

2023 Annual Report



CULTIVATE

Local Food Connections



“Sustainable agriculture is that which depletes neither the people nor the land.”



— Wendell Berry

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Did you know?

Iowa's current food system isn't so local. You could easily live your whole life in Iowa without eating an Iowa-grown meal. More than 85% of Iowa's land is farmed, yet Iowa imports 90% of its food.

- Iowa's Local Food System: A Place to Grow by Laura Krouse, The Iowa Policy

Overview of Cultivate

Our Vision:

Locally grown food on every Iowan's table.

Our Mission:

Cultivate: Local Food Connections is a Des Moines based non-profit with a mission to strengthen our local food system with a focus on **supporting small scale producers** and **regenerative farming practices**. We do this through educating and cultivating a **supportive community of food citizens**.





WHAT IS A FOOD CITIZEN?

A food citizen understands the wide-reaching impact of their decisions about what and where to eat. A food “consumer” label implies a passive identity and suggests minimal (or no) involvement in how one’s food is produced and processed.

Consumers face limited choice and are forced to accept what is made available—a diet that is the result of a food system that erodes public health, degrades our ecosystems, and takes advantage of the poor and marginalized. **In contrast, a “citizen” is informed, deliberate, and active.** (Definition adapted from John Hopkins Center for a Livable Future.)

Small scale growers have difficulty making ends meet and with limitations around access to land, lack of federal investment and competition with a globalized food system it is very hard to create thriving business. This is why we believe that growing the support and loyalty of our local community is so important at an **economic, health, community and environmental** level.

It's All Connected

We believe in building a local food system that is equitable and sustainable at every level; from the health of our land and water, to the livelihood of farm workers and the wellbeing of our communities. Increasing support for a localized food system and regenerative farming practices underpins this holistic vision.



ECONOMIC



HEALTH



COMMUNITY



ENVIRONMENTAL

"If one were to factor in the damage industrial agriculture does to the environment - its cheaper prices wouldn't look so appealing. Instead those costs are left to local, and often marginalized, communities to bear in the long term."

- Iowa Farmer, Angela Tedesco



Our current food system is built on convenience and competitive pricing. For the full value of local foods on our **health, economy, communities and environment** to be more well known and for new healthy behaviors to be adopted we must create **personal connections** and **convenient pathways** for people to access and consume local foods.

With these intentions our work involves the following three areas of focus and subsequent activities:

1. Cultivate more Food Citizens through Education, Awareness & Communication

- Hosting Cultivate Your Plate events
- Hosting Local Food Fairs
- Pop Ups/Tabling at community events
- Farm Visit events
- Presentations to local groups
- A “Find Local Food” page on our website
- Online resources about food system issues
- Education & Awareness through social media

2. Develop Practical Tools for Accessing Local Foods

- Online shopping cart software for local food retailers
- Local Food Meal Kits
- **[Find Local Food page](#)** on Cultivate website

3. Engage in Statewide Collaboration (and beyond)

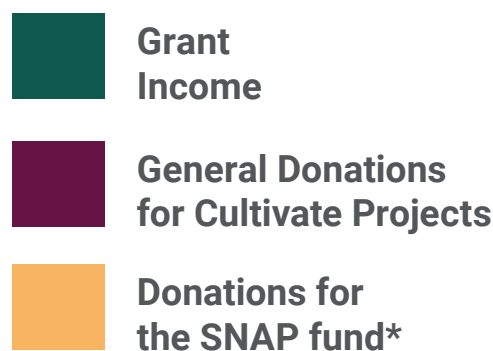
- Involvement in the Iowa Food System Coalition: Communication & Education Group
- Open-sourcing online shopping cart software to other local food retailers



