



PROGRESS REPORT

Iowa's Local Food Purchasing Assistance Program:
Initial Impacts and Recommendations

Iowa Local Food Purchasing Assistance Program, Sept 2022 — Dec 2023



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I. Introduction

Iowa's Local Food Purchasing Assistance Program (LFPA) exemplifies innovative strategies for investing in local producers, promoting farm-to-food access, and fostering cross-sector partnerships across the state. This program's success is driven by collaborative efforts among diverse stakeholders, including farmers, food hubs, food banks, Meskwaki Nation, community access partners, state agencies, nonprofits, and community leaders. Together, they design effective solutions to enhance food access, empower small to mid-scale producer businesses, and bolster economic vitality in both urban and rural areas of Iowa. The LFPA serves as a win-win-win, addressing food access challenges, supporting local producers, and channeling dollars back into Iowa's economies.

In December 2021, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) unveiled the LFPA, marking a historic \$900M investment in states and tribal governments. Under the leadership of the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service and Commodity Credit Corporation, this initiative focuses on strengthening local and regional food systems, fostering economic opportunities for local and socially disadvantaged farmers, and establishing partnerships to deliver fresh, nutritious food to underserved communities. (USDA AMS, 2022). By aiming to enhance domestic agriculture supply chain resiliency, the LFPA sets a precedent for a fairer food system that prioritizes family farmers, emphasizes equity, and makes nutritious foods more accessible and affordable.

The LFPA improves access to local and region-specific nutritious foods while creating economic opportunities for local farmers and socially disadvantaged producers nationwide. (Wallace Center, 2023). In Iowa's implementation, producers sell food at a fair price, which is then distributed free of charge to community members through food hubs, food banks, and Meskwaki Nation.

This impact report celebrates early successes, presents measurable impacts of the LFPA, and offers recommendations to sustain and expand this crucial work in the state of Iowa. The impact data and stories shared in this report highlights initial impacts of the program through 2023, and is intended to both inform and inspire, paving the way for innovative opportunities to enhance food access and foster the viability of farmers in Iowa.

“This program’s success is driven by collaborative efforts among diverse stakeholders, including farmers, food hubs, food banks, Meskwaki Nation, community access partners, state agencies, nonprofits, and community leaders.”

II. Program Overview

Iowa partners acted quickly with leaders at Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) to design and implement Iowa's LFPA to align with USDA goals and officially launched in September 2022. The pilot, or Phase 1, occurred September 2022 through March 2023, beginning well into the produce growing season and after meat locker dates were filled for the year which affected initial product availability and time to coordinate distribution. Despite a mid-season start with little time to plan, the pilot generated impressive results, allowing for new partnership development and revealing opportunities for improvement in Phase 2 and 3. This impact report details those initial successes through 2023, and a final report detailing overall impact will be published after the program ends in March 2025.

The program's early success builds off decades of hard work and collaboration across Iowa. Innovative solutions are possible because of the strength and talent of LFPA partners who specialize in food production, value chain coordination, Indigenous food sovereignty, food safety, food assistance and more. With this foundation, Iowa's LFPA relies on Distributors to facilitate connections with Producers and Community Access Partners to ensure the program meets its goals by sourcing food from approved producers, follows pricing guidance, and distributes to approved Community Access Partners. Four LFPA Committees work with program staff to oversee the program and track all food purchases and distribution from the farm gate to the access sites for food insecure Iowans.

Distributors are learning and working together in new ways to strengthen local food system infrastructure and increase long-term food security. Distributors act as the intermediaries between producers and community access sites by facilitating relationships and managing logistics such as warehousing, cold storage and transportation. Distributors are also charged with data management, administrative duties like reporting, following pricing guidance, ensuring food safety and paying farmers. Iowa's LFPA has sixteen participating Distribution Partners: nine Food Hubs, six Food Banks and one Tribal Government. The program built off the strengths and expertise of each distributor group. Meskwaki Nation has a long history of food sovereignty efforts and native foodways to ensure their community gets access to healthy and culturally meaningful food. Food banks have expertise in distributing food in all 99 counties for food assistance efforts to serve Iowans facing food insecurity and hunger. Food hubs partner with hundreds of farmers across the state, and their expertise in both direct-to-consumer and wholesale markets put food hubs in the position to lead the majority of food sourcing for the program. Inclusion of all types of distributors has been key to strengthening local food systems through this program.

In short, the LFPA invests in and works to connect the dots between Iowa's talented producers and the people across the state who need and want access to local products.

III. Quantitative Data

Methods:

The LFPA operates in Iowa's intricate local food distribution landscape, requiring creativity and strong collaboration among Distributors, Community Access Partners, and Producers. Despite complex distribution models in Iowa, a reporting system was implemented, tracking products and details from farmers to distributors to community partners. This system provides key insights into Iowa's farm to food access system, and ensures transparency in sourcing, pricing, and distribution. The curated dataset serves as a valuable tool for Iowa, offering comprehensive insights into the flow of food, supply, demand, and distribution dynamics across the network. The data collected aligns with objectives outlined by USDA, as well as additional priorities outlined in Iowa's program and offers a quantitative overview of the program's achievements and impact.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Producer: Producers eligible to sell into the Iowa LFPA include farmers or farm businesses whose primary places of business are physically located within the state of Iowa or immediately bordering counties and who successfully completed the registration process including submitting W9 forms and applicable Food Safety licenses.

Distributor: Eligible distributors include Iowa's 6 Food Banks, Iowa's Food Hubs, and Meskwaki Nation

Community Food Access Partners (CAPs): Organizations where underserved Iowans access food free of charge including, but not limited to: food pantries, farm stands, senior centers, early care sites, backpack programs, social service agencies, churches and more.

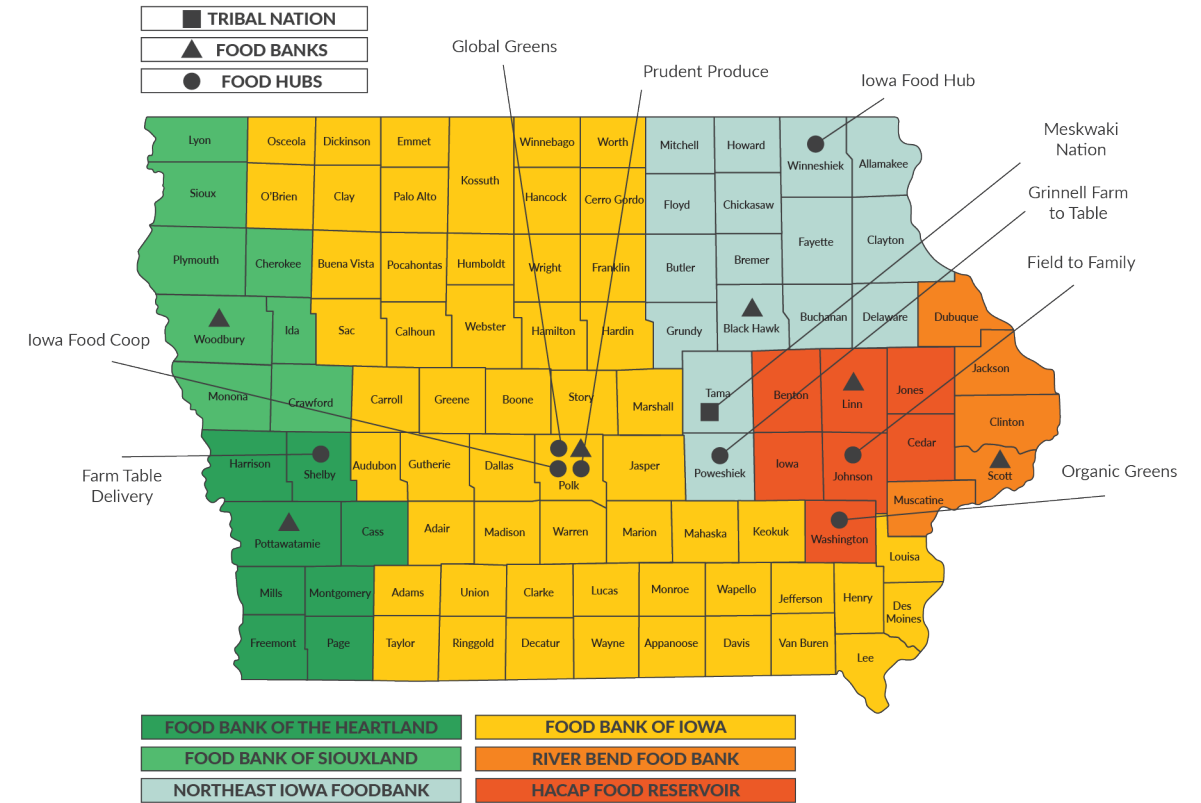
“Tier I”: Tier One Producers are defined as those who self-identified during registration with one or more of the following: Black, Indigenous, Person of Color (BIPOC), LGBTQ+, Women, Immigrant or Refugee, or Veteran

Pricing Guidance: This list serves as guidance on pricing of products purchased through the LFPA and LFS programs to document a fair price for producers while maximizing the amount of food that can be distributed to food insecure households. The price ranges are generous to accommodate a wide range of products and producers, yet this is a competitive program. It is expected that producers will offer products based on their regular wholesale or farmers market pricing. All products purchased through these programs should fall within the price ranges listed. The prices are informed by farmers' and distributors' sales and expertise.

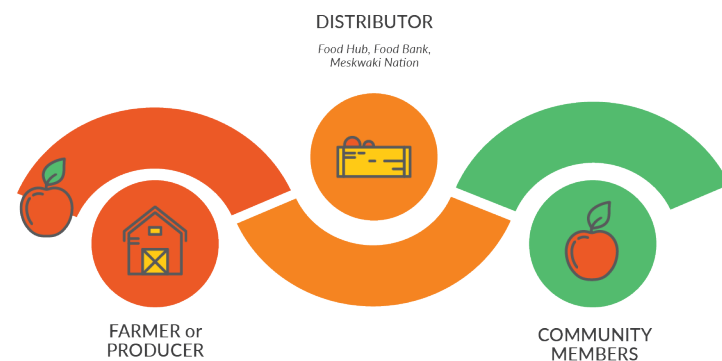
PROGRESS TO DATE

MEASURE	GOAL	PROGRESS THROUGH DEC 2023	% TO COMPLETION
Total Producers Registered to Sell Into Iowa LFPA	300	317	106%
Tier 1 Producers Registered to Sell Into LFPA	150	200	133%
Total Producers with Recorded Sales Into Iowa LFPA	300	234	78%
Total Tier 1 Producers with Recorded Sales Into Iowa LFPA	150	151	101%
Total Value of Food Procured Through Iowa LFPA Producers	\$4,160,087	\$2,015,869	48%
Total Value of Food Procured Through Tier 1 Iowa Producers	\$2,250,000	\$1,447,981	64%
Community Access Partners Reported Receiving LFPA Product	2,000	714	36%
Distributor Community of Practice Meetings Held	12	6	50%

IOWA LFPA DISTRIBUTORS



FARM TO COMMUNITY



Community Access Partners or CAPs describe places like food pantries, early care education (ECE) sites, senior centers, farm stands, and many more. CAPs are where Iowans go when they are experiencing food insecurity or hunger to access food. To date, the program has served 714 CAPs who received free food in 93 Iowa counties.

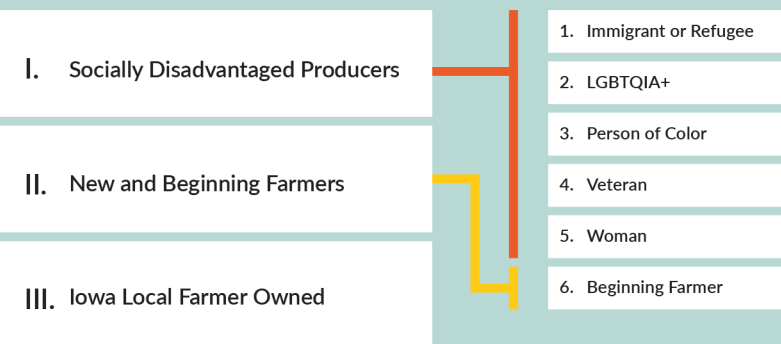
the program with an emphasis on Socially Disadvantaged Producers and in Iowa's program, producers self-identified during registration as having one or more of the following identities: Black, Indigenous, Person of Color (BIPOC), LGBTQ+, Women, Immigrant or Refugee, or Veteran. In Iowa's LFPA and through the report, these groups of historically and systemically underestimated producer groups are referred to as "Tier I" or Tier One Producers. Iowa partners utilized the same producer registration system for the LFPA and LFS programs ensuring all food safety requirements, source identification and demographic information was collected before sales. For more information on the LFS sister program, reference the LFS Progress Report.

Producer partner organizations: Technical assistance and holistic support for farmers is essential to ensuring new markets like those included in LFPA. One adaptation in Phase 2 of Iowa's LFPA to expand producer support systems, was the inclusion of three non-profit Producer Support organizations (We Arose Co-op, Tapestry Farms and Feed Iowa First) to achieve program goals of improving Tier One producer investment while providing nuanced farmer network support.

The LFPA offers data to better understand needs across Iowa and drive data-centered decisions for improvement and growth around food access. Food insecurity rates in Iowa are rising and current SNAP, WIC, Double Up Food Bucks and Summer Feeding programs are not able to meet the needs of food insecure Iowans (Feeding America, 2021). Food insecure population data was identified through county level Feeding America data and compared to county level LFPA data. Researchers found that Iowa's LFPA program has only been able to reach 57% of Iowa's food insecure population. Although not all of the 99 counties were served equally, and there is room for improvement, program staff are learning through Phase 2 to identify improvements in equity for Phase 3.

Producers: The LFPA program revealed incredible diversity in the products farmers and small businesses can produce and also revealed an increasingly diverse demographic of farmers and producers across the state. The USDA designed

LFPA PRODUCER TIERS



The Tiered Purchasing Structure is intended to support participating distributors in prioritizing purchases from Socially Disadvantaged Producers participating in Iowa's LFPA.

A Note on Intersectionality:

With multiple marginalized identities, systemic oppression increases.

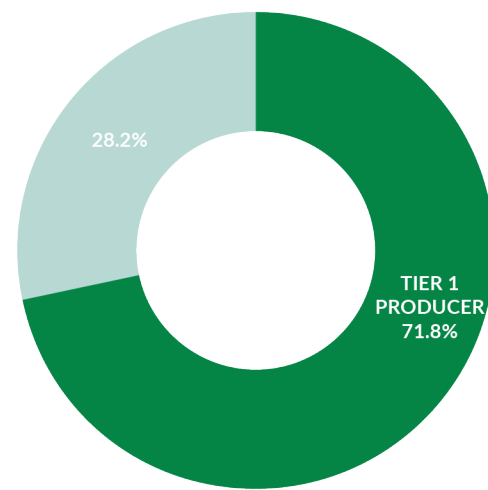
- Example 1 | I-3: Veteran, Person of Color, Immigrant or Refugee
- Example 2 | I-2: LGBTQIA+, Woman
- Example 3 | II: Beginning Farmer

LFPA Producer Overview:

234 Producers have sold through LFPA in the period reflected in this report

- 151 Producers self-identified as “Tier 1”
- Average LFPA Producer Sales:
 - Median - \$1,000
 - Mean - \$5,000

DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS



Products:

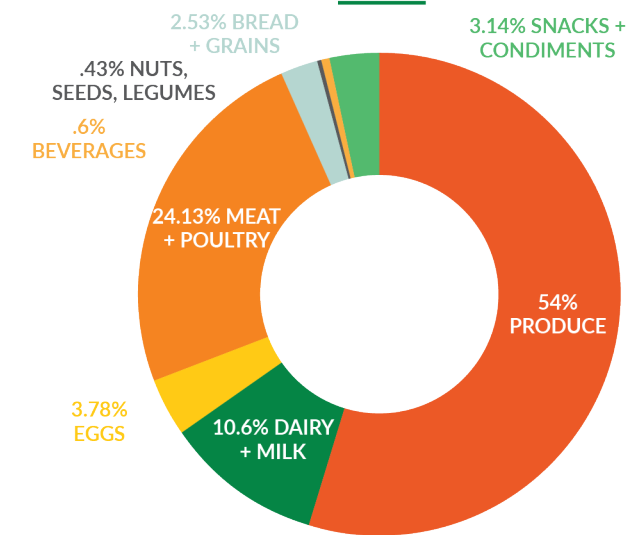
A diverse product distribution strategy reflects an awareness of the unique needs across various communities. The following breakdown underscores the program’s commitment to addressing nuanced preferences and ensuring a well-rounded nutritional offering:

- 55% Produce: Over half of the distributed products comprise fresh, seasonal Iowa produce, aligning with the overarching goal of fostering healthy, locally sourced options. This commitment ensures that communities have access to a variety of fruits and vegetables.
- 24% Meat and Poultry: Protein is one of the least accessible dietary staples for Iowans facing food insecurity. High quality protein sources are important dietary staples across Iowa, with different products such as chicken, beef, pork and lamb that cater to the preferences of different communities.
- 10.6% Dairy: Dairy products such as yogurt, cheese, butter and cottage cheese were distributed to communities. Liquid milk was not an eligible product for the LFPA.
- 11% or less of products were eggs, bread, beverages, nuts, snacks, grains, and legumes.

Anecdotal reports highlight regional variations in Community Access Partner (CAP) needs, with difficulties reported in accessing meat, produce, and culturally relevant food items as well as distributor challenges in finding high quality products such as dairy.

- New routes were formed in Northeast Iowa that have increased the distribution of culturally relevant foods to local pantries as a result of relationships built through LFPA. Immigrant and refugee families have the opportunity to not only

LFPA PROCUREMENT BREAKDOWN



grow and sell familiar produce, but can receive it as well with the help of partner organizations.

- After recognizing barriers to access fresh local food in their area, a non-profit was formed to fill the gap with the support of LFPA’s commitment to innovative solutions. Producers found a collaborative way of meeting the needs of their community by distributing a seasonal box in Southwest Iowa while receiving a fair wage for their labor.
- Direct partnerships between food banks, food hubs, nonprofits and producers in Central Iowa supported thoughtful market development and matched local supply with community needs.

These brief anecdotes and program data collectively underscore LFPA’s dynamic and community-driven approach, highlighting the program’s adaptability, responsiveness, and commitment to meeting the diverse needs of communities across Iowa. The LFPA procurement and distribution exemplifies the diversity of products that are produced in Iowa. The LFPA program has expanded what distributors can offer because of increasing understanding of what kinds of local food community members need and want.

IV. Qualitative Data

Stories from local communities in Iowa help illustrate the tangible impact, both materially and nutritionally, for Iowans whose lives have been improved. The stories convey how the LFPA is not a one size fits all program, it looks different in different parts of the state. Hundreds of LFPA partners hold unique stories that explain how LFPA has impacted their lives and communities in Iowa. Leaders of the project continue to collect and share stories in order to show how this project is improving underserved communities and the dignity people feel in receiving high quality local food across the state.

