Abstract: Iowa State University Dining Services initiated the Farm to ISU program to increase purchases of local foods by 35 percent by 2012. This project sought to boost the awareness of ISU students about Farm to ISU and the importance of buying locally-produced foods.

What was done and why?

When ISU Dining initiated the Farm to ISU program in 2007 to enhance its local food purchasing efforts, it had tremendous support from the director of ISU Dining, farmer organizations and sustainable agriculture researchers. An early program concern was that support from ISU students, faculty and staff was not as strong as it needed to be in order to sustain the program. This project sought to answer the question of whether or not increased knowledge of the Farm to ISU program would encourage students and the ISU community to provide social and financial support for local food systems including the ISU Dining efforts.

The specific objectives of this project were to:

- Build student interest in and awareness of local food systems;
- Educate the student community about local food systems; and
- Increase the involvement of students in the Farm to ISU Program.

What did we learn?

The results of this project will serve to assist the future advancement of local food programs for ISU Dining, and those of other colleges and universities. The success of local food programs on college and university campuses depends greatly on student social and financial support. In order to instill a sense of student ownership, local food projects must be able to effectively incorporate student opinions and suggestions into goals and strategies. In this way, students will take pride in understanding and connecting to Iowa and U.S. agriculture, either as consumers or producers.

However, student interest in paying a premium for local/organic food choices is not strong. Surveying showed that they do not want to pay very much more for these products, and they actually feel it should be fresher and cheaper due to lower transportation costs and time.