



HARKIN ON WELLNESS REPORT 2023

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Forward

The COVID-19 pandemic tested the limits of our food systems in a way we had never seen before. Not only did supply chain issues make it difficult to get certain food during lockdown, but the pandemic also impacted people's access to food due to loss of job and income.

These devastating consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to think of new, regional approaches to improve health and food outcomes, as well as ways to make those systems more sustainable.

That's how we came up with this year's theme for the Harkin on Wellness Symposium: 'Reimagining Regional Food and Health Systems.' Communities and local leaders had to create innovative wellness and nutrition initiatives amid the pandemic. And we believe these new approaches can improve health, lower health care costs, reduce disparities, improve clinical practices, increase economic vitality, and support sustainable food systems.

This year's Symposium will showcase the amazing work being done at state and local levels to improve people's lives by reimagining the food system from farm to table and everywhere in between.

Senator Tom Harkin



Introduction

COVID-19 demonstrated the need to work collectively in our local and regional food and health systems. In the early stages of the pandemic, supply chain issues disrupted many people's access to healthy foods. Food workers suffered at the hands of systems that did not sufficiently prioritize their health, safety, or livelihoods. And healthcare systems were overrun with people suffering from COVID-19, many of whom suffered from diet-related chronic disease that contributed to the severity of their symptoms. There was a clear need for communities to come together, centering on those disproportionately affected by the global pandemic.

But the response to COVID-19 also highlighted an important trend; the emergence of new approaches that address the relationship between food and health. These new approaches include the growth of food systems coalitions and councils working to shape, advise, and implement food policy. We also saw the emergence of grassroots leaders and organizations in recent years focused on increasing opportunities and reducing barriers to healthy outcomes at the regional level, which demonstrated how communities can respond effectively to huge challenges like COVID-19.

We believe innovative and progressive wellness and nutrition initiatives that address nutrition security can have a larger impact on creating real solutions that provide not only food but improved well-being for local communities. Furthermore, we believe effective policy and grassroots change is necessary to accelerate the adoption, effectiveness, and sustainability of food and nutrition programs.

It is the goal of the Harkin on Wellness Report, to highlight the top wellness and nutrition initiatives in the country that are examples of organizations able to make a large impact through effective policy, system, and environmental change. We encourage others to use this as a tool to build partnerships and create sustainable, cross sector coalitions within their own community and beyond.

Methodology

In the Fall of 2022, we began the search for top wellness and nutrition initiatives from across the United States. The call for submissions was distributed nation-wide through professional organizations, public agencies, and more. We asked that all submissions highlight how their initiative or program are reimagining food and health systems in their communities.

We received numerous submissions which were reviewed by an external committee to narrow down the applicant field. The review process included an analysis of each program that helped identify a series of elements necessary to enhance the quality, acceptability, and impact of health programming.

Submissions were rated on relevancy, adaptability, acceptance, implementation, reach, and cost (modified RE-AIM framework).

For this report, we took special care to consider the following questions when selecting the top initiatives:

1. How has your organization used policy, system, or grassroots change to improve food and/or health outcomes at the regional level?
2. What is the reach of your program (how many people has it, or can it impact?).
3. How is your program or initiative funded?
4. What outcomes (health, economic, environmental, and/or social) has your program or initiative had?

Based on the responses from the external committee, a total of 10 programs were selected as the best examples of wellness programs and initiatives in the United States.

Photo courtesy of Seattle Farm to Preschool.



Harkin On Wellness Designees

2023 Designees

Argus Farm Stop– Ann Arbor, Michigan

City of San Antonio Metropolitan Health District– San Antonio, Texas

Grady Health Foundation: Food as Medicine Partnership– Atlanta, Georgia

Greener By Default– New York City, New York

Iowa Healthiest State Initiative: Iowa Produce Prescription Program– Des Moines, Iowa

