



# Nourish Iowa VISTA AmeriCorps

*Increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables in Iowa's communities.*

## 2025 Highlights





## About Nourish Iowa VISTA

Nourish Iowa is an AmeriCorps VISTA program within the state of Iowa based at the University of Northern Iowa working towards the elimination of poverty through capacity-building projects. These projects incorporate land access, transportation, and financial support as integral pieces to abundant food access and each person's opportunity to choose the foods they eat. Founded in 2015, the Nourish Iowa VISTA Project now includes a number of sub-sites across the state of Iowa!

### Our 2025 VISTA Cohort

In 2025 Nourish Iowa VISTA engaged 8 service sites hosting 14 service members.

- Sarah Steinmeyer - VISTA Program Manager
- Eden - VISTA Leader at UNI CEEE
- Amy - Farm, Food & Enterprise Development (FFED)
- Jill - Farm, Food & Enterprise Development (FFED)
- Cece - Eat Greater Des Moines
- Phil - Field to Family
- Louise - Field to Family
- Fidele - Tapestry Farms
- Jada - Table to Table
- Kent - Waterloo Urban Farmers Market with We Arose
- Melanie - Table to Table
- Natalie - Feed Iowa First
- Carina - CEEE at UNI
- Meg - CEEE at UNI
- Jamie - CEEE at UNI

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[ceee.uni.edu/nourish-iowa-vista](https://ceee.uni.edu/nourish-iowa-vista)  
to learn more about our  
program, find open positions  
and more!





## **Nourish Iowa: Cultivating Community Through Service**

Over the past year, Nourish Iowa VISTA members have helped drive meaningful progress across Iowa's local food network. From organizing spreadsheets, planning innovative outreach campaigns, to securing more than \$415,000 in grant funding, their work has strengthened partnerships and expanded access to fresh, healthy food. Through capacity building service, creative problem-solving, and strong community relationships, Nourish Iowa continues to nourish both people and partnerships helping build a more resilient food future.

### **Empowering Local Food Systems, One Project at a Time**

This year, Nourish Iowa VISTA members supported more than 75 non-profit food events, expanded digital outreach, and helped develop infrastructure that improved food distribution and storage. Whether coordinating volunteer gleaning efforts, designing educational materials, or building food access initiatives, each member played a unique role in strengthening Iowa's local food network. Together, their efforts have reached tens of thousands of Iowans, highlighting the power of national service in advancing sustainable, community-driven solutions to hunger.



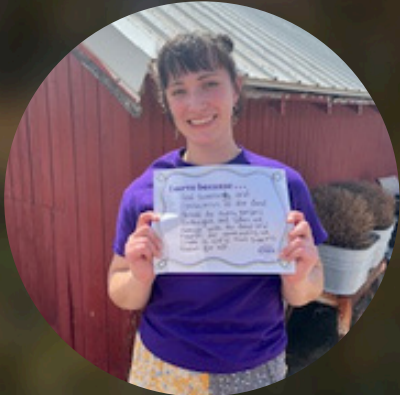


## Eden Rowland - UNI CEEE VISTA Leader

Eden served as an exceptional VISTA Leader with Nourish Iowa, providing steadfast guidance, compassion, and strategic support to both members and partner sites across the state. With a remarkable ability to balance logistics, mentorship, and mission-driven vision, Eden strengthened the capacity of our entire program.

She fostered a cohesive, supportive VISTA cohort, ensuring members felt heard, prepared, and connected, and she consistently went above and beyond in organizing trainings, troubleshooting challenges, and building systems that will benefit future service years. Eden's leadership elevated Nourish Iowa's ability to fight food insecurity and expand access to nutritious, locally sourced food.

Her dedication, professionalism, and heart left a lasting impact not just on the VISTA team, but on communities statewide. Eden exemplified what it means to lead with integrity and service. Eden concluded her service in October 2025.



# Amy Taylor - Farm, Food & Enterprise Development (FFED)

During her service with Nourish Iowa, Amy Taylor made significant contributions to advancing local food education, outreach, and community engagement. She secured a \$500 sponsorship from ISU's ANR Extension to support the ISU Local Food Festival and led extensive outreach efforts, developing email templates and sending invitations to more than 400 stakeholders.

Amy also collaborated with Jill and Cece, fellow VISTA members in our cohort, to design a farm-to-ECE apple lesson and presented it at Drake Head Start during the Great Apple Crunch, helping young learners connect with Iowa grown foods.

Amy represented ISU FFED at several key events, including the Iowa Hunger Summit where she connected with VISTA peers and agricultural leaders to raise awareness about local food systems. She also attended the Soul of the Soil Conference. She further contributed to team learning through active participation in the FFED Book Club, even suggesting a guest speaker to discuss nitrogen runoff. Amy's service reflects her commitment to strengthening Iowa's food system through education, relationship-building, and creative outreach.

Amy's service concluded February 2026.



## Jill Ardueser – Farm, Food & Enterprise Development (FFED)

During her service with Nourish Iowa, Jill demonstrated exceptional leadership in food systems education, curriculum development, and statewide coalition-building. She collaborated with Colorado State University and Texas Local Food to advance Immersion Curriculum projects, ultimately completing the final curriculum report. Jill supported Iowa Kids Garden Day webinars and helped grow the event's reach from just 3,000 children to more than 30,000 participants statewide, with projections nearing 40,000 in 2025 and recognition through a gubernatorial proclamation.

Jill co-developed a local apple-themed farm-to-ECE lesson plan with Cece and Amy, preparing materials and supporting on-site delivery at Drake Head Start during the Great Apple Crunch. She was accepted as a poster presenter for the 2025 National Farm to Cafeteria Conference and began producing a final report based on pilot program evaluations and Immersion Curriculum findings.

Her service also strengthened Iowa's food systems network through research and community engagement. Jill assisted an Iowa State University research team by conducting mock interviews to assess the Iowa Food Systems Coalition and helped anonymize data for analysis. She conducted a high school taste test in Council Bluffs featuring a savory sweet potato dish, gathering valuable student feedback. Additionally, she contributed to team culture by participating in a group bonding activity at a plant nursery and supported development of materials for her national conference poster.

Jill's service reflects her commitment to meaningful partnership, thoughtful curriculum design, and increasing access to food education for learners across Iowa. Jill completed her first term in June 2025 and re-enrolled for a second term of service with Nourish Iowa.





## Cece Jensen – Eat Greater Des Moines

During her service with Nourish Iowa, Cece made a powerful impact through her creativity, branding expertise, and commitment to community outreach. She played a leading role in expanding the visibility of Eat Greater Des Moines (EGDM) by developing donor outreach emails, distributing promotional flyers for Cultivate’s Summer and Fall Series, and managing sponsorship and grant information.

Cece also updated the EGDM website and led Canva-based design and social media planning, strengthening the organization’s digital presence. Cece’s design contributions were standout highlights of her service. She helped brand EGDM’s blender bike, affectionately named “Chip the Nacho”, and created interactive educational materials that delighted children during the Drake Head Start family block party.



She designed flyers, wish list templates, and other outreach tools, while also contributing to the EGDM Annual Report and participating in mission and vision development discussions. Her work extended beyond design into community engagement and resource organization.

Cece created interactive materials for early childhood events, coordinated a fridge donation, and organized shared digital folders to support future VISTA members. She participated in planning meetings for Cultivate Your Plate, produced a mock-up for the event, and evaluated EGDM’s website to inspire improvements. Additionally, she attended Practical Farmers of Iowa field days, supported the Iowa Beet newsletter, and co-led collaborative lesson planning with Drake University.



Cece’s service term was marked by creativity, initiative, and meaningful relationship building, leaving a lasting foundation for future outreach and education efforts across Iowa. Cece’s service concluded in December 2025.



## Phil Tyne – Field to Family

During his service with Nourish Iowa, Phil strengthened community partnerships and advanced local food education across the state. He collaborated with Engaged Early Education to host a children’s scavenger hunt at the Children’s Discovery Garden, helping young learners explore fruits and vegetables in a fun, hands-on way. Phil also partnered with Cornell College and Bon Appétit Management Company for their Local Food Celebration, supporting campus engagement around Iowa grown foods.

Phil developed a comprehensive Serving Local Food Resource Packet for school nutrition directors, expanding his knowledge of healthy school meal planning and creating a valuable tool for future procurement efforts. His service extended into technical support for local food distribution, where he tracked school purchasing records and helped with sourcing more than 50,000 pounds of local food to schools.

He played a key role in aggregating produce for regional partners, including sourcing over 200 heads of cabbage for the Meskwaki Settlement’s CSA and supporting teacher box distributions featuring multiple varieties of cauliflower.

Through relationship-building, logistical support, and educational resource development, Phil contributed meaningfully to strengthening Iowa’s capacity to serve fresh, local food in schools and community programs.

Phil re-enrolled for his second service term in July 2025.



## Louise Mbouma – Field to Family

During her service with Nourish Iowa, Louise made significant contributions to Field to Family through her leadership in marketing, volunteer coordination, and community engagement.

She developed the 2025 online market survey, created a comprehensive volunteer training presentation and manual, and supported orientation planning for the upcoming market season. To boost community visibility, Louise secured bus signage through Iowa City Transit and contributed to weekly Mailchimp outreach, earning praise for her creativity and communication skills.

Louise played a vital role in streamlining internal processes and reducing staff workload by strengthening communication systems and coordinating volunteers more efficiently. She also began contributing to Field to Family's Workplace/Group Purchasing project, which explores opportunities for CSA programs and Veggie Prescription initiatives.

Her team's broader work in supporting local food systems was recognized in the Des Moines Register, highlighting the impact of these efforts.

Louise promoted the Double Up Food Bucks initiative and SNAP access through the online market, attended advisory meetings, and presented the 2024 report to stakeholders. Her service reflects a strong commitment to local food access. Louise's term concluded December 2025.



## Fidele Muragara – Tapestry Farms

During his first year of service with Nourish Iowa, Fidele made transformative contributions to community food access, farm infrastructure, and volunteer engagement. He helped secure a \$500 tree grant and raised an impressive \$2,500 at a community concert, generating both resources and local enthusiasm for garden projects.

Fidele also led the planning of a comprehensive drip irrigation system across a 2-acre garden, improving growing conditions and supporting the farm's long-term sustainability. One of his most significant achievements was advancing a walk-in cooler project that will quadruple storage capacity and dramatically increase the organization's ability to handle fresh produce.

Fidele played a major role in volunteer coordination, helping the garden reach a record harvest of 30,000 pounds of produce distributed to partners such as River Bend Food Bank. He supported key harvest efforts by coordinating the delivery of 320 pounds of cabbage to local food pantries and helped boost community interest through his outreach.

Beyond the garden, Fidele demonstrated deep community commitment. He supported accessing food and clothing for families in need, provided translation support for refugee families, and spoke at a Jewish congregation and school events to raise awareness about food insecurity and community gardening initiatives. Fidele re-enrolled for a second term in December 2025.



## Jada McDonald – Table to Table

During her service with Nourish Iowa, Jada made major contributions to strengthening Table to Table’s digital presence, volunteer communication, and community outreach.

She led the soft launch of the organization’s newly designed website, improving SEO, increasing page traction, and implementing a detailed FAQ page to streamline volunteer inquiries. Her thoughtful approach to content organization and audience engagement continues to enhance Table to Table’s online accessibility and capacity-building efforts.

Jada also expanded the organization’s outreach through multimedia storytelling. She produced impactful video content addressing topics such as mental health and SNAP EBT access, helping connect community members with essential resources in relatable and accessible ways. Her creativity supported broader communications efforts and added depth to Table to Table’s educational messaging.

Earlier in her term, Jada attended the Food for Thought event at the Coralville Pantry, where she received meaningful community recognition for her contributions. She generated fresh outreach ideas, supported staff communications, and continued to refine Table to Table’s digital tools to better serve volunteers and partner organizations.

Jada’s service reflected a strong blend of creativity, technical skill, and community-centered storytelling. She concluded her two years of service with Nourish Iowa in December 2025.



## Kent Shankle – Waterloo Urban Farmers Market / We Arose



During his service with Nourish Iowa, Kent has made extraordinary contributions to the Waterloo Urban Farmers Market (WUFM), expanding its funding base, community reach, and program offerings. He secured a \$15,000 grant from the Otto Schoitz Foundation, the organization's first ever award from this funder, bringing his total fundraising impact to more than \$60,000 and effectively doubling the market's annual budget. Kent also revitalized sponsorship efforts, launching the "Sponsor-a-Farmer/Producer/Maker" program and preparing an additional \$30,000 in grant applications.

Kent planned an impressive array of community events designed to promote food access, wellness, and engagement. His programming included the Fresh & Fun Fitness Series, Pet Therapy, Kids' Play Days, a Drum Circle event, and the Fresh For All food access fair. He partnered with Mediacom to launch "Go Green, Get Greens," an initiative incentivizing reusable bag use to reduce waste. Earlier in the season, he coordinated pumpkin patch activities, provided vouchers at school-based pop-up markets, and created urban garden interpretive signage and a media campaign.



Kent significantly increased WUFM's visibility through strategic outreach and digital communication. He managed the market's social media presence, doubling average monthly views and reaching more than 80,000 people in a single month. His collaborations included coordinating a Specialty Crop Block Grant and co-launching the Love Local 5K with UNI Local Food VISTA Carina, further elevating the market's regional profile.



Throughout the year, Kent also engaged directly with community members, serving as a guest reader at the arboretum and witnessing firsthand the emotional impact of programs like Double Up Food Bucks. His thoughtful and creative service helped strengthen food access, build community connections, and set WUFM on a strong trajectory for future growth. Kent re-enrolled for his second term in June 2025.

## Melanie Fetter – Feed Iowa First & Table to Table

During her service with Nourish Iowa, Melanie made meaningful contributions through operational streamlining support and community engagement at both Feed Iowa First and Table to Table.

At Feed Iowa First, she led a cooler maintenance project and helped plan a remodel to improve food storage infrastructure, a service that will enhance efficiency and quality across the organization's distribution system. She presented at a pantry partner meeting and prepared annual food safety and handling training for volunteers, strengthening consistency, safety, and confidence across the volunteer team. Her support with distribution logistics further improved day-to-day operations and helped ensure reliable delivery of fresh produce to community partners.

At Table to Table, Melanie jumped into fieldwork and volunteer coordination with enthusiasm. She organized and led a gleaning event that harvested more than 2,500 pounds of sweet corn and 725 pounds of apples, marking her first experience with large-scale farm gleaning and making an immediate impact on local food recovery efforts.

Melanie also attended the Twin City Produce Auction, where she gained insight into regional produce markets, donation systems, and collaboration opportunities with growers. As she continued her term, she has taken on volunteer support roles, built relationships with staff and community partners, and familiarized herself with organizational systems to prepare for deeper involvement throughout her term.

Melanie's service reflects leadership, initiative, and a willingness to learn. Melanie re-enrolled in February 2025 for a second term with Nourish Iowa.



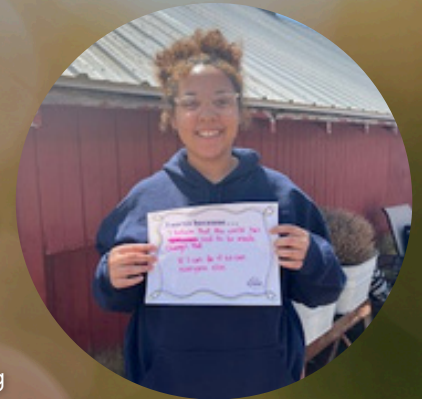
# Natalie Jasso – Feed Iowa First

During her service with Nourish Iowa, Natalie brought creativity, initiative, and strong organizational skills to her role, making meaningful contributions across events, outreach, and educational programming.

She led a volunteer-driven plant sale that generated \$1,000 in online sales, building on the season's early work of starting planting trays and preparing for the spring sale. Natalie also designed a logo for a new fall event and secured her first in-kind sponsorship for an upcoming September program, demonstrating her growing leadership in event planning and community engagement.

A highlight of her service was supporting the launch of Global Graze, a new annual event centered on food, culture, and community connection. Natalie also collaborated with the Rodale Institute to help host a workshop on organic vegetable production, expanding learning opportunities for growers and attendees. To strengthen outreach and storytelling efforts, she created a program video that supports education and promotes the organization's mission.

Natalie's service has been marked by creativity, initiative, and she is helping lay the groundwork for new events, stronger outreach, and expanded educational resources. Natalie re-enrolled for a second term in December 2025.



## Carina Collet – CEEE at UNI

During her service with Nourish Iowa, Carina made wide-ranging contributions that strengthened community engagement, regional food access, and local food education across northeast Iowa. She played a key role in organizing the Love Local 5K fundraiser, gaining experience in event planning, logistics, and promotion, and created a volunteer manual for the SPROUT Garden that will support center-wide collaboration for years to come. Carina also helped launch educational outreach at local farmers markets, offering recipes and samples to promote local food literacy while creating eye-catching graphics and signage through Canva to sustain strong event visibility throughout the season.

