

MEMORANDUM

Date: May 13th, 2025
To: Kenna Bell, Iowa Valley RC&D
From: Local Foods Capstone Group
Cc: Travis Kraus, IISC
Re: University of Iowa Workplace CSA Feasibility Memo

INTRODUCTION

In 2024, Iowa Valley Resource Conservation and Development (Iowa Valley RC&D) entered a partnership with Iowa Initiative for Sustainability Communities (IISC) to conduct a feasibility study for a Workplace community supported agriculture (CSA) Program at the University of Iowa. Through a workplace CSA program, Iowa Valley RC&D aims to create a partnership with the University of Iowa to connect university employees with CSA farms, providing an equitable approach to increase local food purchasing and improve employee health while also expanding market access for local farmers.

The purpose of the feasibility study is to evaluate the potential for a workplace CSA program at the University of Iowa as a strategy to expand market access for local farmers. This study examines the feasibility of such a program by assessing stakeholder interest, administration challenges, and financial sustainability to inform the future implementation of a workplace CSA program at the University of Iowa. In addition, a policy analysis was conducted to assess how different levels of funding for a workplace CSA program at the University of Iowa could impact employee fruit and vegetable consumption and overall well-being. The analysis focused on addressing negative externalities across the University, such as reduced productivity, lower alertness, and higher health-related costs linked to poor nutrition.

Through surveys, stakeholder interviews, and a workplace CSA policy analysis the report provides actionable insights into how a workplace CSA model could increase farmer revenue, strengthen local food systems, enhance individual health for employees, and produce healthcare savings for employers.

FINDINGS

Stakeholder Analysis

Understanding stakeholder perspectives was critical to evaluating the feasibility of a Workplace CSA Program at the University of Iowa. Interviews with university offices and a survey of local CSA farmers provided key insights into potential support, barriers, and implementation needs. Overall, stakeholders expressed strong interest in the program's goals, emphasizing the importance of clear leadership, sustainable funding, and thoughtful program design to ensure success.

The Benefits Office confirmed that a Workplace CSA would fall under Well-Being at Iowa, not traditional benefits. They noted no formal pilot process, case-by-case funding, and potential challenges

with payroll systems. Well-Being at Iowa expressed support for promoting a workplace CSA pilot but emphasized the need for clear data on health and engagement outcomes. They are willing to assist with outreach but not manage the program directly. Lastly, the Office of Sustainability and the Environment (OSE) showed strong enthusiasm, offering help with marketing, recruitment, and sustainability integration, while emphasizing Iowa Valley RC&D should oversee implementation.

Farmers were supportive of expanding CSA offerings if there is demand and showed willingness to adapt. They emphasized CSAs' benefits in building community and farm stability but flagged challenges around affordability, convenience, produce variability, and fit for different household types.

Policy Analysis

The University of Iowa faces several workforce health and satisfaction challenges: 83% of employees report poor nutrition, up from 79% in 2019. Poor nutrition generates negative externalities such as fatigue, lower productivity, and increased health care utilization, which impact not only individual employees but also the broader effectiveness of the University. Our policy analysis evaluated three alternatives to address these concerns: maintaining the status quo, implementing a workplace CSA promotion program, and launching a workplace CSA voucher program. Each alternative was assessed using three criteria: equity, effectiveness, and cost.

Though the voucher program entails a higher cost, it remains within a manageable range and should be piloted on a small scale to evaluate its effectiveness and scalability. Based on the analysis, the workplace CSA voucher program is the most promising option to enhance employee well-being and support a more resilient and inclusive food system at the University of Iowa.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Phase 1: Planning and Establishing Partnerships

Partnership Development

- Partner with the OSE to plan and design a workplace CSA program to be implemented at the University of Iowa.
- Partner with the Well-Being at Iowa Office to plan and garner support for the adoption of a workplace CSA program at the University of Iowa.

Recruitment & Communication

- Conduct community engagement events to recruit participants, inform design, and generate program buy-in.
- Collaborate with Well-Being at Iowa to recruit program participants.
- Develop a communications and marketing plan with Well-Being at Iowa and the OSE.
- Provide guidance for promoting and sustaining program participation.

Funding & Feasibility Planning

- Emphasize the benefits of the CSA voucher model when proposing funding options to business partners.

- Promote the use of SNAP and WIC benefits for purchasing CSA shares.
- Conduct a pilot workplace CSA program at the University of Iowa.

Design Principles & Administrative Preparation

- Review existing Workplace CSA Toolkits.
- Design the program based on the employer's existing infrastructure and tools.
- Enhance program accessibility through design elements.
- Create mechanisms for program evaluation.
- Avoid administrative burdens in program design and implementation.
- Develop accountability and operational processes for participants and farmers.

Phase 2: Implementation

Pilot Program Launch

- Start small before scaling up to the entire University.
- Survey employees to gauge interest and current CSA participation.

Program Delivery

- Assist business partners and farmers in coordinating pick-up and drop-off logistics.
- Track CSA share pick-ups and redistribute or donate forgotten shares.
- Establish clear expectations for program participants.

Participant Engagement

- Plan events to increase and sustain participant engagement.

Phase 3: Evaluation

Ongoing Feedback Collection

- Engage all stakeholders through surveys and opportunities for direct feedback.

Program Impact Assessment

- Collect data to assess program impacts.
- Maintain financial records to support proof of concept.

NEXT STEPS

1. Meet with program champions at the University of Iowa's Office of Sustainability and the Environment (OSE) to plan the next steps for conducting a pilot with Well-Being at Iowa.
2. Collect detailed records and data from current and future workplace CSA partnerships with local businesses to support a pitch for a workplace CSA employee benefit program at the University of Iowa.

APPENDIX

A1. Policy Analysis Matrix

Analysis Criteria	Impact Categories	Status Quo	Workplace CSA Promotion Program	Workplace CSA Voucher Program
Equity	Access to benefits across income levels	Low access	Moderate access	Highly accessible
Effectiveness	1. Improvement of individual health	Very low effectiveness	Moderate effectiveness	High effectiveness
	2. Healthcare cost savings	Very low effectiveness	Low effectiveness	High effectiveness
Cost	1. Monetary cost	\$0	\$0	\$55,000 (per year)
	2. Administrative cost	Low cost	Medium-low cost	Medium-high cost

A2. University Stakeholders Opportunities & Challenges Matrix

University Stakeholders	Opportunities	Challenges
University of Iowa Benefits Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will provide guidance navigating University of Iowa approval processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complexities with payroll and IT CSA voucher does not align with traditional benefits
The Office of Sustainability and the Environment (OSE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enthusiastic support for sustainability tie-ins Willing to help with marketing, education, and farmer connections Can provide intern hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited capacity to manage program Labor shortages could impact outreach needs for engagement
Well-Being at Iowa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Willing to support through outreach, education, and promotion Can collaborate to add survey questions to their yearly, LiveWell Employee Personal Health Assessment Survey (6,500+ employees respond) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will not manage the program directly Needs clear data on impact before full partnership

A3. Farmer Takeaways for Creating Sustainable CSA Markets Matrix

Positives	Challenges and Limitations
Providing community connection to local foods	High, up-front costs to consumers
Better market stability for farmers and recycling local dollars through the local economy	Lack of accessibility of pickup times and locations for both farmers and consumers
Opportunity of choice for consumers based on share type	Limited choice in items inside share boxes
Possibility to diversify one's diet	Challenges for households with a variety of dietary needs