Fiscal Year July 2022 - June 2023

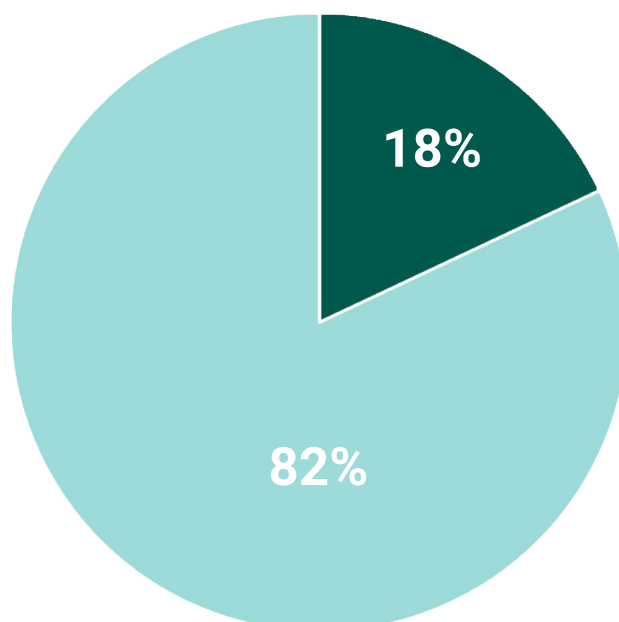
Donations are an important part of making Cultivate possible. Donations not only help us cover our overhead expenses but many grants also require matching funds. Having matching funds on-hand helps us expand the potential for grants we can apply for and also supports piloting new ideas! If you're interested in donating you can donate through [our website](#).

Income Categories



*These donations allow us to support the Iowa Food Coop by waiving membership and consumer fees for SNAP users.

Expense Categories



2023 Events

6 Cultivate Educational Events

- 3 - Cultivate Your Plate Dinners
- 2 - Fair-style events (CSA & Local Food Fair & Harvestfest)
- 1 - Film on the Farm & Farm Tour Event

+

4 Pop Up Events

- Valley Community Center Love You DSM Days
- DMACC Urban Food Forest
- Mindfulness Day at the Franklin Library
- Pleasant Hill Library Pop Up

= 494 Attendees

35 Local farmers and chefs involved in our events as educators

Community Outreach

6 Events
Tabled

- Botanical Gardens: Earth Day Event
- IPR Horticulture Day at Iowa State
- Northside Market
- Downtown Farmers Market
- The Nature Summit
- Jester Park Makers Market

= 1000+ People...

**That we have connected with to share the
importance of supporting local farmers**



Cultivate Your Plate

The goal of Cultivate Your Plate (CYP) is to create personal connections between the community and food producers; **empowering loyal and allied food citizens through increasing awareness and access to local foods.**

The format of our CYP events includes the introduction of a food system issue, followed by small group discussions with farmers, distributors, and other stakeholders within Iowa's local food system.

The small group style offers space for authentic conversations, personal connections and time to ask questions. After the small group portion of the evening, we share a free community meal crafted by a professional chef that features locally sourced ingredients. Sharing a meal as a community creates the opportunity to cultivate genuine connections.

We offer these events as family friendly and donation based so that price is not a barrier for participation. Producer educators also cited these events as an important space to speak to the community about the realities of being a local producer as well as showcase their farm in a more unique setting.

We're also spreading the word through...