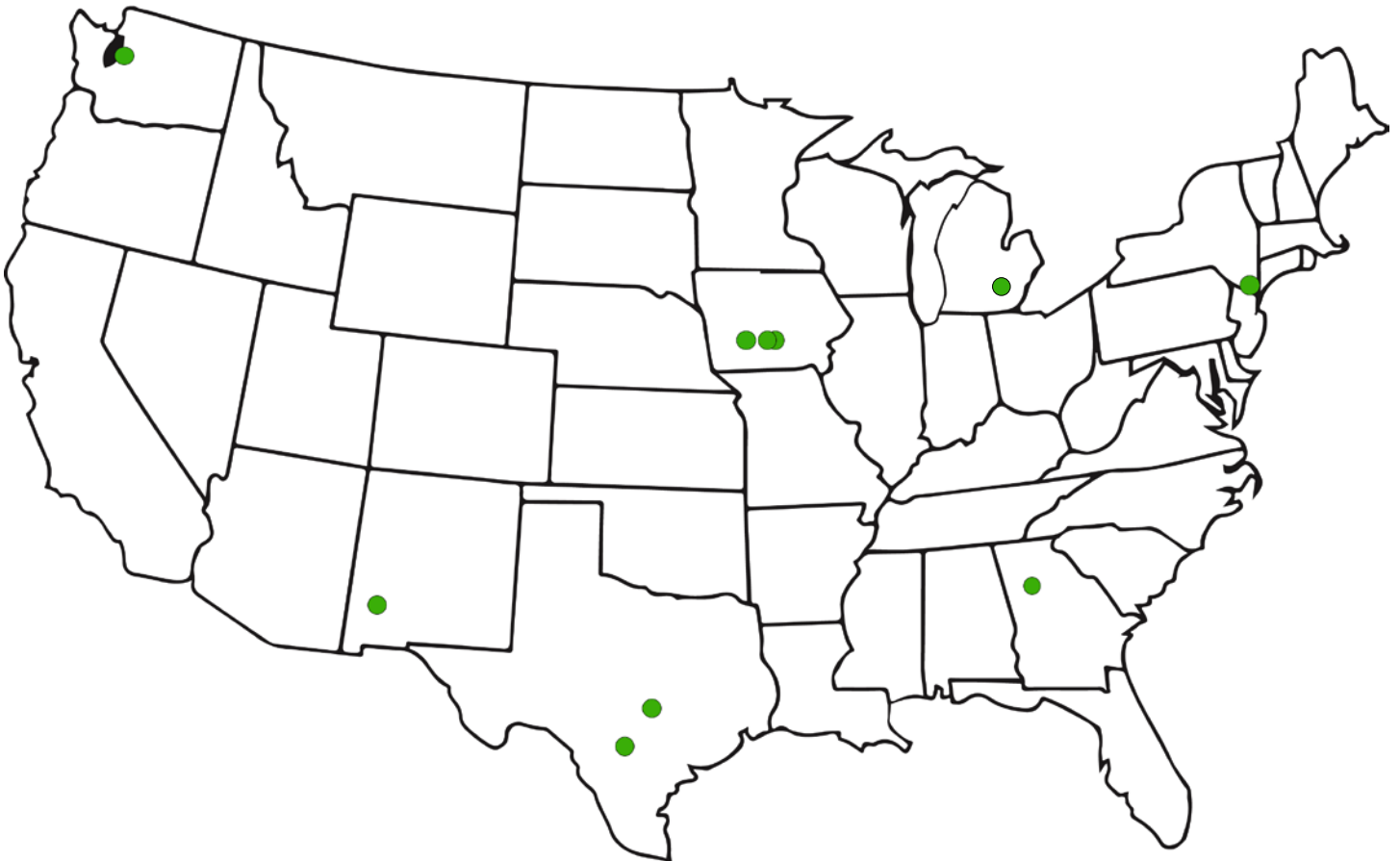
LSI Global Greens– Des Moines, Iowa

Planted Society– Austin, Texas

Seattle Farm to Preschool– Seattle, Washington

The Frontier Food Hub– Silver City, New Mexico

Waukee Community School District Farm to School Program– Waukee Iowa



Argus Farm Stop

The Argus Farm Stop is a local food market in Ann Arbor, Michigan. It was founded in 2014 with the goal of providing a convenient and accessible way for consumers to purchase locally sourced, farm-fresh foods.

All the products sold at the Argus Farm Stop are sourced from local farms and food producers within a 150-mile radius of the store. In addition to providing a convenient way for consumers to purchase locally sourced foods, the Argus Farm Stop also supports local farmers and food producers by providing them with a direct market for their products. This helps to strengthen the local economy and promote sustainable agriculture practices.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Argus Farm Stop expanded to include online sales. Regular customers who couldn't go to the grocery store were able to order fresh, local produce and goods online. They also offer a weekly produce subscription box that is available to local residents, including those using SNAP benefits.



Photo above courtesy of Argus Farm Stop.

City of San Antonio Metropolitan Health District

The City of San Antonio's Healthy Food and Beverage Procurement Policy is an administrative directive (AD 11.1) that affects all City employees. AD 11.1 specifies that any food and beverages purchased with City funds must meet the Food Service Guidelines (FSGs) for City of San Antonio Facilities. This applies to vending, packaged snacks, ready-to-eat/catered foods, and beverages.

San Antonio has some of the highest rates of chronic diseases like Type 2 Diabetes, cancer, and heart disease compared to other cities in Texas and across the United States. These diseases are often preventable through positive lifestyle behaviors such as healthy eating and physical activity. Research indicates that when employees are offered healthier foods in the workplace, they are more likely to make positive choices. The City of San Antonio is in a unique position to leverage local purchasing power to create healthier communities by making healthy food available through food procurement policies. AD 11.1 encourages healthy eating behaviors among City employees and others who visit City sites and attend events. This policy also reflects the City's commitment to building a healthier community.

