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Contact:

Emilee Harris, eharris@sppg.com, (563) 581-7274

Farmers and Child Care Providers Launch Local Food, Healthy Kids Policy Initiative

The Local Food, Healthy Kids Policy Initiative calls for lawmakers to improve Iowa's food system

DES MOINES, IOWA – The Iowa Farmer's Union announced the launch of the Local Food, Healthy Kids Policy Initiative in partnership with the Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children and Northeast Iowa Food & Fitness. The initiative aims to improve access to locally sourced products for Iowa children by advocating for changes to the state's food and child care systems. In order to address current barriers and provide policy solutions, the *Analysis of Iowa's Food System: Opportunities and Policy Recommendations* report was also released as part of the initiative's launch.

"Less than fifteen percent of the food consumed in Iowa is produced in Iowa, so there are significant opportunities for growth in local purchasing that would benefit farmers," said Aaron Lehman, President, Iowa Farmers Union. "The early care and education market represents an area for this growth, but farmers looking to increase production of local food products currently face barriers to accessing land, regulatory burdens, challenges to crop insurance eligibility, and a lack of processing and packaging facilities." According to Krista Smith, representing the Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children, there is interest among child care providers in purchasing more local products. "Improving the nutritional quality of food for children should be a top priority. It is a critical factor in early learning and life-long health," Smith explained. "However, many early care and education providers lack time, sufficient financial support, and educational resources and infrastructure to currently participate in a statewide Farm to Early Care and Education program."

Solving these barriers and creating a pathway for a strong statewide Farm to Early Childhood Education program needs to be approached from many different policy angles at the local, state, and federal levels. The barriers faced by child care providers can be removed through solutions such as increased direct funding and subsidies for meals, statewide education initiatives on the importance of local foods, and incentives for serving locally sourced foods to youth. Farmers and producers could benefit from economic development initiatives to promote local foods, support infrastructure needs, and assist beginning farmers. Assisting Iowa's food hubs that play a critical role in bringing these two groups together should also be a priority.

Over the next several months, the Local Food, Healthy Kids Policy Initiative will be hosting discussions with leading policymakers to advocate for these changes. The contributing partners hope that this initiative will not only put more locally sourced food products into the hands of children, but into the hands of families across the state. The launch of the Local Food, Healthy Kids Policy Initiative will create a foundation from which the state can build a better, healthier future for Iowa's children.

For more information, please contact Emilee Harris.

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Local Food, Healthy Kids is a collaboration between the Iowa Farmers Union, Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children, and Northeast Iowa Food & Fitness. The goal of this project is to advocate for policy solutions that get more locally sourced, fresh and healthy food into the hands of Iowa children in child care and pre-K. To learn more, please visit our website: <https://www.localfoodhealthykids.org/>