

What we've been up to in 2016

Helping people grow their own food

In early June, we offered a class on vegetable gardening in small spaces at the ISU Home Demonstration Garden in Rock Rapids. There is a growing interest in small space gardening. Many people wish to grow their own food but have limited space or time while others want to reduce the size of their gardening plots due to mobility issues or other needs. We discussed several space-saving techniques such as inter-planting, companion planting and succession. Plus, we demonstrated how to grow vegetables using raised beds, containers and trellising.



Cooking class using fresh produce

In a follow-up to our small space gardening class, we offered a cooking class using fresh garden vegetable at the Forester Community Center in Rock Rapids. The class was led by ISU Extension and Outreach nutrition and wellness program specialist, Renee Sweers. We had 25 people participate. After learning techniques for prepping gardening vegetables in the kitchen, we split into groups and headed into the kitchen ourselves and cooked several dishes. The class finished up with a sit-down feast of all the freshly prepared food.

Both classes were part of our Garden to Table series, which incorporates gardening and cooking information. Due to the popularity of the series, which so far has included vegetables and herbs, we plan to continue next year bringing in classes featuring fruit or gardening and cooking with children.



Bringing Fresh Produce to Food Pantries

This summer the Iowa Master Gardener program partnered with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach SNAP-Ed program to increase food security. The goal of this partnership is to make fruits and vegetables more accessible at food pantries. All seven ISU Home Demonstration Gardens participated together with gardens throughout the state managed by Master Gardeners. The ISU Home Demonstration Garden in Rock Rapids contributed over 1,000 pounds of fresh produce to six area food pantries. The ISU Home Demonstration Gardens will again be pantry gardens in 2017.

Farm to Table Dinners

In August we had a local foods dinner at [C. Brown Gardens](#) in Merrill, IA. Known for their pesticide-free vegetable and naturally raised Angus beef, the evening featured great food. C. Brown Gardens has a high tunnel specifically for growing cherry and salad tomatoes most, of which, are heirloom varieties. The evening started with a social hour featuring appetizers and a wine tasting by [Calico Skies Vineyard and Winery](#). Guests also received a tour of the farm and enjoyed live music with dinner. Served up were farm fresh dishes of homemade salsa, soups and salads, New York strip with garlic mashed potatoes, cabbage slaw, corn bread and mini apple pies. The beef and vegetables were home grown on their farm.



Also, in August we had a dinner at [Innspiration Vines and Wines](#) vineyard and winery in Linn Grove, IA. Guests enjoyed fresh, local ingredients prepared by Smokin' Hereford BBQ. The evening began with a social hour that included appetizers and a wine tasting followed by a tour of the winery with guests learning about the history of Innspiration Vines & Wines. Live music accompanied the dinner, which featured delicious stuffed pork loin with mustard dill cream sauce, au gratin potatoes, corn casserole and dark chocolate forest cake for dessert.



In October we had a harvest dinner featuring local foods at the Willow Creek County Park and Recreation Area in Ocheyedan, IA. We invited several local producers to join dinner guests and talk about their work. It was an evening of great conversation, delicious food, and an overall wonderful time of fellowship to celebrate the season. Speakers included Michael and Darla Eeten from [GoodEetens Produce Farm](#), April Wilson from [Seven W Farm](#), Will Kimberley from [Calico Skies Vineyard and Winery](#) and local bee keeper, Beth Thole, from Sibley. The

evening began with appetizers featuring locally raised shrimp and a wine tasting by Calico Skies. Dinner included a main course of smoked pork and chicken from Seven W Farm, sides prepared by Shari's Kitchen and Catering using locally grown vegetables that included carrots with maple syrup locally tapped by Darla Eeten. Dessert featured locally grown apples and honey from [Boernsen Bees](#) in Ocheyedan.

Note: If you are a local food producer or business *interested in participating in or hosting a Farm to Dinner event*, let us know! To learn more about local food producers and business, please visit the [Flavors of Northwest Iowa website](#).

Festivals

Herbs in the Hills

"nature, knowledge, live music, food"

In September we held our annual family-oriented festival, Herbs in the Hills that showcased education about herbs, local food and wellness. Education, entertainment and hands-on activities for all ages is part of what makes the Herbs in the Hills Festival unique.

This free family event was held at Peters Park near Rodney, Iowa. Approximately 120 people came to participate in educational sessions, experience free entertainment, enjoy make-and-takes, taste herbal tea and herbal seasoning samples and shop at a variety of local food and product vendors. This exciting event was brought to you by Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, Onawa Chamber of Commerce, Monona County Conservation, Monona County Public Health and Monona County Economic Development.

Rising Star Internship Program

2016 was the third year for hosting ISU students participating in the Rising Star Internship program. Eight students interned with ISU Extension and Outreach for 12 weeks, May-August, throughout counties in the mid- and northwest region of Iowa. They had quite a busy summer.

The interns hosted **local food tastings** - several per week - showcasing locally grown produce from gardens and farmers' markets. The Rising Stars were teaching about local foods at elementary schools, food banks, county fairs and farmers' markets.



They were also busy **working with local producers** helping build an online presence. Examples include: [Kentwood Farms](#) and [Boernsen Bees](#),



Farm and community garden **tours** were on the list of fun things to do together with some interns working with individual farms to get a hands-on experience of what local producers do.

Meeting producers also resulted in several **producer summaries** written to give consumers a quick and easy way to get to know their farmer and learn more about local food production – see www.flavorsofnorthwestiowa.org to view several producer profiles.

In some counties, interns presented on local foods at youth camps and helped plan local food events.

If that wasn't enough, each intern was responsible for an **individual project** that they presented at the end of their internship. Their projects touched on many topics including:

- a look at best practices for farmers' market vendors regarding marketing and displays
- educational outreach on healthy eating and nutrition information for adults and children as well as on the benefits of buying locally grown food
- research on the use of local farmers' markets and food pantries by the elderly to support ways to decrease food insecurity and improve nutritional status within the elderly population
- helping to connect local producers with area food pantries.

To keep us updated on all their activities, the interns posted [weekly blogs](#), and made posts to [Facebook](#), Twitter and Instagram.

Note: We are again hosting ISU students for 2017. Please contact us if you would like to be involved with the Rising Star program.