- Education & Awareness building through social media

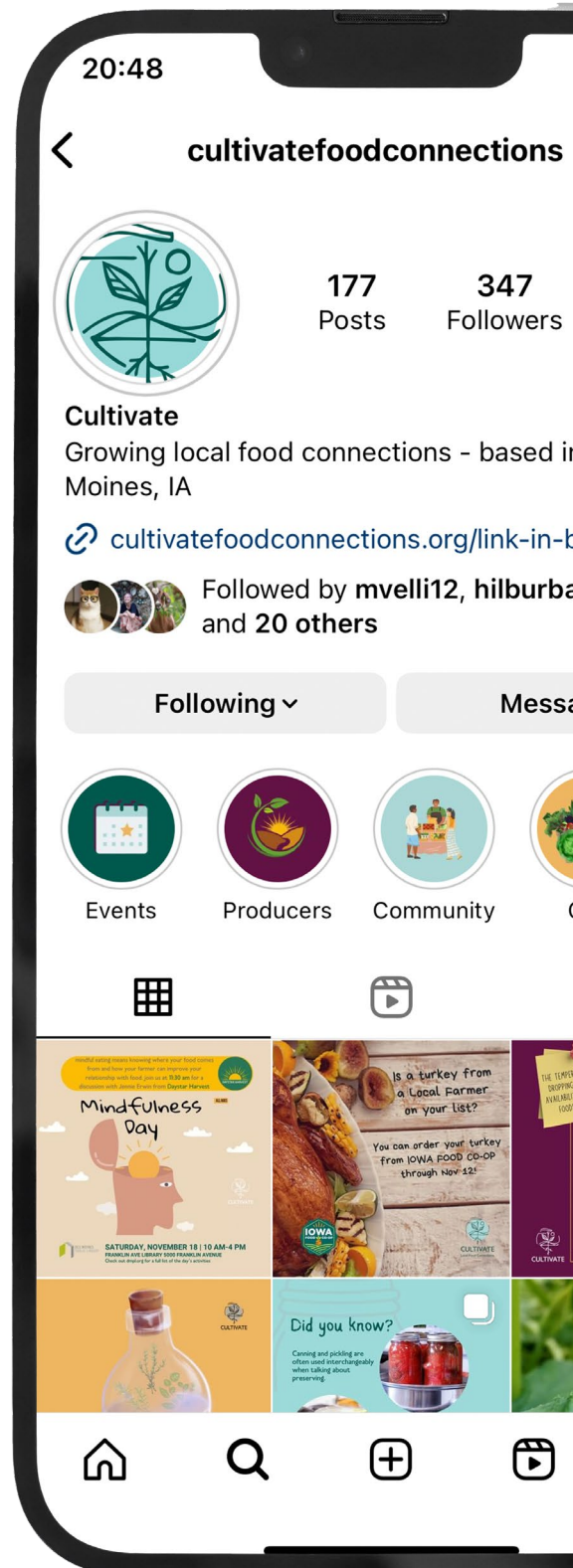
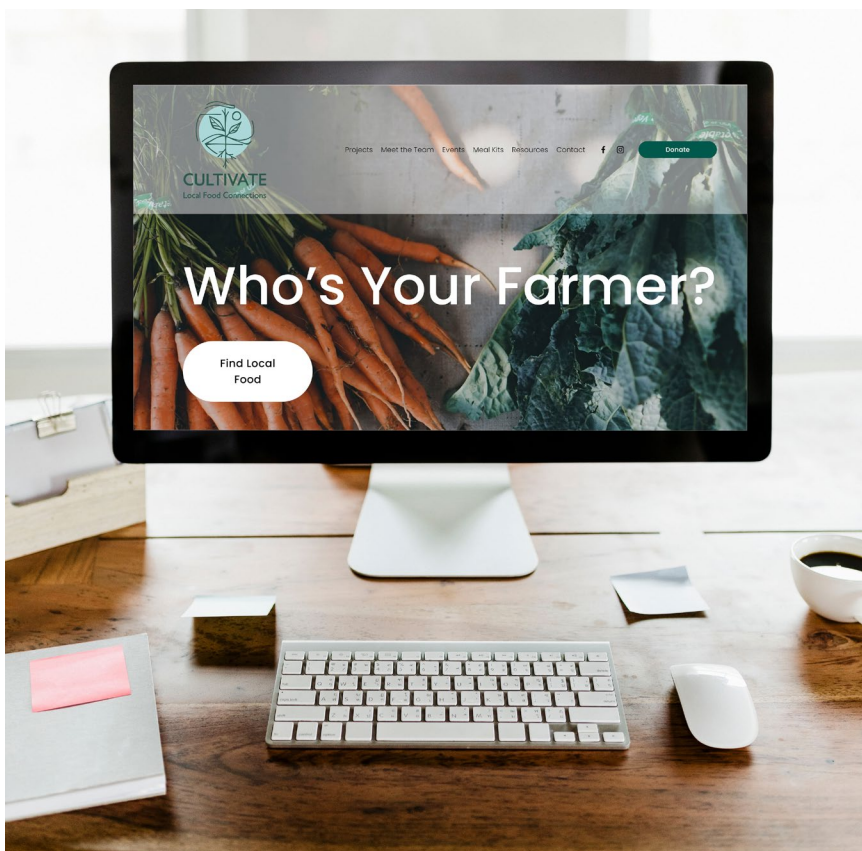


Instagram



Facebook

- Our pamphlets with local food resources which have been distributed to over 20 local businesses and through tabling at events.
- A “Find Local Food” page on [our website](#), which includes a map & a variety of ways to connect with locally grown goods.
- [Website resources](#) about food system issues & ways to learn more.





