



GOING LOCAL

Paths to Success For Farm to School Programs

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Developed by the National Farm to School Program Center for Food & Justice, Occidental College and Community Food Security Coalition

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Introduction

Farm to school programs link local farmers with schools. This simple idea bears great potential as a solution to two of the major challenges facing our society: concerns about the diet and health of children, and the disappearance of small farms. By purchasing locally grown products, schools have been able to serve fresher products to the students, create new markets for local farmers, and incorporate innovative educational activities that meet state education standards. Farmers participating in farm to school gain a sense of community involvement by impacting the lives of young children, and becoming involved in providing agricultural education, while benefiting from increased sales to institutions.

Farm to school programs have been operational in the United States for nearly ten years. We estimate that as of 2006, there are over 950 farm to school programs in more than 35 states, and the numbers are growing rapidly. Over the past decade, major strides have been made in the knowledge and understanding about farm to school program models, implementation methods, evaluation, and policy development. Farm to school programs have been the focus of significant media attention in this period, feeding a dynamic movement that is gaining momentum due to its benefits of improving students' eating habits and farmers' incomes.

This report showcases innovative farm to school programs from around the country. It draws upon the existing information as well as new research to present a compilation of eight case studies of farm to school programs operating in different regions of the country. Each case study profiles a program's operations and accomplishments as well as the barriers that have been faced and the tactics used to overcome these challenges.

With case studies from California, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, North Carolina, and Oregon, the publication provides a snapshot of the diverse ways in which farm to school is making a difference nationwide – from a local food-based curriculum in Chicago, to a focus on transportation and distribution in Massachusetts, to utilizing the Department of Defense produce buyers in Michigan, the report highlights strategies that can help farm to school practitioners and advocates of healthy kids and farms build successful programs in their home communities.

We are continuously inspired by the powerful work being done by farm to school leaders in the country. We would like to extend special thanks to those individuals who graciously agreed to spend their time providing us with information, anecdotes and pictures for this publication – Elizabeth Farrell, Nathan Duclos

and Tony Geraci from New Hampshire, Kelly Erwin and Deborah Habib from Massachusetts, Viki Lorraine from Michigan, Gary Cuneen from Illinois, Emily Jackson from North Carolina, Vonda Richardson from Florida, Katrina Wiest and Meredith Whitten from Oregon, and Rodney Taylor and Adleit Asi from California. Sincere thanks are also due to Loren Gustafson from Bucknell University for providing editorial support, and to Amanda Shaffer from the Urban & Environmental Policy Institute, Occidental College for designing this publication.

The eight programs profiled in this report are just a sampling of successful farm to school programs; for more information on these programs and others, please visit the National Farm to School Website at www.farmtoschool.org. We hope the stories we tell in this publication will facilitate a better understanding of the farm to school approach and encourage the development of future programs.

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California: The Riverside Farm to School Salad Bar Program

In March 2005 the Riverside Unified School District (RUSD) in Riverside, California launched its Farm to School Salad Bar Program in Jefferson Elementary School with support from the California Endowment and in partnership with the Center for Food & Justice. Since the implementation of the Jefferson salad bar, the program has expanded to four schools, with plans for expansion to all of the district's elementary schools by June 2008. The farm to school salad bar is a popular meal option for students and staff at Jefferson and has served as a catalyst for other nutrition focused programs in the district.

The Program's Beginnings

The success of the Riverside program is due in large part to RUSD's Nutrition Services Director Rodney Taylor. Mr. Taylor was previously the food service director at the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District, where he implemented one of the country's first farm to school programs. In Santa Monica-Malibu Taylor began a relationship with the Center for Food & Justice (CFJ), a division of the Urban & Environmental Policy Institute at Occidental College, which helped support the implementation and evaluation of the district's farm to school program. After he moved to Riverside in 2002, CFJ was eager to work with him again. CFJ sought funding from the California Endowment to help fund the program's beginnings. Funding began in February 2005, and the salad bar at Jefferson Elementary opened just one month later.

Riverside County is a historic agricultural county in Southern California. Once abundant with citrus groves and apples orchards, the county now has one of the fastest growing populations in the nation, and agricultural land is rapidly being lost to housing developments. For these reasons, Taylor saw farm to school as particularly important for Riverside and sought to make the program as locally-focused as possible. Through local farmers' markets he identified two small family farmers located within 30 miles of Riverside who were willing to make weekly deliveries to the district. These two farmers have become strong supporters of the district's farm to school mission and have worked with the district to provide the variety of foods desired at an affordable price. When produce isn't available from the two growers' farms, they look to other independent growers in the area to provide the needed items. Thus, the farm to school program is helping support a wide range of small local farmers.

Fruits, Vegetables, Nuts and Bolts

The main component of the Riverside Farm to School program is a daily salad bar offered to students as an alternative to the hot lunch meal. The salad bar is stocked with as much local produce as the district is able to purchase. In the peak growing seasons nearly all of the fruits and vegetables served are from local sources, in slower months the salad remains about 50% local, owing to the year-round growing season in Southern California. Local fruits and vegetables such as lettuce, strawberries, broccoli, kiwi, spinach, apples, oranges, celery, cucumbers, and jicama are

served on the bar, supplemented by commodity protein, dairy, and grain items such as turkey, tuna fish, yogurt, rolls, milk, and multi-grain crackers. Students serve themselves and are allowed to take as much food as they want and return for seconds. Lunch room attendants ensure that students take at least the required 3 of 5 reimbursable meals components (those components are fruits, vegetables, protein, grain, and milk.)

The grant funding allowed Taylor to hire a nutrition specialist/salad bar coordinator to oversee the program. This person has become key to the program's success and sustainability. The coordinator serves as a liaison between the district and the farmers, placing produce orders with the local farmers each week. The farmers make one delivery to the district's Central Kitchen each week. From there, most of the local produce is prepared, stored, and delivered each day as needed to the individual school sites. Some of the more fragile produce items such as lettuce and strawberries are prepared at the school site for optimal freshness.

Educational Opportunities

Through partnerships with CFJ and the Riverside Department of Health, RUSD has been able to implement innovative and effective education programs which greatly enhance the farm to school salad bar. Prior to the salad bar implementation, all students at Jefferson Elementary School participated in a nutrition lesson, salad bar taste test, and etiquette training. This training was repeated at each subsequent school where salad bars were implemented and is an important first step in introducing students to the salad bar program.

To maintain enthusiasm for farm to school throughout the school year, a number of schools in the district are implementing the Harvest of the Month program. Harvest of the Month is a nutrition education program developed by the California departments of Education and Health which provides schools with the tools they need to feature one seasonal fresh fruit or vegetable item per month in the classroom and the cafeteria.¹ To supplement the state's program, RUSD and its project partners have offered school wide taste tests, featured the item of the month on the salad bar, taken students on tours of the local farmers' market, and offered farmer in the classroom presentations. Students have also had nutrition assemblies, visited the farms of the farm to school growers, and participated in gardening and planting activities. These supplemental nutrition education and salad bar promotion activities reinforce messages of good nutrition and encourage students to eat lunch at the salad bar throughout the year.

