa Farmers Union (IFU), in partnership with organizations throughout Iowa, seeks to convene stakeholders and explore opportunities to develop and promote policies and practices to improve access to healthy food for all Iowans, especially vulnerable children and their families, through enhancing local and regional food systems. These efforts aim to expand on and complement the work of the Iowa Farm to Early Care and Education Coalition, the Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative, and the Association for Education of Young Children.

This project is designed to address many intersecting needs in Iowa. We have a large and growing problem with obesity, with childhood obesity rates of particular concern. Many Iowans, especially vulnerable children and their families, lack access to healthy local food in their communities. Rural, agricultural communities face significant economic challenges and farmers face growing barriers to find viable economic models. Young children in all Iowa communities need early education environments that promote learning and healthy lifestyles in order to ensure kindergarten readiness and the best possible preparation for learning and development.

The focus of this project will concentrate on developing and disseminating policy recommendations and initiatives that enhance local and regional food systems and their interaction with early childhood education providers and efforts to create healthy communities. This call for project proposals will specifically address this concentration of the project.

Please note that a different but complementary part of this project will build the capacity of early childhood education providers by mitigating and eliminating barriers in the procurement process in order to encourage tangible relationships between good food and healthy communities. It will also assist early childhood education professionals to make connections with the local and regional food system. This part of the project is not part of this call for proposals.

Goals and Related Strategies to Achieve Outcomes

Addressing these needs is long-term work that will require many initiatives striving for collective impact. This project aims to contribute to and help to catalyze these efforts to advance the work. While initial expectations must be modest, long-term expected outcomes of this project include:

- Increased access to healthy local food for all Iowans, especially communities of color and vulnerable children and their families.
- Education institutions, especially early education centers, that promote and encourage healthy eating and living while offering healthy and local food to young children and students.
- Creation of additional new markets available to farmers producing local food using methods that are environmentally sound.
- More efficient and economical systems of processing, distributing, and marketing local food.

- Elimination or mitigation of barriers for procurement of healthy food from the local food system by early childhood education providers.
- Increased participation of community and state institutions in coalition activities and discussions around the intersections between the food system and the needs of early education providers.

Project Activities

1. Regularly convene to plan and evaluate the project.
2. Research Policy Options: gather relevant policies, practices, and programs from local, state, federal, and private sources to utilize as relevant background for use by partners and stakeholders. In addition to Iowa policy initiatives, the project will rely on relationships with coalitions and partnerships in other states, especially other grantees.
3. Convene Stakeholder Discussions: convene partner stakeholders in person and electronically. Local, state, and federal policy options will be explored in addition to policies, practices, and programs used by private commercial businesses and by non-profits. Sample activities include policy priority surveys, open forums across stakeholder levels, and individual stakeholder feedback sessions. Food system stakeholder groups include producer associations, food distribution centers and food hubs, food retailers, early childhood education centers, and state and local agencies and departments. IFU will build on the existing networks developed by current partners FFI and IAEYC.
4. Develop and Promote Policy Recommendations. Under IFU leadership, partners/stakeholders will develop a set of recommendations for action at the local, state, and federal level in addition to practices for commercial businesses and non-profit organizations. Recommendations will be promoted by partners/stakeholders. Communications strategies will be developed and executed under IFU guidance. Organizational practice, administrative and policy change efforts at the local and state level will be conducted with partners/stakeholders.

The contractor for this project will be specifically responsible for items 1, 2, 3, and 4. A separate contract will be executed for the following items. They are listed here to give potential contractors a sense of the scope of the work IFU is conducting overall.

- Build Capacity in Early Childhood Leaders: IFU will partner with education and outreach specialists to provide technical assistance and capacity building to early childhood personnel regarding the procurement and utilization of local healthy food in order to increase access for vulnerable children and their families. Differentiated strategies will be employed to address the specific needs of home-based providers, independent community-based facilities and Head Start providers. Alliances with public school district food systems will be explored to capture opportunities across the spectrum of the educational system.
- The multi-faceted approach will offer a series of workshops to center personnel provide a basic introduction to local foods systems and develop a F2ECE action plan for their early childhood education center, including defining objectives to their center, identifying potential farms and food sources and setting goals for local food procurement. A train-the-trainer curriculum and a mentoring program will build the capacity of local food coordinators and related resource personnel to be certified F2ECE Local Food Coaches. This approach will strengthen the capacity to support local food procurement across the state utilizing an existing network of food system professionals.

Key Communications and Knowledge Dissemination Activities.

The project will revolve around the key partnerships and coalitions that existing allies have developed. They are part of the Iowa state/community partnership to advance farm to ECE to increase access to healthy food, increase the quality of the learning environment, and support local farmers and the local food economy.

- Utilization of the coalition's existing structure to communicate about the specific activities of the work and the overall direction of the project.
- Assessments of the challenges and opportunities related to increasing access to healthy food, increasing the quality of the learning environment, and supporting local farmers and the local food economy.
- Opportunity and challenge assessments, stakeholder identification, and prioritization exercises with individual coalition partners through surveys, interviews, and leadership discussions.
- Workshops and group discussions with all coalition partners participating jointly.
- Regular updates and relationship building with local and state policy makers throughout the project utilizing electronic and personal communication.
- Dissemination efforts of policy recommendations will concentrate on the coalition partners existing networks and structures and the development of IFU outreach efforts. As recommendations are finalized the communications activities will build on the relationships built during policy development to community and state policy makers responsible for implementation.

Project Future

The project will build ownership with core partners and hundreds of individuals to ensure engagement that lasts beyond the two-year scope. The building of sustainable commitments to the policy development through lasting relationships and partnerships will be a key aspect of the work.

Project Proposal Scope

The contract will last until December 31, 2020. The contract award is \$75,000 for 2019 and \$70,000 for 2020. Payments are expected to be made quarterly.

Call for Project Proposals

Interested entities and individuals should submit a proposal to complete the project. Proposals should be no longer than 4 pages and should include information regarding the qualifications and background of the contractor including specifics regarding involvement in policy development, the local/regional food system in Iowa, and early childhood education systems. Examples of previous work and its relevance to this project should be included along with references.

Proposals should be submitted to Aaron Lehman, IFU President,
alehman@iowafarmersunion.org by March 20, 2019.