Cultivate Iowa: A Season in Review

Results of the Iowa Food Gardening Social Marketing Initiative

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A project of the Iowa Food System Council’s Food Access & Health Work Group

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Cultivate Iowa: A Season in Review

INTRODUCTION

Cultivate Iowa is a social marketing campaign that aims to: 1) encourage low-resource Iowans to consider food gardening to increase their food security; and 2) encourage gardeners to plant or harvest extra to donate to food pantries or other organizations within their community. The campaign was developed and implemented through a partnership between the Iowa Food Systems Council’s Food Access and Health Work Group (FAHWG) and the American Advertising Federation of Des Moines. The campaign was launched April 19, 2013 and continued throughout the summer and fall. It included print materials such as postcards and brochures, posters, a website, Facebook and Twitter accounts, billboards, TV and radio commercials. A marketing guide, press release and sample email copy was also available.

The outcomes of the Cultivate Iowa campaign were generated through two mechanisms, feedback from implementers of Cultivate Iowa (FAHWG partners, low-resource Iowans, gardeners) and media reach, partnership capacity and resources leveraged.

WHAT IS SOCIAL MARKETING?

Social marketing is an effective tool for encouraging individual, policy, system and environmental changes by:

- Influencing social behaviors not to benefit the marketer, but to benefit the target audience and the general society, and
- Focusing on the consumer and learning what people want and need rather than trying to persuade them to buy something.

The Cultivate Iowa campaign encourages more Iowans to garden and Iowa gardeners to donate produce.


Background information and the results of the formative research that led to the development of the Cultivate Iowa campaign are available at iowafoodsystems council.org/food-gardening and at www.Cultivatelo wa.org.
Cultivate Iowa Campaign Evaluation

An evaluation was conducted at the end of the 2013 campaign to understand:
- Partners’ use of materials, their perceptions of campaign effectiveness, and opportunities for improvement in future campaigns;
- Low-resource Iowans’ exposure to Cultivate Iowa materials, their feedback on material quality, and food gardening practices; and
- Current gardeners’ exposure to Cultivate Iowa materials, their feedback on material quality, and produce donation experiences.

FAHWG partners were surveyed using a semi-quantitative survey tool at the 2013 Fall FAHWG Gathering; an on-line version of the survey was made available to partners via email. A random clustered sampling strategy was used to implement a semi-quantitative survey among low-resource Iowans. Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) and the Iowa Women, Infants & Children Supplemental Nutrition Program (WIC) implemented the survey in 27 local agencies. Surveys were administered by program staff or were self-completed by low-resource Iowans depending on local workflows and respondent needs. All surveys were implemented between October 1 and November 15, 2013. Gardeners were surveyed through an on-line tool. This survey was distributed through Master Gardener groups at the state and county levels, and through social media. Individuals who ‘pledged’ to donate produce on the Cultivate Iowa website were also recruited.

FAHWG Partners
- Use of Cultivate Iowa materials
- Opportunities for next season

Low-resource Iowans
- Exposure to Cultivate Iowa
- Gardening practices this season

Food Gardeners
- Exposure to Cultivate Iowa
- Produce donation practices this season

Food Access and Health Work Group Partners

Twenty-eight FAHWG partners responded to the Cultivate Iowa evaluation. Four in five (82%) had used Cultivate Iowa materials. Partners used a wide variety of materials (Figure 1); high cost items such as media advertising were unused by agencies, however, these materials were used in the larger statewide Cultivate Iowa marketing campaign.
Figure 1: What Cultivate Iowa materials have you used?

Partners felt the most effective materials were posters, postcards, seeds, social media, and the campaign website. FAHWG partners thought the billboards, radio ads and press release were less effective for the purposes of implementing Cultivate Iowa promotions in their agencies. Only four agencies edited materials to include their logo or other information. One partner printed their own materials. A small number of partners also purchased seeds and other gardening materials as part of their Cultivate Iowa promotion.

Not only did partners use a diversity of materials, they tailored their use of materials to their agency needs. The campaign was promoted in newsletters, materials were used at expos and events, they were shared with community leaders and policy makers, and they were distributed through social services. For example, WIC adopted the campaign by providing a training webinar and distributing the materials to local agencies. Local agencies were then allowed to use, as they wanted. Many agencies created displays and some put together container gardening kits for WIC participants. Another partner used the poster as part of an Iowa Public Television gardening special.