Evaluation Findings

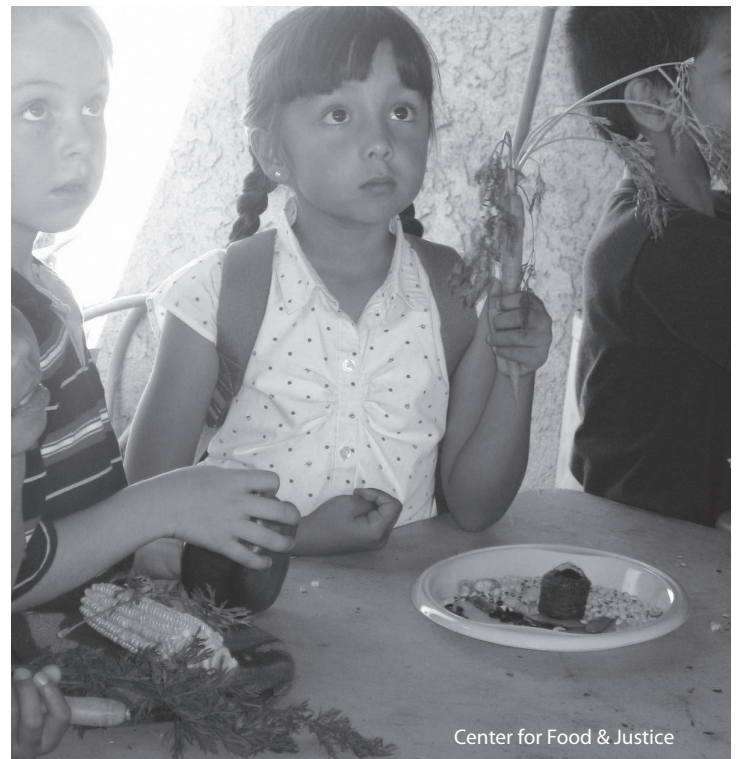
Jefferson Elementary school was chosen as the pilot site for its supportive principal and its student demographics. Jefferson is a large school with a student population of 1,023, 75% of whom are enrolled in the free and reduced lunch program. The program has been shown to have had a positive impact on this largely low-income school. CFJ conducted an evaluation of the RUSD farm to school program using data provided by the Nutrition Service department and the Jefferson cafeteria. The findings

show that the farm to school salad bar is having a number of beneficial impacts.

Participation: In March 2005, when the salad bar opened, a record 65% of students chose salad bar lunch over hot lunch. After the initial excitement about the new program wore off, Jefferson saw strong but decreasing numbers of students choosing salad bar. By July 2005, an average of 35% of students were choosing salad bar lunch over hot lunch each day, and in September 2005 participation numbers leveled off to 26%, where they have remained since then. An unexpected result of the program at Jefferson has been a nearly 9% increase in overall school meal participation, including exponential growth in the number of teacher meals served. Prior to the salad bar, the school served approximately six teacher meals per month; now they are now serving an average of 11 teachers per day, nearly all of whom eat salad bar lunches. This growth in participation has resulted in a substantial increase in revenues that help make the program financially sustainable.

Consumption: The fruit and vegetable consumption data from the Jefferson Elementary Farm to School Program are very encouraging. On average, students who choose the hot lunch meal take 1.49 servings of fruits and vegetables per meal, whereas students who choose salad bar lunch take an average of 2.36 servings of fruits and vegetables per meal. Thus, students who eat salad bar receive, on average, 58% more servings of fruits and vegetables than students who eat the hot lunch meal. The salad bar lunches contain an average of 125% of the USDA's recommended servings of fruits and vegetables.

Farmer Revenue: As of May 2006, the two farmers from whom RUSD purchases are averaging more than \$1,700 per month in produce sales to the district. This revenue source represents the farmers' access to a previously untapped market and most importantly, it represents an opportunity for growth and security, which are hard to come by in Southern California's increasingly



¹ See <http://www.harvestofthemoth.com> for more information on the program.



Riverside Unified School District

challenging environment for small farmers. Furthermore, both farmers have become very involved with the district, hosting field trips for students to visit their farms, speaking at ‘farmer in the classroom’ presentations, and participating in a Riverside Farm to School Workshop held in February 2006. This farm to school program is extending the farmers’ relationships to the school well beyond the cafeteria and into the classroom.

Program Sustainability

Rodney Taylor has taken great steps to help to make the Riverside Farm to School Salad Bar Program sustainable. Originally the Nutrition Services Department hired one person, paid for by an outside grant, to serve as a nutrition specialist and salad bar coordinator for the farm to school program. In spring 2006, to meet increasing demand, the position was split between two people—a nutrition educator and a salad bar coordinator—and both positions are now permanent and wholly funded by the Nutrition Services Department. As a testament to the success of the pilot that kicked things off in Riverside, the salad bar coordinator is the former kitchen manager from Jefferson Elementary; she now trains the kitchen staff at new farm to school salad bar sites and serves as the coordinator for all aspects of the program.

A great benefit to the Riverside farm to school program lies in the partnerships that Nutrition Services Department has made. Apart from the Center for Food & Justice, the district has great support from the Riverside Department of Health Services which helped conduct salad bar etiquette trainings at Jefferson and is now conducting nutrition education programs throughout the district. Other groups such as

the Dairy Council of California, the California Nutrition Network, the American Cancer Society, and the San Bernardino County Department of Health have also provided support for the farm to school program. It seems that the entire community of Riverside is working with the District to make the farm to school program a success.

The district has a plan to roll out the farm to school program to all 31 of the elementary schools in the district by the end of the 2007/2008 school year. At current trends, this could result in a more than 10-fold increase in revenue for the farmers and lead to more than 22,000 Riverside students having access to fresh, healthy, and local foods each day. Following implementation in all of the district’s elementary schools, Taylor will begin to expand the program to middle and high schools, likely selling prepackaged salads made with local ingredients at the secondary schools, a model that proved popular and successful in Santa Monica-Malibu.

Taylor would be the first person to tell you that running a farm to school salad bar program is a lot of work. However, feedback such as the email below, written to him by a school principal after her school’s salad bar opened, makes the program worthwhile.

Thank you, thank you, thank you!! My kids are so excited and they absolutely loved eating their fruits and vegetables!! I am so impressed with the level of commitment you and your staff have toward bringing healthy foods to our students. . . . Beyond the healthy aspects, it occurs to me that the introduction of a salad bar in the lunchroom also produces more of a community feel in the atmosphere. The lunch period has become a social gathering with positive energy and purpose. I loved eating with the kids and watching them talking and laughing with each

other as they enjoyed their meal. I know that the staff is doing much harder work in order to make this possible, but the kids are worth every bit of it. I am probably your biggest fan right now, so know that what you are doing is making a difference in the lives of children! Thank you.

-Lia Boucher, Principal
Adams Elementary School

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MORE INFO

Visit the Riverside Farm to School profile on the Farm to School website
📄 <http://www.farmtoschool.org/ca/riverside.htm>

Read an article about the program in the Riverside Press Enterprise at
📄 http://www.pe.com/localnews/riverside/stories/PE_News_Local_R_salad20.f673.html



Florida: Growing Collards for the Cafeteria: The New North Florida Cooperative

The New North Florida Cooperative

Since 1995, the New North Florida Cooperative (NNFC) – within Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Arkansas – has been working with school districts, providing fresh produce for school meals. Indeed, since the beginning of this farm to school program, the cooperative has served over one million students in 72 school districts, growing, processing, and delivering fresh ready-to-cook produce. The cooperative works with farmers when, where, and how they feel comfortable, encouraging them to join the cooperative and explaining that selling to school districts is a long-term market that will help them capture the highest price for their products. The cooperative succeeds in this market by offering value-added products that are minimally processed so that no further washing or cutting is needed by food service staff.

The cooperative sells fresh produce year-round, including bagged, washed, and ready-to-cook collard greens and sweet potato sticks. At any given time, 60-100 farmers are involved with the cooperative. In each case, NNFC connects a farmer with the local school district or the one that is closest to his or her operation. Some farmers may choose only to grow food, while others may decide to grow food and participate in processing and distribution. While a stable number of farmers work with the NNFC at any given time, some farmers come and go for various reasons. Profitability for farmers depends on the farmer and how they choose to participate.

Project Collaborators

Key collaborators on both the school and the farm sides saw the potential of a farm to school program, and motivated the birth of the cooperative. Farmers saw that sourcing to schools would create a new market that could bring stability, profitability, and organization to small operations that could not get by on their own. North Florida, where the program initially began, is an economically depressed area with high unemployment rates. Farmers wanted bargaining power within the market place; they wanted to be “price-makers” instead of “price-takers.” From the food service perspective, integrating fresh local produce into school meals was a nutritionally sound decision that benefited the local community and economy. Glyen Holmes, outreach specialist with USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service in Marianna, was one of the key initiators in the organizing process. Former Food Director of Gadsden County J’Amy Peterson believed in supporting local farmers and wanted more fresh produce integrated into school meals. She worked with Holmes to organize initial deliveries to the Gadsden County school district. Today, Holmes is the administrator of the cooperative. Another key collaborator is Vonda Richardson with Florida A & M Cooperative Extension.

Mission Statement: The New North Florida Cooperative provides fresh, healthy agricultural products at a fair price to School Lunch and Breakfast Programs. The Cooperative is responsible for the marketing, handling, processing, and delivery services of agricultural products produced by participating local small farm operators. The Cooperative will meet the needs of local small farm operators by facilitating the flow of profit from the value-added business operation to and within the local community.

Resources for Start-up

Initially, without significant start-up funds, farmers put their own sweat equity into the project. In 1995 a \$3,000 loan from the West Florida Resource Conservation and Development Council (WFRCDC) helped fund production demonstrations. In 1995

and 1996 a few loans from local banks and the Jackson County Development Council (JCDC) funded the purchase of a cutting/chopping machine and a refrigeration storage system. The JCDC has continued to provide loans, when necessary, for equipment such as a self-propelled pea harvester and a pea-shelling line. The Department of Defense (DoD) farm to school program has also been important, especially in the early years, as the program lent credibility to the farmers as they were getting established.

NNFC received two grants from the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service – one in 1997 for \$40,000 and another in 1999 for \$30,000. From 2000-2002 they received a Rural Business Enterprise grant through USDA Rural Development for further infrastructure needs: processing, harvesting, storage, and transportation. Since 2002 the NNFC has funded itself through direct sales and consulting work. The cooperative has a working capital fund to cover bills due between harvest and the receipt of payment from customers, helping farmers to get by before payment is received.

Finding a Market Niche

NNFC has worked directly with food services from the beginning. School administrators came on board naturally as they witnessed an enthusiastic response from teachers and students to the fresh products. Because schools are not processing the product, facilities become more of an issue for the cooperative, which has a storage, refrigeration, and processing facility where it operates its washing, cutting, and bagging equipment. The cooperative prices stay within what the school can afford, and it does not cost more for the school to source local products from the NNFC. Labor and equipment costs are assumed by the cooperative. While the DoD Farm to School program lent credibility to the organization during the start-up, DoD took several months to pay farmers and to reimburse school districts. Most school districts now spend their DoD dollars on other items and rarely use them to buy from the cooperative. Some schools buy directly from the NNFC, while others have formed a buying coop and buy products in bulk.

The products that come to the schools from the cooperative are primarily used as side dishes to the main entrée. The raw sweet potato sticks are used in salad bars in some cases. The signature products offered year-round are: collard greens bagged and washed in a country rough chop and a fine chop, and sweet potato sticks. Over the years the cooperative has also offered a variety of peas – including black-eyed, purple hull, butter, and



cream; sweet potato French fries; ground goat meat; muscadine; grapes; strawberries; blackberries; watermelon; okra; turnip greens and green beans.

Value-added packaging has been key for the cooperative for two reasons: it maintained the quality and freshness of their products, providing convenience to food services that were not able to handle fresh, “unprocessed” greens; and it differentiated the cooperative’s products from other product lines. Originally, all of the washing was done in large steel tubs, and chopping was done by hand. There was no refrigeration system and therefore no storage capacity. As a result, harvesting and processing had to be done in one day – one very long day. To continue in business, the cooperative purchased a packing/processing shed, a cutting/chopping machine, sinks, and a refrigeration and storage system.

All farm to school programs face distribution issues. It’s often difficult to organize and manage delivery of fresh, short-lived produce to numerous sites with different requirements. Through experience the cooperative has proved itself to be a reliable distributor of its products. In general, farmers drop off products at the cooperative where they are processed. Then, several refrigerated trucks are used for deliveries. Deliveries are made 2 ½ to 3 days per week depending on school menus, and are always made within 1-2 days of when it will be served. While much of the produce is delivered by the cooperative, they do work with other produce vendors as well. NNFC assumes transportation/distribution costs. The bagged produce has a label with the NNFC logo and a nutritional analysis. The Florida A & M University provided technical assistance to develop the label. The logo is printed on the side of the NNFC trailer along with the name of the cooperative and the phrase, “The Pinnacle of Quality.”

Educating Farmers and Students

The NNFC is involved in educational work both with the farmers and at the schools. The cooperative has developed posters showing the life cycle of a crop from production to consumption, and these posters are displayed in school cafeterias. The posters promote awareness of agriculture and small farms to school children, and are also an effective promotional tool. The NNFC also hosts field trips, usually in the summer, that provide students with the opportunity to visit the cooperative to see first-hand how their food is grown and prepared.



The NNFC also assists both member and non-member farmers in their community, teaching them new production and business practices. This assistance also extends to farmers from other states, as NNFC travels to their farms and hosts groups of farmers in its own classroom. The NNFC is very active in agricultural marketing events and school food service association conferences, relating its successes and experiences to large audiences. The NNFC office often fields calls from school districts looking for information about how to get involved or start their own farm to school projects. The cooperative has developed a Small Farmer Distribution Network that is a vehicle for networking with farmers as well as for providing marketing, education, processing and transportation assistance to other groups in the region.

Secrets of Success

In their first year, the cooperative learned the importance of building a positive business reputation. They identified the following approach as key to their success:

- Be professional and courteous
- Be purposeful and serious
- Be accountable and committed
- Provide sample products
- Get DoD certification and participate in the DoD program

Over the years the cooperative has identified the following successes:

- Innovative partnership for assistance
- Organizational development
- Market development
- Building a strong delivery record
- Improving income for small farmers
- Teamwork
- Product trials
- Proven reputation with the government agencies
- Establishing a demonstration project
- Creating community awareness
- Providing nutritional benefits to children

The overall impact of the program has been beneficial on several fronts. First and foremost, schools districts are incorporating fresh, local products in school meals and increasing the nutritional value of the food they offer their students. Schools are also investing in their community. Through the NNFC model, farmers have found an alternative market. Lastly, the cooperative has created jobs for local residents: depending on the season there are 5-10 day laborers at the cooperative.

This farm to school program is also successful in that it benefits the school and local community without burdening food services. The cooperative provides a finished product in a manner that allows schools to treat them like any other vendor.

Future Challenges

The cooperative continues to be challenged with how to work with farmers and encourage them to change from open market

competition to working together for the common good of the cooperative. The greatest challenge for the cooperative is to keep small farmers involved.

The New North Florida Cooperative has been sustainable since it began, as 90% of its funding comes from direct marketing sales. The few loans and grants they have received have helped build infrastructure with equipment purchases. The main challenge to sustainability is keeping farmers involved and, connected to this, providing continuity of product to school districts. There is an ebb and flow to farmer participation, and the cooperative works hard to keep farmers involved and to stress to them that this is a long-term market that requires long-term commitment. When a farmer works with a school district for a short time and then drops out it can cause production problems.

As the NNFC looks to the future, several areas for development are being explored. The cooperative is testing new product feasibility. They are also doing more work to continue education, training, production, marketing and development.

Over the years the program has received extensive newspaper and TV coverage. USDA has also published in-depth documents about the cooperative. (See the resource list below for details.) In spite of the challenges it faces, the NNFC is a successful example of the farm to school program.

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Marketing Fresh Produce to Local Schools: the North Florida cooperative experience, Small Farmer Success Story, Bulletin No. 1, July 1999.

A Sea of Greens: Low-income farmers use vegetable processing, marketing co-op to create new opportunity in north Florida, by Pamela J. Karg.

Taking it to the Next Level: Success of small Florida vegetable co-op leads to a network of similar cooperatives, by Glyen Holmes, Vonda Richardson and Dan Schofer.

Innovative marketing opportunities for small farmers: local schools as customers, USDA publication, by Glyen Holmes, Vonda Richardson, and Charles Connerly, Feb. 2000, 51 pages.

Presentation developed by NNFC staff explaining the cooperative in detail:  www.ezec.gov/Pubs/noflacoop.ppt

A series of four Small Farmer Success Bulletins describing the history and progress of the NNFC:
 www.eric.ed.gov/sitemap/html_0900000b80137df1.html



Illinois: Fresh from the Farm—And into the Classroom

Fresh from the Farm (FFF) is a comprehensive educational program implemented at selected schools in the Chicago area. Through an eight-week curriculum in the classroom that touches upon education about food, nutrition and health, and includes school garden activities and farm tours, FFF aims to improve eating habits among students and parents; increase student knowledge about nutrition and health, about agriculture and the environment, and about how food is grown; and support local farmers raising food in ecologically responsible ways.

FFF is a project of Seven Generations Ahead (SGA), non-profit organization based in Oak Park, Illinois, whose mission is to promote the development of ecologically prosperous and healthy communities. SGA works with parents, teachers, food service and school administration in Oak Park and Chicago Public Schools.

School Lunches can be Different!

SGA initiated a pilot program in two Oak Park District 97 schools in 2004 to serve healthy lunches to students. The pilot healthy lunches supported by the PTO introduced students to healthy vegetables, fruits, and grains, promoted opportunities for developing and testing new healthy menu options, and testing the logistics and operations needed for regularizing healthy lunch offerings in these schools. Some of the product for these lunches was purchased from local growers such as Growing Power and Genesis Growers, but it did not constitute a major aspect of the meal. As is the case in many schools in the country, the major barrier towards providing healthy, freshly cooked meals in District 97 schools was that none of the schools had working kitchens or a space to cook meals on-site. The district

had a contract with food service operator Preferred Meals, who was unwilling to modify menus substantially or change purchasing patterns to include locally grown products.

Building support for the pilot healthy lunches within the parent, teacher and school administration groups, and over two years of advocacy efforts culminated in an event organized by SGA in March '06. The event was titled "School Lunches can be different – What is possible in our community" and was attended by over 70 parents and community members. As a result of the highly successful event, District Superintendent Connie Collins and the school board agreed to create a daily pilot healthy lunch "satellite" model at District 97 schools.

The pilot program involves collaboration with District 200 Food Service Director Micheline Piekarski to provide whole wheat pita, veggie and chicken wraps with sides of seasonal fruits to demonstrate that healthy lunches are possible and economical. District 200 food service operates a full catering facility that provides healthy meals cooked from scratch. Starting in the 2006-07 school year, District 200 food services is supplying freshly cooked meals daily at Irving and Beye Elementary schools. Future plans include expansion to all eight elementary schools in District 97 as well as inclusion of as much local product as possible in the meals served. Towards that goal, SGA will facilitate a meeting of local farmers and food service in January 2007 to explore opportunities for establishing contracts for local farmers, including making linkages with the Oak Park Farmers' Market. As a result of the outreach efforts around healthy lunches, PTO-supported Pilot Healthy Lunches are still conducted once or twice a month at a handful of Oak Park schools without inputs from SGA staff.

Since 2004, SGA has also been involved in implementing educational activities at 4 Oak Park schools through a K-2 curriculum titled "Local Foods, Global Stories." The educational activities include an eight-week curriculum that highlights different local products—how they are grown, country of origin, cultural relevance of food, nutritional benefits, role in health and body functions—culminating in a tasting of the product. Farm tours, farmer visits to the classroom and parent educational sessions are incorporated into the lesson plans, which make it an interesting way for students to learn about local fruits and vegetables.

Healthy Foods and Education at Two Chicago Elementary Schools

Building on its experience with Oak Park schools, SGA has expanded coverage to two low-income schools in Chicago – Lozano Bilingual School and McAuliffe Elementary – with plans for implementation at Whittier Elementary in Spring 2007. In these schools, the "Fresh from the Farm" curriculum is designed for grades 3-4 and grades 5-6.

The FFF curriculum activities engage children in the classroom and outside on gardens and farms to teach them about where food comes from, how it is grown, sustainable agriculture practices, nutritional benefits of eating specific fruits and vegetables, the benefits of living a healthy lifestyle that includes local, healthy food. The multi-faceted curriculum includes:

- Student activities
- Eight-week healthy eating curriculum modules focusing on nutrition, earth-friendly agriculture, global food traditions, and experiencing food with the five senses. Activities are aligned with Illinois learning standards.
- Tours of local organic farms with structured curriculum activities. Participating farms include Growing Power, Prairie Crossing Learning Farm, Angelic Organics, the Green Earth Institute, and Genesis Growers.
- "Meet the Farmer" classroom visits highlighting how food is grown, building healthy soil and raising food in earth-friendly ways, and the farmer's life.
- Local Chef Cooking Demonstrations that teach students ways to prepare healthy foods and information about their nutritional qualities.
- School-based organic garden development through partner organizations.



Seven Generations Ahead

I want to thank you for making yesterday's field trip possible. Amelia continued to talk about it for the rest of the day. When she got home she said, "Today was the best day of my life." She also wanted to know if we can go visit the farm again. I told her we can go buy some corn from Jason on Saturday. This seemed a good compromise in her eyes. I guess this is a true measure of success.

–Note from a parent after a farm tour

Parent Education and Outreach

SGA engages parents of students participating in the Fresh from the Farm curriculum so that healthy eating behaviors and knowledge are carried back into the families and the community.

Weekly deliveries of fresh produce baskets are made available to parents at an affordable price. The produce baskets are delivered by SGA partner Growing Power, and consist of 12-14 varieties of sustainably grown fresh fruits and vegetables grown by farmers from Wisconsin and the southern states, who sell to the Rainbow Farmers' Cooperative. During November'05 and May'06, parents and teachers from Lozano Elementary School ordered a total of 40 Market Baskets (valued at \$15 each), 11 sustainable boxes (valued at \$26 each), 87 Junior/ Senior Market Baskets (valued at \$8 each), and 2 lamb chops (valued at \$4 each). The total value of products ordered from Growing Power during the time period was \$1,590.

Parent-Child Healthy Eating Nights bring parents and children together to taste healthy, delicious foods, as well as bring in subject experts on child nutrition, health and agriculture to talk to parents about common health and nutrition issues in the community.

The program newsletter provides parents with current health information related to diet, Fresh from the Farm program events, features on healthy foods and their health benefits, tips for making your home a haven for healthy eating, and profiles of local farmers.

Parent evaluations have been conducted to assess the impacts of the FFF program on knowledge and behaviors regarding healthy eating, if any. Both before and after the curriculum implementation, a majority of parents agreed they would buy fresh fruits and vegetables if they were affordable and convenient to get. Many parents were concerned about making sure their children maintained a healthy weight, and were motivated to have their children eat a low fat diet. Knowledge-related questions showed a need for further education about what constitutes a healthy diet. Parents also reported that their children were eating healthier meals at homes since the curriculum was implemented in the school.

Impacts on Healthy Eating Knowledge and Behavior

The FFF curriculum was pilot tested in Grades 5 and 6 at Lozano Elementary School in the 2005-06 school year. Preliminary results from the evaluations clearly show that the students and parents are enthusiastic about the program, and demonstrated an increase in the overall knowledge about healthy diets and lifestyles. For example, students were aware of the importance of consuming five or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day, and what constitutes a healthy snack and juice. Behavioral changes were reflected through an increase in the number of students eating three or more servings of fruits and vegetables



after the FFF implementation, as well as self-reporting of healthier diets and lifestyle. There was no substantial change in awareness of where food is grown.

The school administration and teachers were excited with the results of the pilot program, and have made a commitment to supporting it in the coming years. Dr. Acevedo, the school principal, is also very keen on exploring further collaboration with SGA to provide healthy meals in the school cafeteria.

In the 2006-07 school year, the FFF curriculum was modified slightly to be piloted in Grades 3 and 4 at McAuliffe Elementary and in Grade 4 at Lozano Elementary. SGA staff are phasing out their role in implementing the curriculum, and are training teachers from the two schools to take ownership of program. In the future, SGA plans to offer this curriculum training to teachers from other schools in the Chicago Public School system. SGA's FFF curriculum has complemented the work of other organizations working with the McAuliffe School, such as the Logan Square Neighborhood Association, which has facilitated the establishment of a salad bar program at the school. McAuliffe teachers report that on the days the FFF lessons highlighted tomatoes, the third and fourth graders were seen gobbling down cherry tomatoes from the salad bar! SGA Executive Director Gary Cuneen strongly believes this type of collaborative work helps strengthen the program. In his opinion, if several organizations are providing the same "healthy food and lifestyle" message to the school administration and to parents and children, change is bound to happen.

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"A Report on the Fresh from the Farm Program Evaluation" by A. Joshi and A. Azuma, Center for Food & Justice, Occidental College, September 2006

"Archdiocese of Chicago Food Service Thinking Seven Generations Ahead," an article by Gary Cuneen in Catholic Rural Life Newsletter, Spring 2006.

A follow-up meeting with teachers and the school administration provided further suggestions for improvement in activities involving parents. These included more consistent and regular communications with the parents, involving parents in classroom nutrition education sessions – so that they better understand and support what is being promoted in the classroom – and in the parent seminars. Parent participation could also be improved through family homework requiring parental involvement, such as parent sign-offs, ten-minute activities for the family, etc. Another suggestion was to have the presenters prepared with information on the families and community, so that the presentations are more culturally appropriate. Other ways of improving impact of the Healthy Eating Night could be to provide ten key suggestions for improving family nutrition that are repeated throughout the sessions, and provide easy-to-understand take-aways for parents. It was also suggested that for future sessions it will be helpful to ensure continuity of speakers across the year so that the parent community is comfortable with the speakers.

According to Mr. Cuneen, the price, supply and availability of local foods in Illinois is a major barrier towards promoting this kind of innovative work in schools. SGA's procurement specialist is working to facilitate producer-vendor linkages, to develop marketing and publicity strategy development for the program, and to provide assistance to local school districts that are looking for healthy, local foods. A major thrust in the future will be to identify new farmers who can supply to schools and other institutional buyers. SGA is also in conversations with Food Service Professionals (FSP), which serves the Archdiocese of Chicago schools, to increase the procurement of fresh fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods for their lunch menus, and with Fox River Foods, the largest school food distributor in Illinois, which has verbally committed to purchasing from local sources. Potential local items that may be included on the menus are apples, baby carrots, cucumbers, lettuces, cabbage, broccoli, cherry tomatoes, green beans and snap peas.

Spreading the Word

SGA has been instrumental in spreading the message about healthy, local foods in schools in Illinois and nationally. The Fresh from the Farm program has been the focus of several media articles and is also highlighted on their website. Through its work with implementing the FFF program, SGA is emerging as a resource for school districts wanting to incorporate healthier, and to the extent possible, locally raised food into school lunch menu offerings. SGA has established partnerships with key Chicago based organizations working on school food and local agriculture issues, such as Growing Power, the Healthy Schools Campaign, University of Illinois Extension, Open Lands Project, Logan Square Neighborhood Project and the UIC Chicago Health Partnership Consortium.

SGA has received funding from the USDA Community Food Projects grants, the Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children (CLOCC), and Farm Aid for this project. It will continue to fundraise for continuing work on these issues. However, the ultimate goal is to make the curriculum resources available for teachers all over Chicago and the country to use in farm to school programs.



Massachusetts: Sowing Seeds in Farms and Schools

In Massachusetts, farm to school efforts benefited from a unique class action suit that resulted in funding for nutrition-related grants. Several vitamin companies were found guilty of price fixing and had to pay restitution to the state. Some of the collected funds were granted to the Massachusetts School Nutrition Association (SNA), which used \$40,000 to start “Get Fresh, Get Local,” a one-year farm food to school cafeteria pilot program that focused on five school districts.

Prior to the efforts of the Mass. SNA, the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources had begun exploring farm to school possibilities from the farm side of the equation. As an employee of the Department, Kelly Erwin was asked to launch a statewide farm to institution task force and to begin finding ways to connect farmers with potential buyers.

When budget cuts resulted in Ms. Erwin’s job being cut, she went to work for the SNA to assist the five pilot schools in developing local purchasing programs. It was clear that one of the biggest challenges was finding farmers that would consider shifting over to this new market sector.

Fortunately, Erwin was not easily daunted, and began the legwork of contacting farmers. She combed membership directories of associations such as the New England Vegetable and Berry Growers Association and the Massachusetts Fruit

Growers Association, as well as old lists of wholesaling farms, she asked farmers she knew for referrals, and then sent letters and made phone calls. She was ultimately successful in sourcing farm products for four out of the five pilot school systems that year. The fifth system was matched up with a farm the next year.

Forming New Partnerships

Working out of her home with consulting funds from the Mass. Dept. of Agricultural Resources, Erwin continued the project after the SNA grant ended. In hopes of developing a new approach, she began working with Professor Anne Carter at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. Prof. Carter decided to organize deliveries of farm products to local schools, and raised funds from the University as well as from a state-wide anti-hunger organization, Project Bread, to make that possible. After contacting a number of farmers, Prof. Carter’s staff began delivering Joseph Czajkowski Farm’s products to the Chicopee, Granby, Amherst, and Williamsburg public school systems. Grant support ended

after the first year, but farm to school sales relationships continued with Chicopee, Amherst, and Williamsburg.

Erwin began to work intensively with Czajkowski Farm to define what a “good” school customer would look like relative to existing delivery routes, school locations, product mix, and purchasing volume. At the same time, she continued trying to match schools with farms throughout the state and found a farm in Central Massachusetts, Lanni Orchards, which was particularly interested in developing the school market. Erwin met with Pat Lanni to identify the farm’s existing distribution routes, communities where the farm’s products were sold, and the minimum order required for each delivery location. After this initial research she could more accurately find schools that fit into the “desirable” school customer profile for each farm.

To arrive at the point where schools were regularly purchasing locally grown food, a lot of preliminary research and outreach were required to locate mid-sized farmers who were interested in the market. In some areas smaller farms were matched up with small school systems. It was necessary to figure out sales and delivery logistics, product availability, and communication channels. This approach required matching the unique needs of each school district with farmer availability and selling preferences.

Growing the Program

Once Lanni and Czajkowski began delivering to multiple schools, they also each began buying products from other local farmers, for resale to school systems. The schools wanted a variety of products from which to choose, but also preferred to do business with just one farm vendor. Lanni Orchards grows apples, other tree fruits, and some vegetables. Czajkowski Farm offers berries and a variety of vegetables including peeled and sliced butternut squash, carrot sticks and coins, snipped green beans, chopped cabbage, diced onion, and zucchini and summer squash sticks, in season. Judging from these farms' experience, it isn't economically advantageous to sell just vegetables. A combination of vegetables and tree fruit and/or berries makes school sales more profitable. In addition, using cold storage for apples and growing winter crops help extend the period of time when farms have products to sell to schools in Massachusetts.

Project Bread, a state-wide anti-hunger group that emphasizes serving fresh food to children at summer feeding sites, became an important partner in farm to school sales. Through modest grants written by Kelly Erwin, Project Bread gave Lanni Orchards, Joseph Czajkowski Farms, and McKinstry Market Garden short-term funding to cover summer delivery costs to new school system customers, with the hope that these new sales relationships would continue on their own during the regular school year. In the majority of cases this has proved true. Several food service directors who were reluctant partners at the beginning of the summer became very enthusiastic about the value of locally grown food and continued buying from the farms during the following school year. In one system, the farmer said he could only deliver to a few school locations during the regular school year and the food service director was sufficiently motivated to arrange transportation of the food to the rest of his schools.

Making the School Market Work

It can be impractical for farmers to deliver small orders, especially to multiple locations, as they are usually not profitable. Farmers who plan to continue selling to schools usually have a minimum order requirement. Mr. Lanni has a non-negotiable \$100 per delivery location per order requirement, Mr. McKinstry a \$150 minimum order, but Mr. Czajkowski is sometimes willing to forego a minimum order per location, especially for schools which are large purchasers or for those close to his farm. Farms that offer a longer list of items for sale (by diversifying crops or by including other farms' products) make it easier for schools to meet a minimum order. Including fruit becomes significant as cases of apples or flats of berries help school purchasers meet the minimum order required by the farmers.

It is important to note that during this period Erwin also encouraged and assisted with local purchasing arrangements for the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, a school with 20,000 undergraduates. UMass began including a clause in their bid specifications that reserves the right to buy up to 15% of all produce from local farmers. The University intends to keep increasing this percentage and has found that produce doesn't cost more when purchased

from local farms. Public schools like Chicopee and Westfield greatly benefited from the University's demand for local foods, because Czajkowski Farm added a lot of additional products to its list at UMass's request, which then became available to all the school customers.

Between June 2005 and May 2006, produce farmers in Massachusetts selling to schools within the state grossed more than \$55,000 in K-12 sales and more than \$80,000 in college sales. The majority of these sales were made by Czajkowski Farm and Lanni Orchards. There were about 45 school districts, private secondary schools, and colleges involved in purchasing from Massachusetts farms. (Not included in these figures is the income generated by sales of other local products, such as eggs, milk, honey, maple syrup, cheese, and meat, primarily to colleges.) The ongoing challenge for Mass. farmers and school food service directors is to ensure that their purchase/sale arrangements make economic and organizational sense.

Issues to Consider

One issue facing both colleges and K-12 is the emergence of food service management companies that are contracted by educational institutions to manage food services. In Massachusetts, about 10% of K-12 schools, and more than 50% of colleges and universities, contract with an outside food service management company. Most of the management companies have "preferred" vendor contracts with large food manufacturers or distributors which require volume discounts and allowances. It is very difficult for school food service directors employed by one of the food service management companies to buy directly from local farms, as the management companies frown upon purchases made outside of preferred vendor contracts. Even school food service directors who are able to obtain permission from management company higher-ups to buy some locally grown foods find they are usually confined to purchasing token amounts and often cannot pay the farmers in a timely fashion.

Another issue is that some schools simply do not have adequate kitchens or staff. For instance, the Boston public school system serves frozen lunches manufactured out of state to more than

half of their students, due to the lack of food preparation facilities.

On a positive note, in Massachusetts, school systems and colleges that buy directly from local farms usually find price is not an issue. In addition, schools find waste is reduced. Even when schools buy more expensive local items, like strawberries or hot-house tomatoes, they report increased meal participation and thus improvement of school food service finances. It appears that the kids choose to eat locally grown foods because they taste better!





Resources for Success

Much of the success of farm to school in Massachusetts is due to finding mid-sized farmers with existing delivery routes that can sell to schools without making substantial changes to their business operations. Also, working within the existing financial parameters of farms and school systems may be slow, but the results can be more long-lasting than those based on a large one-time influx of grant funding.

Bringing farmers and school food service together does often require a “translator” and persuader at the beginning, as farmers and food service directors don’t always understand each other’s priorities and parameters. This is where an outside party familiar with both worlds can be very useful. It is important to understand the difficulties and limitations of both farm and institutional food service operations.

Educational programs can also play an important role in creating lasting success for farm to school sales. The chef-led “Cooking with Local Foods” regional workshops organized for members of the Mass. SNA were well-received and resulted in more inquiries about farm products and in better use of products purchased.

The Massachusetts-based Seeds of Solidarity Education Center has also helped the success of farm to school sales by developing school gardens and classroom curricula that meet state standards. As is often the case, where there are active school gardens there also tends to be more long-lasting interest in purchasing locally grown foods for the cafeteria. When the “three Cs” reinforce each other – classroom, curricula and cafeteria – nutrition and agriculture education can be dynamic.

The Mass. Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) has been a staunch supporter of farm to school sales and has created display materials for school food service trade shows and developed a farm to school page on the MDAR website. The web page includes a listing of all the public school systems in the state, with information about food service directors, numbers of students, schools, and average number of lunches served. It has a listing of farmers interested in selling to schools. MDAR’s web page also provides a school sales evaluation tool for farmers to use and a colorful seasonal availability chart for school food service staff.

In the past few years, support for Erwin’s Mass. Farm to School Project has been provided by MDAR and the Mass. Society for Promoting Agriculture. More recently they have been joined by MassDevelopment (an economic development and financing agency), the Mass. Farm Bureau Agricultural Preservation Corp. and Project Bread. Each of these new partners brings a particular interest, such as farm to college sales or summer feeding programs, to the table.

Lessons learned by Kelly Erwin have been passed on in presentations to Berkshire Grown, the Mass. Fruit Growers Association, the Northeast Organic Farming Association, the Sustainable Agriculture and Food System Funders conference, and a Women in Sustainable Agriculture conference, in addition to other organizations.

Future Plans

In the coming year, the Mass. Farm to School Project will attempt to work with school food service management companies, encouraging them to buy directly from farmers. General farm to school sales promotion and technical assistance will continue around the state, with a focus on colleges and universities as well as K-12 systems. The Mass. Farm to School Project is also conducting a telephone survey of all of the public school food service directors in the state to ascertain their current practices related to local food purchasing.

For school purchasing situations where direct sales are not possible, the Mass. Farm to School Project is working with school customers and farm to school organizers in other states to develop a list of attributes and a system of accountability that could allow some conventional distributors to be designated as preferred local foods vendors, based on their performance.

Collaborators on the Farm to School Project include the Mass. Dept. of Education, several public school food service directors and a chef, Amy Cotler, who develops and tests recipes for a school food service cookbook. The cookbook project is jointly funded by the Mass. Dept. of Agricultural Resources and the Mass. Society for Promoting Agriculture, but will also be promoted and disseminated by the Mass. Department of Education (DOE).

Upcoming projects include training and mentoring of other agriculture support professionals so that there are more “matchmakers” in more regions of the state, and research on the relative profitability of school sales for farms. Lastly, if sufficient funds can be raised, the Mass. Farm to School Project hopes to launch a state-wide week of school and farm food-related activities such as occurs in New York during New York Harvest for New York Kids week.

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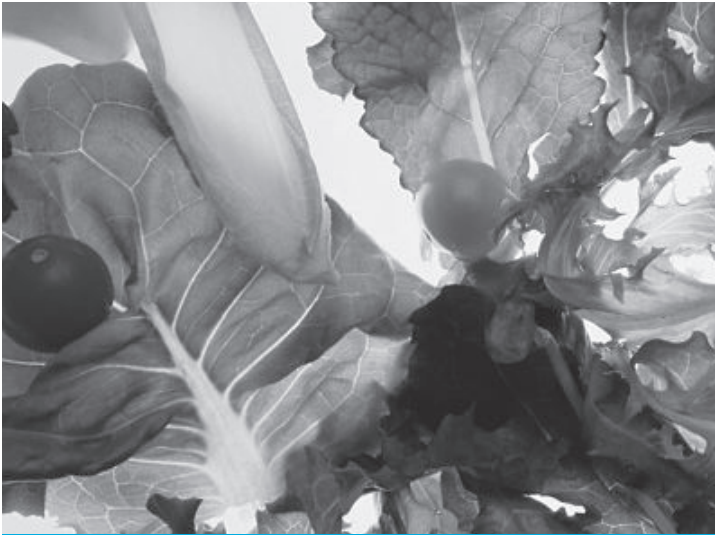
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Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) website:
🌐 www.mass.gov/agr/markets/Farm_to_school



Michigan: Farm to School with Help from the Department of Defense

In Michigan, farm to school programs are a collaboration between the MI departments of Agriculture and Education, the C.S. Mott group at Michigan State University, and the Department of Defense Farm to School Program. By utilizing the produce-buying expertise of the Department of Defense (DoD) field staff, the farm to school program obtains excellent quality produce – a priority for DoD buyers. As the largest purchaser of produce in the world, supplying commissaries, federal and state institutions as well as military operations worldwide, these buyers are well-qualified for this task.

The Department of Defense (DoD) Fresh Program

The DoD pilot program began in 1994 with eight test states (South Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado, New Hampshire, Florida, Texas, Maryland, South Carolina), using \$3.2 million of entitlement funds. At this time, the Department of Defense began offering its produce-buying services for institutions other than military bases and installations. Hospitals, schools, and prisons are just some of the institutions to utilize these services. Several years later in 1996 at the request of USDA, the DoD Fresh Program was developed. This partnership between USDA and DoD shifted the emphasis to buying from farmers within the state where the produce was purchased, and was called DoD Fresh. Through the program, food service directors can use federal commodity dollars to purchase state-grown produce from DoD buyers. DoD Fresh increasingly gives preference to small and mid-size family farmers within the states in which it operates. The DoD and its Supply Center Produce Business Unit operate ten regional Produce Buying Offices. The Produce Business Unit also oversees a roving staff of field buyers who purchase products directly from growing areas.

At present, twelve states and one territory are working with DoD in varying degrees to procure local produce for school meals. They are Alaska, Mississippi, North Carolina, New Mexico, Texas, West Virginia, Kentucky, Michigan, California, New York, New Jersey, Oklahoma, and Puerto Rico. The DoD farm to school programs work differently in each state/territory and, unlike many distribution models, DoD

programs require coordination and good working relationships among many federal, state, and local organizations. DoD often relies on state agriculture personnel or other knowledgeable agriculture organizations to facilitate these partnerships because they are familiar with growers and their capabilities. In most DoD farm to school programs, the state departments of agriculture are involved in identifying farmers and farmer organizations because DoD brokers may not have connections with local farms. However, in other instances, this work has been done by non-profit organizations working on food, farming, and agricultural issues. Since this is a crucial part of the program, the department or organization taking on this task should be well connected to farmers within the region.

Currently the funds for the Program come from the Department of Defense Fair Share Entitlement dollars allocated in the 2002 Farm Bill. There is \$50 million dollars distributed to schools based on participation rates in the school meal programs. Schools can also use their Section 4 & 11, or state reimbursable dollars, for this purpose. Products that are available from local growers can be noted on the state list of product offerings used by food service directors, or food service can specifically request products from DoD Fresh.

How it All Works

DoD farm to school partnerships typically begin with a planning meeting. DoD coordinates a meeting between state agriculture and school food service personnel to determine items that could be used in the school menus. Other potential participants include farmers, food service staff from the district level, direct marketing groups that work directly with farmers, and state nutrition staff. The participants then determine, based on product availability and menu planning needs, the local produce items that will be grown for use in school meals.

Once a farm to school partnership is established, DoD works with the parties to ensure a successful program. DoD negotiates the actual price of the product with growers or co-ops to assure that, based on current market prices, the prices are fair and reasonable. DoD is committed to paying farmers a fair price and DoD negotiations are not based on finding a “lowest cost deal.” DoD also works with growers and grower organizations to assure that all required certification, such as Blank Purchase Agreements, are in place and quality standards and post-harvest requirements are established. Standards and requirements may be set for pre-cooling of product and for size, grade, and packaging. In some cases, DoD can work with processors to supply value-added produce to schools’ specifications, such as pre-bagged or pre-cut vegetables. Since DoD buys only Grade A produce, the quality is generally excellent.

After product specifications have been determined, DoD assists states in monitoring the crops to ensure product quality. DoD will also establish a timetable with all parties to ensure product quality and availability meet schools’ needs. DoD often partners with states and schools to promote the benefits of buying fresh produce from local farmers.

Making the DoD Connection in Michigan

Farm to school efforts began in Michigan in September, 2001, when a brainstorming meeting was held between the State Departments of Education and Agriculture and the Department of Defense (DoD). As a result of this meeting and subsequent ones, the group made significant progress identifying key players and strategies to link farmers with schools.

Michigan receives approximately \$1.9 million in fresh USDA commodity produce each year, ordered through DoD in Nashville, Tennessee. The Michigan Department of Education is coordinating with DoD in Nashville to purchase \$1.9 million in fresh produce from Michigan growers. Once the produce is purchased, it is stored in a state warehouse and then delivered to the schools by two commercial distributors, Sysco and Gordon. The Michigan Apple Committee is also involved by assisting in transportation and storage.

More Farm to School Work in Michigan

State farm to school efforts within Michigan are also being led at the university level. The C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems at Michigan State University (MSU) coordinates and assists in the development of farm to school programs throughout the state. The group, led by Mike Hamm, surveyed approximately 700 food service directors in Michigan to determine their interest and perceptions of purchasing local produce. Approximately 380 food service directors responded to the survey with the following results:

- 73% are interested in purchasing locally, if price and quality are competitive, and reliable sources are available
- 85% are interested in purchasing locally if the product is available from their current vendors
- 10% had already purchased local product

The Michigan Departments of Education and Agriculture have used the results of this survey to map the state and identify food service directors who can be linked with local producers. Clearly, their efforts have been successful, as 600 schools participate in the DoD Fresh Program. Products and volumes purchased through this program for 2005 are as follows:

PRODUCT	# OF CASES
Red Delicious Apples	9894
Empire Apples	1906
Gala Apples	8641
Gold Delicious Apples	8891
Jonathon Apples	1675
McIntosh Apples	2053
Apples Sliced	7022
Carrots Fresh	12837
Nectarines Fresh	1937
Peaches Fresh	2712
Potatoes Fresh	2930

The Michigan DoD Program has benefited from strong support from the Department of Education and other partners collaborating to make this happen. Additionally, most schools in Michigan have kitchens, making it relatively easy to work with fresh product, and additional labor has not been necessary. Because the program deals in relatively large volumes, it has had a significant

economic development impact on farmers. At the same time, children have had increased access to healthy, tasteful produce.

The cost of the fresh product has been a little higher than what is normally paid. For example, an apple costs about 25 cents, which is a high percentage of the 80 cent average cost of the meal. However, because the funds come out of the commodity allotment, the price is more easily absorbed.

Farm to School Opportunities through the Fruit & Vegetable Pilot Program

Michigan was one of four states chosen to participate in the Fruit

& Vegetable Pilot Program (FVPP), which aimed to increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables by U.S. schoolchildren by providing them to the students at no cost. The Nutrition Title of the 2002 Farm Bill provided \$6 million for this effort during the 2002-03 school year, and was distributed to 25 schools in four states – Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, and Ohio. According to a USDA study, during the pilot program 15% of all produce purchased came from local farm sources. In Michigan, 4 of the 25 schools utilized local produce of their own initiative. All schools in Michigan were required to include nutrition education as a condition of receiving the grant.

Zeeland Soya Farms

Large volume purchases of low saturated soybean oil are also happening at the K-12 level. In the 2005-06 school year the Michigan Department of Education ordered low saturated soybean oil as a replacement for vegetable oil and liquid shortening previously used in the USDA commodity program. This purchase constitutes ten truckloads of product and will utilize two million extra pounds of Michigan soybeans.

Future Plans

In the near future, the Michigan DoD Fresh Program plans to collaborate with commodity groups to develop a marketing plan for schools, parents, and the general public. Information about the program has been presented at the School Nutrition Association, the Second National Farm to Cafeteria Conference, and the Great Lakes Fruit and Vegetable Expo in the Upper Midwest region. Staff also hopes to work more closely with DoD farmers by cutting out the middleman and negotiating prices upfront to keep prices stable for farmers and the MDE.

Challenges of Working with the DoD Fresh Program

Since the original charge of the DoD buyers was to buy produce from anywhere in the U.S., it is crucial to develop good communication channels with them. Working closely with the buyers will help ensure that they are making the effort to find Michigan product and that farmers are given a good price when working through commercial distributors to transport the product.

In the long-term, the viability of the DoD Fresh Program is being hampered somewhat ironically by USDA, which is attempting to enforce regulations that prohibit giving “geographic preference” when purchasing products with federal dollars. There is, however, legislation from 2002 that overrides the 1988 regulation, and efforts are being made through USDA and the legislature to clear up any confusion on this issue. The Community Food Security Coalition is working through the 2007 Farm Bill as well as administratively with USDA to permit more flexibility in local purchasing.

MORE INFO

Farm to School Programs in Southeastern Michigan:
http://fsepmichigan.org/reports/farmtoschool_litreview06

Results from the 2004 Michigan Farm to School Survey:
www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=pubmed&dopt=Abstract&list_uids=16635200



Program ended the 2004-2005 school year in May 2005 with 230 schools from 44 districts purchasing 1,400 cases of apples, 2,454 cases of pints (24 pints/case) and 140 cases of cider gallons (4 per case) from two wholesalers who in turn purchased products from two wholesale growers. In addition, local apple supply contracts were arranged for three smaller retail growers. As a result of the program, more than 108,000 students in the state of New Hampshire had access to fresh NH apples and cider in their cafeterias.

NH Farm to School staff assisted with connecting the dots between school food service and apple growers and distributors. A website (www.nhfarmtoschool.org) provides free downloadable promotional materials, sample letters and other resources for food service staff, parents, farmers, school boards and community members interested in buying NH apple and apple products through the program.

New Hampshire: Get Smart, Eat Local: Step A is Apples

The New Hampshire (NH) Farm to School Program has lived up to its own motto of “Get Smart, Eat Local!” by focusing efforts on the procurement of a single local product in schools all over the state: apples. According to Nathan Duclos, program coordinator of the NH Farm to School Program, which is housed at the University of New Hampshire’s Office of Sustainability, the decision to streamline distribution systems to offer small (140 count) apples from NH and, later, apple products such as cider, was a conscious effort by the program staff to find an entry point into the school food purchasing system. At the same time, farmers unable to get a good price in the market for the 140 count apple realized that it was perfect for marketing to kids due to its small size. Since the first product introduced was apples, which do not require significant washing or prepping, there were no major changes in kitchen infrastructure or staffing required at the school level to incorporate the NH apples and apple products. The cost of buying NH apples was negotiated so that it was not higher than other available sources. Also, apples can be made available to schools throughout the school year through controlled atmosphere storage, so growers did not run into the problem of finding alternative markets when school was closed.

The NH Farm to School Program, a collaboration of the UNH’s Office of Sustainability and the NH Coalition for Sustaining Agriculture, received initial funding from Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) in 2003. Based on program reports submitted to SARE, the NH Farm to School

Outreach for the program includes direct contact with food service and school administration, direct mailings and phone calls, community events, harvest fairs, information booths at conferences, and workshops conducted by program staff. The NH program has also worked to develop relationships with key state departments and organizations such as the NH Department of Education, NH School Food Service Association, NH School Principals Association, and NH Apple Growers, among others.

Since the program’s inception, students have started identifying the apples as a NH product, and the number of schools ordering apples and cider has increased to over 300. Some schools are also buying other local products such as greens, root vegetables, berries, and honey. In the fall of 2006, NH Farm to School launched a new pilot program to work with eight seacoast NH school districts to make more direct links with local growers in order to increase the amount of locally grown foods at the schools.

In 2005, apple growers noted that the supply of small 140 count apples was going to be short. Together they determined how to work to ensure deliveries to the schools—for this school year and as a model for the future. One orchard used school and related vending market opportunity as the basis for adding pasteurization and expanding his cider operation to include pints. The new cider is free of preservatives making it accessible for children with allergies. The shorter shelf life (two weeks vs. six weeks) has been challenging for distributors and food service staff. Test marketing for “Grab Bags,” a new apple product for kids

was facilitated through the program. The 2 oz. package of pre-sliced apples was enthusiastically received by kids, especially when paired with another New England product (containing NH milk, of course): Cabot cheese!

To broaden the scope and coverage of the farm to school approach, the NH Farm to School Program is also collaborating with food service management companies. The program is currently in conversations with Café Services, a food service management company in the Northeast which operates in 17 school districts. Café Services is slated to incorporate farm to school and local products into their corporate purchasing strategy very soon.

Going Local: The Con Val Experience

Tony Geraci, who spearheaded the Contoocook Valley School District (Con Val) farm to school program, has proven that farm to school can totally transform the outlook of not only school children, but also of parents, school administration and the community. The district serves the communities of Antrim, Bennington, Dublin, Frankestown, Greenfield, