



GETTING STARTED WITH FARM TO SCHOOL

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**NATIONAL
FARM to SCHOOL
NETWORK**

GROWING STRONGER TOGETHER
The National Farm to School Network is an information, advocacy and networking hub for communities working to bring local food sourcing and food and agriculture education into school systems and preschools.

What is farm to school?

Farm to school enriches the connection communities have with fresh, healthy food and local food producers by changing food purchasing and education practices at schools and preschools. Farm to school implementation differs by location but always includes one or more of the following: (1) Procurement: Local foods are purchased, promoted and served in the cafeteria or as a snack or taste-test; (2) Education: Students participate in education activities related to agriculture, food, health or nutrition; and (3) School gardens: Students engage in hands-on learning through gardening.

Farm to school empowers children and their families to make informed food choices while strengthening the local economy and contributing to vibrant communities.

Getting Started

Farm to school offers multiple strategies to improve the health of children and communities. But getting started can be a daunting endeavor. This list provides some simple first steps to develop a lasting farm to school program in your community.

- 1 Assess where you are and where you'd like to be.** Are your goals centered on:
 - Procurement of local foods to be served in school?
 - Establishing a school garden?
 - Integration of farm to school within the curriculum?
 - All of the above?

- 2 Form a team and collaborate.** School food service staff, teachers, administrators, local farmers, students, parents and community organizations each have an important role in establishing a sustainable farm to school program.

Farm to School in Action

Programs exist in all 50 states—here are four examples:

Community collaboration equals farm to school success in Oregon

Working with community organizations can help build strong, sustainable farm to school programs. During the 2008-09 school year, Springfield School District in Oregon worked with the Willamette Farm and Food Coalition (WFFC) to implement a farm to school program at three of their elementary schools. They integrated educational activities including Harvest of the Month in the cafeterias, farm field trips, garden sessions, nutrition lessons, tasting tables and harvest days. All activities were coordinated and overseen by the WFFC farm to school coordinator. As a result, their students are enjoying more healthy farm-fresh foods and have a greater understanding of where their food comes from.

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WHY FARM TO SCHOOL?

KIDS WIN

Farm to school provides all kids access to nutritious, high quality, local food so they are ready to learn and grow. Farm to school activities enhance classroom education through hands-on learning related to food, health, agriculture and nutrition.

FARMERS WIN

Farm to school can serve as a significant financial opportunity for farmers, fishers, ranchers, food processors and food manufacturers by opening the doors to an institutional market worth billions of dollars.

COMMUNITIES WIN

Buying from local producers and processors reduces the carbon footprint of food transportation while stimulating the local economy. Educational activities such as school gardens and composting programs help to create a healthy environment around the school community.

The National Farm to School Network has compiled resources on this topic and others. Find more information and join our network: www.farmtoschool.org

3 Establish one or two attainable goals to get started. Some ideas include:

- Identify menu items that you would like to transition to local products.
- Find a farmer or distributor to connect you to local items.
- Plan a local meal event.
- Determine training needs to assist food service staff with incorporating farm fresh items in meals.
- Bring a school garden planning team together.
- Identify curricular opportunities to connect to a school garden.
- Bring a chef into the classroom.
- Plan a farm field trip or host a tasting event featuring local produce.

4 Learn from others. If you are running into an obstacle there is someone out there who has run into it before. Some places to connect and learn from others include:

- The National Farm to School Network (www.farmtoschool.org). Find abundant resources and contact information for people in your state and region who are working on farm to school.
- Your state's School Nutrition Association. Learn how others in your state are approaching farm to school in their school/district.
- Connect with the Child Nutrition Program at your state agency (typically your Department of Education or Department of Agriculture).

5 Promote farm to school in your school and community.

- Signage in the cafeteria
- Bulletin boards throughout the school
- School newsletters (print and electronic)
- School website
- School events / PTA /etc.
- Local media

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Getting local, farm fresh food into New York school meals

Janet Sklar, Director of School Nutrition Services at Bay Shore Union Free School District, established a program that has been the catalyst for farm to school success in the entire region. With Sklar leading the effort, 45 Long Island school districts formed a cooperative that started purchasing local produce last fall. Approximately 18,000 pounds of locally grown potatoes have been incorporated into about 72,000 school meals served in 20 different school districts in the area.

"Fish to school" makes sense for Alaska

Farm to school isn't just for landlubbers. The Sitka Conservation Society in Alaska launched their Fish to Schools program last fall after building key partnerships with local fishermen, processors and cafeteria managers. Three schools now participate in the Fish to Schools program with twice-monthly entrees featuring rockfish and salmon. As with most successful farm to school programs, there's also an education component through which students have met local fishermen and learned about both traditional and commercial processes, not to mention conservation and cooking. The kids are hooked.

School gardens as experiential classrooms in New Jersey

In New Jersey, students at Haddonfield School District enjoy the fruits of their labor... literally. Haddonfield has a fully operational school garden in one elementary school and they are getting ready to break ground on two others. The schools also offer salads bars where students can eat food right out of their garden. The district does tastings with the children to encourage them to try new foods. Items they tasted this year include mashed sweet potatoes, eggplant sticks and purple cauliflower. To further students' understanding of agriculture, the district invited Farmer John from Ambrogi Produce to speak to the elementary school children about farm to school and what it means to them.