Respondents were asked what other campaign components would be useful. Responses included:
- Identify a local organization to lead the campaign in each community,
- Provide organizations with advocacy kits to take to other organizations in their community,
- Table displays for events, and
- Materials to start container gardens or other gardening resources.

Thirty-five percent of partners promoted Cultivate Iowa through social media. Most (82%) of this promotion was through Facebook.
Partners targeted many types of stakeholders in the Cultivate Iowa promotion (Figure 2). Partners reported positive responses from stakeholders about the campaign. Several agencies said that materials sparked discussion and questions about gardening. Partners were very positive about the look and feel of the campaign, and appreciated the ability to customize materials.

Figure 2: Whom did you target for promotion?

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy Makers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Organizations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Leaders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Partners suggested areas for improvement such as:
- More clear messaging on the website about how to form a partnership with Cultivate Iowa,
- Pictures with link to basic gardening skills for Pinterest, and
- Earlier launch date to increase gardening success.

Most partners plan to use Cultivate Iowa next season, 36% said their organization would print their own materials, 55% said they would promote Cultivate Iowa if materials were available through FAHWG.

Sixteen respondents were from organizations that collect fresh produce. These organizations accepted between 50 and 8,000 pounds of produce this summer. Three provided information to Ampleharvest.org, a website that links produce donors to organizations in their community. The evaluation illustrated a need to expand work with food pantries to encourage engagement with Ample Harvest and other community organizations.
LOW-RESOURCE IOWANS

There were 204 responses to the low-resource survey. A limitation of the evaluation data is that respondents may not have been utilizing WIC or AAA services during the spring and summer when the campaign was launched. These data are a cross-sectional sample of program clients at the time of data gathering.

- One in five (21%; N=42) respondents had heard of Cultivate Iowa. Of those who saw Cultivate Iowa:
  - 31% saw a TV commercial, 17% saw a poster, 7% heard a radio ad, 7% saw a newspaper ad, 5% saw the brochure, 5% saw a billboard, and 2.5% saw social media related to the campaign.
  - 40.5% visited the website as a result of seeing the campaign, 36% planted seeds, 21% shared information with others, 14% pledged to donate produce, 7% donated to a food pantry, and 2.5% researched how to grow produce.
- People who recalled seeing Cultivate Iowa materials were more likely to have completed some college or have a college degree.
- 31% of respondents have gotten food from a food pantry. Of those, only 52% have received fresh produce from this resource.
- 44% of the total sample was likely to donate extra produce to a food pantry, whereas 73% of those who have seen Cultivate Iowa were likely to do so.

Respondents were largely positive about the Cultivate Iowa campaign. Table 1 provides a summary of respondents’ perspectives on issues related to campaign quality.

**Table 1: Low-Resource Iowans Response to Cultivate Iowa Campaign Quality**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultivate Iowa...</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is enjoyable and entertaining to read</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feels well organized</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has appealing illustrations</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a high quality look</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is easy to read</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is not too cluttered</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes information that is the right length</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presents information in a fresh, new way</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses language/terms I understand</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is a good source for gardening information</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contains useful information</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides a good variety of information</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides information not seen elsewhere</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Campaign Impact on Gardening Knowledge, Attitude and Practices/Behaviors

- 18% of respondents were likely to refer to Cultivate Iowa next spring for gardening information, including almost half (43%) of those who had seen the campaign prior to the survey. 25.5% were likely to recommend Cultivate Iowa as a resource, including half (50%) of those who saw the campaign.

- When asked how they would prefer to receive gardening information, 35% would like information provided by service agencies, and 28% would like information mailed to them (Figure 3).

- 42% of respondents were extremely or somewhat likely to plant a garden next year. Among those who have seen Cultivate Iowa, this number jumps to 59%.

- People who recalled seeing Cultivate Iowa were more likely to have planted a garden this year; 42.5% have done so versus only 27% of the entire sample. This was the first year they had tried gardening for 35.5% of all respondents.

- Most (71%) grew food in their own yard, 18% in a container, and 18% at a friend or relative’s house.

- Five in six gardeners (85.5%) felt that they saved money as a result of gardening, and 90% felt that their household ate more produce because of gardening.