"Tonight's event was a very good opportunity to meet local producers and to getting to know more about their farm techniques was very interesting."

"I appreciated having ideas reinforced and heard in new ways."

"I learned about so many important things happening in Iowa, Please keep us informed!"

"Thank you for holding this event, it was helpful and well worth our time and effort to be there!"

"Please hold more events like this!"



*- Comments from
producers and attendees*



The Data

From our survey data we have found that **92% of attendees stated they were more likely to purchase local foods after attending a Cultivate Your Plate event.** Producer educators also cited these events as an important space to speak to the community about the realities of being a local producer as well as showcase their farm in a more unique setting.



Iowa Food Cooperative

Start Free Trial - Shop Now

Meet Our Producers

The Software

Our local food retail software, currently being piloted at The Iowa Food Coop at shop.iowafood.coop, offers a unique way to access locally produced goods from a wide range of local producers on a bi-weekly basis.

For producers, it offers a simple and efficient market as they know exactly what has been ordered when they go to harvest and/or pack. For members, all their products are brought to one location for a convenient all- in-one pick up or home/satellite site delivery.

This year we have gathered feedback, improved the user experience and created guides, videos and trainings to support the software & co-op models.

3

User guides developed for the online shopping cart software

- Member, Producer & Staff Guides

7

Videos created for members and producers, including translated videos

- New Member overview & walkthrough videos
- New Producer overview & walkthrough videos
- New Producer walkthrough video translated into Kirundi, and in process with Nepali and Spanish

5

Trainings hosted live and offered online for producers

- Social Medias Basics & 2.0
- Product Photography
- Greener Packaging
- Product Quality

All videos available for viewing on the [Iowa Food Cooperative YouTube channel](#).

In 2024 we are meeting with food hubs, community groups, and producers to work on sharing our software. Our goal is to make local food retail easier in more communities across the state!



Meal Kit Pilot

We are taking the guesswork out of what to cook, where to source it, and what's in season!

Another unique and practical application of our mission is our Local Food Meal Kits (LFMK). **Event attendees have cited lack of education (what to cook, where to buy it, what's in season), cost, time and convenience as top barriers to eating local and nutritious food.**

In 2023, we launched a pilot of our LFMK project, offering pre-portioned ingredients for a meal along with step-by-step instructions. LFMK address some of the biggest barriers to eating seasonal, nutrient-dense, home-cooked meals and provide a convenient pathway that supports the growth of our local food system.



124 meals kits distributed

Through the Iowa Food Coop, Harvestfest, pop-up events, and donations to community fridges.

What we're looking forward to in 2024...

MORE EVENTS



JANUARY 10

DSM Public Library
Book Club with Angela
Tedesco's "Finding
Turtle Farm" from
6-7:30 pm.



MARCH 2

Seed & Source: Your
Year of Local Food
at Greater DSM
Botanical Gardens
from 11 a.m. to 3 pm.



MARCH 2024+

More Cultivate Your Plate
Local Food Learning +
Community Meals

Sharing our local food retail
software with other groups
across Iowa
(and beyond!)

Getting more local food meal
kits in convenient locations
throughout our community!

MORE PRESENTATIONS



Should we present to a group you are a part of? Let us know!
admin@cultivatefoodconnections.org



Help us make 2024 a year of local food connections - donate today!

We are a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit. All donations are tax deductible.

Many thanks for joining us in support of our local food system!



DONATE VIA QR OR VISIT [OUR WEBSITE.](#)



CULTIVATE

Local Food Connections

LEARN MORE

CultivateFoodConnections.org

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Admin@CultivateFoodConnections.org

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