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LFPA STORIES

Global Food Project and Field to Family Food Hub, Iowa City

Food insecurity is a state wide and global issue. People lack access to food. In the state of Iowa, it's not that we don't produce enough food, we have a distribution problem.

Food insecurity is a state wide and global issue. People lack access to food. In the state of Iowa, it's not that we don't produce enough food, we have a distribution problem.

The Iowa LFPA is solving the problem of connecting the dots between the right people and the right infrastructure.

Through the LFPA program, gardeners with the Global Food Project, an Iowa City area based non profit, have been able to sell their fruits and vegetables through Field to Family's food hub and get paid a fair price for their produce.

Will Kapp, Global Food Project Manager, said that "[The LFPA] is getting food that people want to the people who need it without shortchanging the farmer. We need more programs like this! It is too much to ask farmers of any kind to grow, clean, market, sell, navigate bureaucracy, etc. and it is WAY too much to ask that of newly arrived immigrants in the area. Why wouldn't we just have a system where people who want to grow food are able to get to the people who need it?"

**For more stories, visit
iowavalleyrcd.substack.com/s/iowa-lfpa**

Global Food Project, Iowa City



LFPA STORIES

Southern Goods LLC, We Arose Co-Op, Northeast Iowa Food Bank

**It has allowed us to get a fair price for what we are selling.
We cannot scale and pay employees and not get a fair price.**

Since 2019, Southern Goods LLC has provided beef and southern produce like collard greens, turnip greens, okra, purple hull peas, and sweet potatoes to the Waterloo community. Shaffer also serves on the steering committee for We Arose Co-op - an organization dedicated to community wellness and building the next generation of Black Iowan farmers and growers.

Shaffer Ridgeway, owner of Southern Goods said "The biggest thing if you go to grocery stores or businesses to sell your produce is [that] you have to already be at scale and prove that you can sell so many bundles of greens a week. [Otherwise] they don't talk to you and have a conversation."

Becca Huber, Northeast Iowa Food Bank Food Sourcing Manager, recalls how a single phone call with Shaffer set them on a path to purchasing local produce for the first time through the Iowa LFPA program. The Northeast Iowa Food Bank serves 16 counties starting at the Minnesota border down to Tama County. They have 153 partner agencies that ultimately distribute 5 million meals. Each month their onsite Cedar Valley Food Pantry serves 3,000 people.

As a growing small-scale producer, Shaffer underscores his ability to negotiate prices being integral to his ability to meet the demands of the community. He highlights the Iowa LFPA program's open pricing guidelines noting how, "It has allowed us to get a fair price for what we are selling." In anticipation of future growing seasons, he explains that "we cannot scale and pay employees and not get a fair price."

**For more stories, visit
www.iowalfpa.org or scan the
QR code below.**



Southern Goods LLC, Waterloo



V. Challenges, Lessons Learned

Challenges in Iowa LFPA:

1.) Bridging Traditional Farm-to-Food Assistance and Local Food Systems: The LFPA program faces the complex task of bridging two distinct systems: traditional farm-to-food assistance and local food systems. Harmonizing these models poses challenges in terms of logistics, supply chain management, and market matchmaking.

2.) Coordination and Value Chain Management: Effective value chain coordination demands time, expertise, and resources. Ensuring the smooth flow of produce from farmers to distributors and community access sites requires experienced staff, highlighting the need for ongoing investment in personnel and development.

3.) Farmer Support: Building relationships with new farmers, especially small farms and farmers from socially disadvantaged groups, necessitates careful planning. Many of these farmers may lack experience in selling beyond direct-to-consumer markets, requiring targeted support and mentorship programs.

4.) Funding Limitations: Even with 300+ producers registered, serving 714 sites, and distributing over \$2M in food to date, the demand for local food is surpassing available funding. Balancing the supply and demand efficiently while seeking additional funding sources is critical for sustaining the program's impact.