Carina broadened her impact through coalition and regional outreach efforts. She connected with rural food pantries, conducted asset mapping for the HEAL grant, and created detailed maps of food banks as well as lists of pantries and community meal sites. She presented at the Cedar Valley Regional Food & Farm Network (CVRFFN) coalition meeting, organized additional CVRFFN gatherings, and supported the launch of the FRED cart at farmers markets to expand access to fresh food. Her outreach extended to engaging more than 300 attendees at the Iowa Eats Food and Farm Fest, where she built connections and raised awareness of local food initiatives.

Throughout the year, Carina participated in professional development opportunities including the HEAL Conference, the National Ag Marketing Summit, and Local Food Leader training and assisted in planning a Farm to Fork Dinner to deepen community ties. She also collaborated with the Northeast Iowa Food Bank (NEIFB) on a video series and assisted in planning regional food events, including the Local Food 5K.

Carina's service has strengthened partnerships, elevated community programming, and advanced key regional food system initiatives. Carina's term concluded in August 2025.



## Meg Gillins – CEEE at UNI

During her 2025 service, Meg made meaningful contributions to outreach, design, and community engagement through her creativity and steady leadership. She designed her first flyer using Canva and quickly expanded her skills to create a wide range of engaging print materials and social media content promoting SPROUT Garden initiatives, local food activities, and food access. Meg developed a content plan that kept her ahead of a busy event season and produced numerous graphics and posts that strengthened the organization's online presence.

Meg played a key role in community education and engagement. She tabled at the Cedar Falls Farmers Market, offering samples and recipe cards to connect visitors with fresh, local produce. She also helped organize the Waterloo Goes Local activity by creating Market Bucks, navigating shifting sponsor input, and supporting a colleague through a rapid-turnaround event. Her adaptability and teamwork helped ensure its success.

Her service connected her with broader food system partners as well. Meg attended the Iowa Hunger Summit, where she felt inspired by the collective commitment to addressing hunger statewide. She also presented at the Cedar Valley Regional Food & Farm Network (CVRFFN) coalition meeting and found encouragement in the shared challenges and collaboration among community partners.

Meg strengthened campus and community relationships by assisting with a Welcome Week event in collaboration with campus health services, opening the door to future mental-health-focused programming in the garden. These interactions highlighted her ability to build positive partnerships and create welcoming, community oriented spaces.

Throughout the year, Meg helped enrich outreach efforts, strengthen community ties, and expand the visibility of local food across the region. Meg joined Nourish Iowa in June 2025.



## Jamie Ross – CEEE at UNI

During her service with Nourish Iowa, Jamie brought warmth, enthusiasm, and a talent for meaningful connection to every event she attended. At the Iowa Eats Food and Farm Fest, she engaged adults in conversations about local food while inspiring children to share their favorite fruits and vegetables, helping build early excitement and awareness around Iowa's regional food systems. Her presence added energy to the event and helped deepen community understanding of local food initiatives.

Jamie continued expanding her knowledge and community connections by attending the Grinnell Local Food Celebration, where she explored new farms and compared their practices to those in the Cedar Valley. She also supported outreach through FRED, interacting with community members and fostering dialogue about food access and local agriculture.

Earlier in the year, she promoted farm-to-school and local food initiatives at the Waterloo Career Inspire event and the Waverly-Shell Rock Middle School 5K, helping build bridges between schools, families, and the local food system. Jamie also participated in the Nourish Iowa retreat, using the time to connect with fellow VISTA members, recharge, and reflect during a busy outreach season.

Jamie's service reflects her genuine care for people, her ability to engage diverse audiences, and her enthusiasm for strengthening Iowa's local food network. Jamie re-enrolled in August 2025 with Nourish Iowa.





## **Nourish Iowa VISTA AmeriCorps**

A program of the University of Northern Iowa's Center for Energy & Environmental Education  
[ceee.uni.edu/nourish-iowa-vista](http://ceee.uni.edu/nourish-iowa-vista)

Sarah Steinmeyer | VISTA Program Manager | [sarah.steinmeyer@uni.edu](mailto:sarah.steinmeyer@uni.edu)



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