Student gardener Abigail Breitbach (left) brings the first-ever delivery of produce to UNI Dining Service, from the first student garden on UNI's campus.

## Face of a Food Champion

University of Northern Iowa (UNI) has worked with the Northern Iowa Food & Farm Partnership (NIFFP) since it started as a Buy Fresh Buy Local group in 1997. Today UNI’s food service spends approximately 29 percent of its total food purchasing dollars on products from within 250 miles of the university, and more than $100,000 on food from the seven counties where NIFFP works.

Lisa Krausman, administrative dietician and purchasing manager for UNI’s Residence Administration, says using local food helps farmers in the community and also the university. And whether or not students, UNI’s primary audience, are aware that their food is local, Krausman hopes “they know it when they taste it and say, ‘Wow! This is a really good cucumber!’”

The purchases include fruit and vegetables, honey, meat, poultry and dairy products. A local meat locker ensures that the meat comes from within the seven NIFFP counties. UNI also buys produce from campus student gardens organized by NIFFP. Most of the food is served in one of two student dining facilities, but the university also serves the retail area of Maucker Union, two convenience stores, a catering service and three kiosk areas in academic buildings, thus reaching faculty and staff.

UNI hasn’t tracked whether any jobs have been created as a result of its local food purchases, but Krausman believes that the sheer quantity must make a difference keeping farmers in business. UNI is able to reduce surplus waste by purchasing items like sweet corn, available in large quantities for short periods of time. It also buys hard-to-sell items like blemished but otherwise edible produce.

“A few farmers that primarily sell through a farmers market can kind of clean out their products by selling to us,” she says. “Because we [have a processing facility, produce] doesn’t

## By The Numbers in 2012

Three farmers reported:
- Total food sales: $181,657
- Total number of full-time, year-round jobs: 5

Twelve institutions reported:
- Current local food purchases: $2,267,462

Economic impact of local foods for farmers and institutions combined:
- Total number of new jobs: 5
- Total number of new full-time, year-round jobs: 0
- Total funds leveraged by the Northern Iowa Food and Farm Partnership: $51,173
- Minimum spent in local food commerce for every dollar leveraged: $44

Methods used to collect these data are available in the statewide report, *2012 Economic Impacts of Iowa’s Regional Food Systems Working Group*. 
have to look perfect, because we’ll be sending it out chopped or in strips. Even if it has a weird shape we can use it.”

Krausman highlights NIFFP’s role in helping UNI get in touch with farmers. She gets information on current stock and pricing details from NIFFP’s local foods coordinator, Rachel Wobeter, saying this reduces the amount legwork the university has to do finding suppliers. She says NIFFP also encourages farmers to sell locally and educates them on the needs of the buyer, for example when selling tomatoes.

“[The end user] may want standard size tomatoes,” explains Krausman. “The farmer may need to give different prices on different sizes of tomatoes... [NIFFP] has helped in those educational elements.”

UNI has greatly increased local food purchases, particularly these past five years, but Krausman points out that it serves five to six thousand meals per day—more than what local producers currently supply. And as other businesses get interested in buying locally, this further limits UNI’s potential purchases, “because everyone pulls from the same sources.”

“In a perfect world, we try to get more farmers out there producing specialty product, but that takes time,” says Krausman. NIFFP plays an important, ongoing role in strengthening the local foods infrastructure to meet the needs of farmers’ and buyers like UNI.

Bagge Strawberries supplies UNI’s dining services with fresh strawberries in June. Bagge employees here show off produce during a farm visit.

NIFFP’s “Faces of Our Farmers” project advertises and markets local food producers. Here, a reporter from the Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier visits Tim Daley’s farm in New Hartford.

**About this Series**

This report documents the impact of the local food industry on Iowa’s economy associated with the efforts of the Regional Food Systems Working Group. These impacts result from collaboration and innovation among Iowa farmers, farm-based businesses, and support providers. It is one in a series of 11 regional reports and one statewide report, developed from an evaluation of the economic impact of the RFSWG. The evaluation focused on four indicators of economic change:

» Local food sales by farmers  
» Local food purchases by restaurants, food services, hospitals and other institutions  
» Job creation as a result of local food production, processing or utilization  
» Funds leveraged by RFSWG groups to support the development of regional food systems

For a description of data collection methods and an analysis of results, consult the statewide report: [www.leopold.iastate.edu/local-food](http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/local-food).

The RFSWG is funded by a competitive grant from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

**Contact Information**

Rachel Wobeter, Local Food Program Manager  
UNI Center for Energy & Environmental Education  
319.273.1494 | [rachel.wobeter@uni.edu](mailto:rachel.wobeter@uni.edu)

Jessica Burtt Fogarty, RFSWG Coordinator  
319.400.7988 | [jessicaburtt@gmail.com](mailto:jessicaburtt@gmail.com)