

Voices of Double Up in America

Community Leader



While Iowa is an agricultural powerhouse, the state ranks dead last when it comes to fruit and vegetable consumption.¹ Incubated by local business leaders, the Iowa Healthiest State Initiative was founded in 2011 with the recognition that public health is equally a workforce and economic viability issue. For one of its first on-the-ground projects, it launched a Double Up Food Bucks pilot in 2016. Today, it has plans to expand Double Up to additional sites and Iowa's business leaders are fully on board. Jami Haberl is the Executive Director of Iowa Healthiest State Initiative.

Here are her words.

“ **EVERYONE RECOGNIZES** that you can't have a strong workforce without healthy people. And if we don't have a strong workforce, we're not going to have a strong economy. Ultimately, it is about the importance of having healthy, strong people who can carry out the tasks needed within our business economy to ensure that our communities and our families can continue to thrive and drive into the future.

Iowa Healthiest State Initiative launched in 2011

to address these issues. But prior to the official launch there was a lot of conversation among three business owners here in Des Moines: John Forsyth, CEO, Wellmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, one of the largest health insurance companies; Doug Reichardt, retired CEO of Holmes Murphy, an insurance brokerage company; and Ric Jurgens, retired CEO of Hy-Vee, Inc., a large grocer based here in Des Moines.

They recognized the impact these issues have

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on bottom lines as well as productivity and the overall well-being of their employees.

Now these three businesspeople could have just kept doing things within their own walls, but they came together and formed the Iowa Healthiest State Initiative.

Today, we bring together organizations, businesses, and government agencies that are working to improve the health and well-being of Iowans. We serve as a facilitator of those conversations. That's where the public-private partnership comes together: We recognize that if we're going to make changes, it can't just be done by government agencies and it can't just be done in the private sector. How do we work together to support the long-term viability of our state, of our community, and even of our workforce?

We had multiple communities in Iowa that had heard about Double Up Food Bucks and the success it was having throughout the United States. They were contacting Fair Food Network directly and saying, "Hey, how do we do this here?"

We did a six-week pilot last summer and saw huge success. We worked with the University of Iowa on our evaluation and saw that people were already changing their behaviors: They were starting to purchase healthier items than they have in the past.

Our vision is to expand Double Up. We'll have 12 sites in 2017. Additionally, we have the opportunity to expand into grocery stores in the coming years, which will increase access to even more people.

A lot of the communities that are participating are very rural. Their world has changed significantly from when those communities were first founded. This probably isn't just in Iowa, but throughout the United States.

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Executive Director
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That was a super important part of bringing in this specific program: It was addressing multiple issues. We'll continue to demonstrate how this program not only benefits those on SNAP but also benefits our local communities and our local farmers.

Being able to support local farmers and local community members obviously is a win-win.

It's hard not to want to see how you can bring Double Up to your community."

¹ 2015 Gallup Healthways Well-being Report