- Among non-gardeners, 31% considered a garden this year, including 43.5% of those who had seen Cultivate Iowa. The most common reason for not planting a garden was lack of space, followed by lack of money and lack of time.

Figure 3: How would you like to receive gardening information?

[Bar chart showing preferences for receiving gardening information]
FOOD GARDENERS

Forty gardeners responded to an on-line survey. Of those, 76% had heard of Cultivate Iowa. Gardeners had seen Cultivate Iowa through a variety of channels, most commonly social media and the website. Gardeners spent time looking at campaign materials, one quarter spent 15-30 minutes, 18% spend 30-45 minutes, and 27% spend 15 minutes or less. Seven in ten respondents were likely to recommend Cultivate Iowa as a resource for others.

Most gardeners preferred to receive Cultivate Iowa materials electronically, through social media (24%), email (33%), and the website (18%). A smaller number (9%) preferred campaign materials to be mailed to them.

Gardeners felt very positively about campaign materials, and more positively about it compared to low-income survey respondents. Table 2 provides a summary of gardeners’ perspectives on issues related to campaign quality.

Table 2: Gardener Response to Cultivate Iowa Campaign Quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultivate Iowa…</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is enjoyable and entertaining to read</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feels well organized</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has appealing illustrations</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a high quality look</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is easy to read</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is not too cluttered</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes information that is the right length</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presents information in a fresh, new way</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses language/terms I understand</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is a good source for gardening information</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contains useful information</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides a good variety of information</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides information not seen elsewhere</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Campaign Impact on Produce Donation

- Respondents who saw Cultivate Iowa said they took the following actions as a direct result of the messaging: one in four (24%) donated fresh produce to a food pantry, 22% shared materials with others, 24% visited the Cultivate Iowa website, and 14% researched a location to donate fresh produce. Only 3% of respondents who saw Cultivate Iowa had taken no action.
- Most gardeners (85%) had extra produce that their household could neither eat nor save. Among respondents, 67% said they had donated produce from their garden this season, including 78% of those who saw Cultivate Iowa. This is compared to only 33% who had donated produce in previous seasons.
- Respondents donated produce to a variety of organizations (Figure 4). Twenty-seven percent of respondents said that if their produce had not been donated, it would have been thrown away or composted.

Figure 4: What type of organization did you donate produce to?

Partnership Capacity and Media Reach

The essence of Cultivate Iowa is based on building relationships and establishing partnerships that advance consistent and empowering messages about food gardening and produce donation. The key strategies in developing the campaign were to inspire others in a fun and empowering tone that they can garden and do not need much space, time or money; and to inform gardeners that garden produce donation is wanted and needed at local food pantries and to have gardeners to set a goal for themselves to donate.

FAHWG partnered with the American Advertising Federation (AAF) of Des Moines in the development and launch of the Cultivate Iowa campaign. The AAF of Des Moines is a dynamic organization dedicated to professional development and networking in Central Iowa. The Cultivate Iowa campaign served as the AAF of Des Moines’ annual public service initiative in which members donate time and services to benefit organizations.
Materials developed (Figure 5) to support the Cultivate Iowa campaign included:

- Brochure (English, Spanish)
- Posters (English, Spanish)
- Postcard (English, Spanish)
- Cloth shopping bags
- Email campaigns
- Social media (Facebook and Twitter)
- Interactive website
- Radio, television and newspaper ads
- Billboards
- Marketing guide
- Press releases and announcements
- Banner

Figure 5. Cultivate Iowa Materials
The IFSC FAHWG provided an investment of $30,000 to AAF of Des Moines to support their public service work. Between April and October 2013, the value of services and products donated by AAF of Des Moines and FAHWG partners to support the Cultivate Iowa campaign totaled $1,455,434 (Table 3).