5.) Equitable Distribution: County-specific equity considerations play a crucial role in the LFPA program. Addressing disparities in resource allocation, accessibility, and infrastructure among counties is essential for ensuring an equitable distribution of benefits from the program.

6.) Forward Payments for Farmers: Many farmers scaled their operations to meet the LFPA program's demands, often encountering cash flow challenges. Providing forward payments to farmers can alleviate financial constraints, enabling them to better manage their resources and contribute to the program's success.

7.) Timing Challenges: The release of funding coinciding with the middle of the growing season presented planning challenges. Coordination with existing markets and ensuring a smooth transition for farmers faced with prior commitments were crucial aspects that needed careful consideration for the pilot phase.

In conclusion, the Iowa LFPA program encounters multifaceted challenges in integrating traditional and local food systems. Addressing these challenges requires strategic planning, resource allocation, and ongoing collaboration between practitioners and policymakers to ensure the program's long-term success and positive impact on Iowa's food landscape.

Strategies Employed to Overcome Challenges in Iowa LFPA:

1.) Centering Relationships: Collaborative efforts with key organizations provide valuable resources and expertise to guide and implement this program. Partnerships contribute to the development of support systems, mentorship programs, and educational initiatives include working with farmers in navigating the transition to new markets.

2.) Intentional Program Design: A well-defined structure was created to address timing challenges. This involved careful design, scheduling and alignment of activities to mitigate conflicts with the growing season, ensuring smooth execution during crucial phases.

3.) Farmer Focus Groups and Surveys: Engaged farmers through focus groups and surveys to better understand their unique challenges and preferences. This farmer-centric approach informs targeted support programs, fostering stronger relationships and ensuring that interventions align with farmers' needs.

4.) Emphasis on Tier 1 Purchases: The USDA program required emphasis on investment in Socially Disadvantaged Producers. Iowa's program honors and recognizes the need to invest in a diverse group of local producers and structured the program to ensure investment in Tier One farmers and producers who have historic and systemic barriers to scaling and achieving long-term business viability.

5.) Diverse Distribution Models: Flexibility in approach and expert oversight is guided by the four committees and quarterly Distributor Community of Practice (CoP) meetings. Regular committee and CoP meetings facilitate collaboration and information exchange among stakeholders. This fosters a shared understanding of diverse distribution models, encouraging innovation and effective matchmaking between producers and markets.

6.) Equitable Distribution: Developed county-specific equity considerations, addressing resource allocation, accessibility, and infrastructure disparities. By incorporating these strategies into the LFPA program, efforts are made to ensure an equitable distribution of benefits across all participating

counties. Iowa's multi-channel distribution model allowed food banks and food hubs to work together to meet equity goals that distributors have not achieved alone.

7.) Partnerships for Effective Communication: Collaborated with various organizations and partners to enhance communication strategies. By leveraging these partnerships, the LFPA program aims to effectively communicate its goals, activities, and outcomes to a broader audience, including practitioners, policymakers, and the community.

8.) Flexible Approach: The dynamic approach is made possible by the flexible program design as evidenced by continuous adaptations. Recognizing the evolving nature of the challenges, the program adopts a flexible approach guided by feedback from stakeholders and ongoing assessments to ensure that the program remains responsive and effective in the face of changing circumstances.

In summary, the Iowa LFPA program employs a diverse set of strategies to address the identified challenges. Through partnerships, farmer engagement, equitable distribution considerations, and a dynamic approach to problem-solving, the program aims to build resilience and sustainability within Iowa's local food systems while fostering collaboration between practitioners and policymakers.

VI. Future Outlook

Future Outlook and Strategic Initiatives:

1.) Continuation of Phases 2 and 3: Building upon the existing successes, Phases 2 and 3 will unfold, fostering sustained growth and impact until the scheduled expiration of program funding in March 2025.

2.) Securing Sustainable Funding for LFPA's Ongoing Impact: As the LFPA program confronts the impending funding cliff in March 2025, urgent measures are required to secure sustained support, ensuring the continued transformative impact and market for farmers. Simultaneously, efforts should be directed towards optimizing existing resources, exploring opportunities for distributors and food access sites to reallocate private food insecurity funding towards local purchases. Additional resources and funding remain crucial to maintain momentum and improve community well-being, combat rising rates of food insecurity, and to enhance resiliency of local farmers.

3.) Community-Led Change: Innovative solutions from all partners across the state will help to sustain local efforts

around LFPA. For example, LFPA farmers have proposed creative, values-based ideas to support their communities, such as donating to pantries, accepting SNAP and WIC, or offering sliding scale options based on customer income levels. While these solutions are impactful, LFPA has provided farmers with an opportunity to receive fair compensation for their products, facilitating business growth and scalability. This approach is particularly beneficial in areas with small and midscale farmers, offering a statewide approach to address food security challenges and the business viability dimensions require continued funding.

4.) Transformational Impact and Statewide Positive Results: The LFPA Program is poised to showcase its transformative potential, making a positive impact across the state. By strategically investing in local farmers, distributors, and community access sites, the program aligns community resources and skills with the evolving needs of the state.

5.) Advocacy and Collaboration: Project partners, including farmers, distributors, and community access sites, actively advocate for future funding to sustain LFPA operations. Recognizing the program's success, these partners emphasize the crucial role of funding in supporting farmers scaling up operations and addressing the urgent needs of food access sites striving to meet their communities' nutritional requirements.

6.) Sustainability and Food Security for Communities: The overarching goal is to bolster the resilience and sustainability of Iowa's local food system, extending its benefits to more communities across the state. Ongoing innovation, education, and community engagement will be pivotal in shaping the future of local food in Iowa.

VII. Recommendations

1.) Maintain the LFPA "local food" definition as Iowa and directly bordering counties.

2.) Require local purchasing and prioritize food purchases to invest in Tier I local producers, with an exception on local definition for Meskwaki Nation to source within a 400 mile radius.

3.) Continue the partnership between Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship and Iowa Valley RC&D to administer and manage the program.

4.) Maintain the LFPA pricing tool guidance system to ensure fair price to producers and evolve with new products and market changes.

5.) Provide funding based on producer investment and gaps in food access distribution.

6.) Expand support for market matchmaking, technical assistance and coordination to support producers and distributors.

7.) Forward contracting and production planning which helps farmers invest in their business (Wallace Center).

8.) Intentionally build sustainable relationships between farmers, food hubs, food banks and other food assistance programs (Wallace Center LFPA Report, 2023).

9.) Use the LFPA to build capacity with farmers and regional value chains to serve other institutional markets such as schools and hospitals (Wallace Center LFPA Report, 2023).

10.) Design programs around to provide culturally relevant foods. Within tribal governments, using funding to support native foodways (Wallace Center LFPA Report, 2023).

11.) Support a wide variety of food assistance programs, including grassroots programs through schools, farmers markets, local non-profits and early childcare education centers (Wallace Center LFPA Report, 2023).

VIII. Acknowledgments

Iowa would like to thank the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service and Commodity Credit Corporation for launching this new program and making this work possible.

Thank you to Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig and our partners at the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, for your continued support and leadership in Iowa's LFPA. A heartfelt thank you to Tammy Stotts for her tireless work and belief in partnerships to ensure this project succeeds.

Deep gratitude to all the project partners: the distributors, the farmers, the community access site partners who are working hard every day- you are the people on the ground doing the work and making this project possible.

Thank you to the LFPA Impact Report Team, who served as reviewers and supported the data analysis for this report.

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Thank you in advance to our elected officials who will advocate to sustain and grow this program.

IX. Contact Information

For inquiries into how the program works and how to participate, **contact info@iowalfpa.org**

For questions about the report, **contact Giselle Bruskewitz, giselle@ivr.cd.org**

X. References and Additional Resources

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Land Access Farmer, Iowa City