San Antonio is one of 22 cities across the United States recognized for its healthy procurement policies by CityHealth. CityHealth is an organization that rates the 40 largest cities in the United States based on policies that make real impact.

Grady Health Foundation—Food as Medicine Partnership

The Food as Medicine Program began in 2020 to address food insecurity and chronic disease at Grady, especially as the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic became clear. There was an increased urgency to address growing food insecurity. Poor nutrition is linked to poor health outcomes. However, healthy foods are often unaffordable, inaccessible, or do not last long enough for under-resourced households. Some patients have limited income left to purchase food after paying rent and utilities.

Grady's Food Prescription Program combines fresh food pick-up, nutrition education, and cooking classes. The program requires a referral from a Grady primary care or specialty care clinic. Participants are eligible for three-month prescriptions, which are renewable up to one year. Each household receives fresh fruits and vegetables in addition to plant-based starches, grains, and proteins. The enrollment of patients in nutrition and cooking courses empowers them to acquire the skills and knowledge to achieve diet changes that help patients manage their chronic diseases.

Photos below on the left courtesy of Grady Health Foundation.
Photos below on the right courtesy of Greener By Default.



Greener By Default

Greener by Default worked with NYC Health + Hospitals, Sodexo, and Mayor Eric Adams' Office to make plant-based meals the default option for patient lunches, with the choice to opt into meals with animal products. This approach nudges patients towards healthier, more sustainable meals while preserving freedom of choice. The program proved so successful that it is now expanding to dinners as well.

Prior to this initiative, patients were offered a verbal menu consisting of two meat-based Chef's Specials, followed by a variety of options, both meat and vegetarian meals. For the pilot, Chef Philip Demaiolo developed an array of new plant-based meals inspired by the flavors of Latin America, Asia, and other cultures representative of NYC Health + Hospitals' diverse patient population. These meals became the new Chef's Specials, so that both lunch specials were plant-based; if patients did not want either special, they could still choose from a variety of other meat-based entrees.

Approximately 60% of eligible patients chose to stick with the plant-based default, and of those patients, 95% were satisfied with their meals. The pilot was so successful that plant-based defaults are now being permanently implemented for lunches and dinners throughout all eleven hospitals run by NYC Health + Hospitals.

Greener by Default is now offering free support to help other hospitals and healthcare systems pilot plant-based default programs.



Iowa Healthiest State Initiative—Iowa Produce Prescription Program

Produce prescriptions work to help foster healthier eating habits to prevent & manage chronic diseases while improving nutrition insecurity. It is a tool for health care professionals to address the social determinants of health by “prescribing” nutrition education & financial incentives to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables.

For six consecutive months, patients are seen monthly by a medical provider, health coach or dietician. During these visits, the patient engages in nutrition education, goal setting and biometric collection, as well as receiving a monthly stipend (\$30 per patient & per member of household) to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. Patients can use their produce prescription incentive dollars at a variety of retail locations including Hy-Vee, Fareway, C-Fresh Market, Capital City Fruit online ordering & delivery and local farmers markets. Patients who express a transportation barrier are offered bus passes to travel to and from appointments and retail grocery locations, as well as the option to utilize online ordering and delivery from Capital City Fruit.

The Iowa Produce Prescription Program advances health equity by transforming the healthcare system’s role to increase access to affordable, nutritious food that can improve the overall health of patients and their family members. Without such access, individuals face greater risk of diet-related disease, increased health care costs, and death. While traditional medical insurance covers the cost of prescription medications only, the Iowa Produce Prescription Program promotes a food as medicine approach covering the cost of healthy foods for the patient.



Above photo courtesy of Iowa Healthiest State Initiative.

Top Right photo courtesy of Lutheran Services of Iowa.

Bottom right photo courtesy of Iowa Healthiest State Initiative.

LSI Global Greens

Since 2011, LSI's Global Greens Program has directly served over 500 former refugees, New Americans, and low-income individuals to gain access to culturally appropriate food through land access, agriculture education, and market creation.

Annually, LSI connects over 200 former refugee families to gardens and farms throughout the Des Moines Metro area with City, private, and non-profit partners often in designated food deserts.

LSI also hosts aggregated markets like a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) and Global Greens Farmers Market, organizes a Food Box for elderly refugees in partnership with Aging Resources of Central Iowa, and has begun building regional networks to support other garden and educational farm initiatives in the Midwest. This coalition building also involves participation in organizations like Iowa Food System Coalition and Iowa Farmers Union so they can have a greater voice together to improve local and regional food systems that provide pathways for the farmers we serve to grow more nutritional food for our communities.



Planted Society

Planted Society is a non-profit organization based in Austin, TX that is dedicated to promoting plant-based diets and sustainable living. The organization's mission is to "create a world where plant-based living is the norm, and sustainable choices are easy and accessible for all."

Planted Society offers a variety of programs and resources to support individuals and communities in transitioning to plant-based lifestyles. These include educational workshops and events, cooking classes, and networking for people interested in animal, social, and environmental advocacy.

In addition to promoting plant-based diets, Planted Society also works to raise awareness and promote action around environmental issues, such as climate change and the impact of animal agriculture on the planet. The organization collaborates with other environmental and social justice groups to create a more sustainable and equitable world.

Photo below on the left courtesy of Lutheran Services of Iowa.
Photo below on the right courtesy of Seattle Farm to Preschool.



Illustration below courtesy of Planted Society.



Seattle Farm to Preschool

The Seattle Farm to Preschool program provides preschool children and families access to fresh food and learning opportunities that celebrate food cultures and invest in the local food economy.

The program strives to create easy access to locally produced, culturally appropriate food by cultivating a local food system that benefits farmers, consumers, and the planet. It does this through stipends to purchase local food through an online marketplace for school meals and snacks; nutrition and gardening education, including family events, staff training, and field trip opportunities; and regular bags of fresh produce for preschool families.

Farm to Preschool is recognized by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as an opportunity to increase access to healthy environments for improved early eating habits and obesity prevention in early care and education. This program not only benefits children, but also farmers, ranchers, fishermen, food processors, manufacturers, and distributors by providing another market for their products.



The Frontier Food Hub

The Frontier Food Hub (FFH) is a program of the non-profit organization, The National Center for Frontier Communities (NCFC). NCFC is the only organization that focuses solely on the smallest and most remote communities in the nation: the frontier.

In 2014, NCFC formed the southwest New Mexico Regional Food Policy council to address numerous and longstanding inequities present within their remote food system. The council is made up of farmers, ranchers, public health workers, food pantries, municipal officials, business representatives and numerous other stakeholders.

Following the formation of the council, NCFC conducted two groundbreaking regional studies: a health impact assessment which looked at the quality and quantity of food pantry foods and the policies that determine food distribution and a food hub feasibility study. NCFC subsequently formed the Frontier Food Hub in response to these studies, using their recommendations as guiding objectives.

Since 2018, Frontier Food Hub has grown, expanded and made an impact in southwest New Mexico and beyond and has several core components of its operations, all addressing different aspects of the regional food system, including extensive marketing and distribution of local foods across the state, a food pantry component that has distributed over 1,000,000 pounds of healthy food to regional food pantries, a regionally focused seed library and a newly launched community farm aimed at filling gaps within the supply chain and educating the next generation of frontier growers.



Photo above courtesy of Frontier Food Hub.

Photos on the right courtesy of Waukee Community School District.

Waukee Community School District Farm to School Program

The Waukee Community School District (WCSD) is committed to providing nutritious meals, education, and opportunities to support students and families in making healthy choices. As such, WCSD has developed a comprehensive Farm to School Program to increase access to fresh, local foods.

The purpose of Waukee's Farm to School program is to "cultivate curiosity, connection and appreciation for food, health, agriculture and the local food system through interactive, integrated, and innovative experiences. [They] offer students and families space to explore their environment and the natural world, inspire awe, nurture lifelong nourishing habits, empower themselves and the community, and give them a place to belong."

The program engages school and community stakeholders to provide students with education and curriculum, hands-on agricultural experiences, and fresh foods that are sourced from local farmers and producers and reflect the cultures and traditions of our families.





Above photo courtesy of Frontier Food Hub.

The 2023 Harkin on Wellness Symposium was made possible due to the support of our generous sponsors

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Photo above courtesy of Frontier Food Hub.

About the Harkin on Wellness Symposium

The Harkin on Wellness (HOW) Symposium is an annual gathering to discuss timely topics associated with wellness and nutrition. Each year, the HOW Symposium gathers practitioners, policymakers, students, educators and members of the public for an engaging and educational event.

The Harkin Institute and Drake University

The Harkin Institute for Public Policy & Citizen Engagement serves as a venue and catalyst for dynamic non-partisan research, learning, and outreach to promote understanding of the policy issues to which Senator Tom Harkin devoted his career.

The Harkin Institute is located at Drake University. Established in 1881, Drake is recognized as one of the finest institutions of higher learning in the Midwest. A mid-sized, private university in Des Moines, Iowa, Drake offers the benefits and resources of a larger institution along with the advantages of intimate class sizes and close personal relationships.

Drake's mission is to provide an exceptional learning environment that prepares students for meaningful personal lives, professional accomplishments, and responsible global citizenship. The Drake experience is distinguished by collaborative learning among students, faculty, and staff and by the integration of the liberal arts and sciences with professional preparation. Our inspiration is that together we transform lives and strengthen communities.