Table 3. Resources Leveraged to Support the 2013 Cultivate Iowa Campaign

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partner</th>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Estimated Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Advertising Federation of Des Moines (pro-bono rate of $85/hour)</td>
<td>Provided Cultivate Iowa campaign development, material development, media, website hosting, printing, and campaign kits to FAHWG partners (approximately 561 hours x $85/hr)</td>
<td>$47,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seed Savers Exchange</td>
<td>Donated 5,200 seed packets to be distributed to FAHWG partners and provided to low-resource Iowans or to gardeners who will grow food to donate (Retail $2.75/packet)</td>
<td>$14,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Printers</td>
<td>Donated the printing for 10,000 brochures, 2500 postcards and 100 sets of postcards</td>
<td>$1,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patch</td>
<td>Donated 250 canvas bags for the Cultivate Iowa campaign kits</td>
<td>$200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Paper Company</td>
<td>Donated the paper for 10,000 brochures, 2500 postcards and 100 sets of postcards</td>
<td>$675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/7 Central</td>
<td>Donated the printing for the Cultivate Iowa canvas bags</td>
<td>$630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor Signage (billboard)</td>
<td>4 Billboards were created for Cedar Rapids, Des Moines, Cedar Falls/Waterloo and Mason City (Production costs = $900, space was donated, estimated impressions = 578,124)</td>
<td>$2,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio spots</td>
<td>60 radio stations donated 6,035 spots for Cultivate Iowa (Estimated production value = $350)</td>
<td>$140,259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper advertising</td>
<td>Ad sent to 180 newspapers – no estimates of value provided</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV advertising</td>
<td>9 broadcast stations donated 40,217 spots for an estimated value of $901,745; 2 cable networks donated 13,849 spots for an estimated value of $346,075; (estimated production value = $1000; PSA rates range from $25 - $50 per spot)</td>
<td>$1,247,820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Resources Leveraged</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$1,455,434</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IFSC/FAHWG investment with AAF of Des Moines</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>($30,000)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$1,425,434</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The campaign launch was also supported by: 1) vegetable seeds donated by Seed Savers Exchange; 2) an educational handout by Iowa State University Extension and Outreach on safe produce handling; 3) partnering with Ample Harvest to integrate their online food pantry search engine in to the Cultivate Iowa site; 4) informational webinars on the links between gardening and household and community food security; 5) quarterly gatherings with FAHWG partners; 6) Cultivate Iowa exhibit; and 7) monthly e-newsletters.

**SUMMARY**

FAHWG partners, low-resource Iowans and gardeners felt positively about the Cultivate Iowa campaign. People who saw the campaign took action, and were more likely to donate produce or consider gardening. All campaign materials were used in some capacity, however different messaging channels were more effective or better received with different groups. While partners were positive about re-implementing the campaign in 2014, many lack the budgetary resources to implement the campaign in their community without FAHWG support.
The Cultivate Iowa campaign was extensively supported through donated products and services ranging from printing and paper to advertising space. Donated television and radio over six months was valued in excess of $1.4 million. Although replicating the same level of donated products and services for another growing season at a state level may be a challenge, the model for forming partnerships at that state level may be a model for communities leverage similar resources. These results will be used to expand and improve the Cultivate Iowa campaign in 2014.

**AUTHORS**

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Convener, Food Access & Health Work Group

**CITATION**


This report is available at www.IowaFoodSystemsCouncil.org/food-gardening/

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

www.CultivateIowa.org  
www.Facebook.com/CultivateIowa/  
@CultivateIowa

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The authors would like to thank the following for support of the Cultivate Iowa launch and evaluation including the Food Access & Health Work Group Leadership Team; FAHWG partners; American Advertising Federation of Des Moines, Jason Boucher, Joel Brewer, Brett Burkhart, Adam Feller, Andy Hewitt, Katie Holl, Lisa Lewis, Lori Strum, and Phil Schriver; Iowa Department of Public Health WIC Program; HACAP Food Reservoir; Area Agencies on Aging; the more than 90 gardeners who pledged to grow and donate produce this season; and The Wellmark Foundation who provided funding for this initiative.

The Iowa Food Systems Council is a member-based non-profit organization whose charge is to monitor Iowa’s food and health landscape, encourage and coordinate connections between food system leaders and decision-makers, and identify policies, programs and research that cultivate a resilient and sustainable food system - a system which builds a healthier food economy, a healthier environment and healthier Iowans. For more information go to http://iowafoods-systemscouncil.org/.

The Food Access & Health Work Group is a vibrant statewide network of food and nutrition assistance program administrators, emergency food system providers, public health professionals, community-based organizers and food system stakeholders focused on cultivating a diverse and just food system that eliminates hunger, increases access to nutritious food, and improves the health of all Iowans. For more information go to http://iowafoods-systemscouncil.org/food-access-health/.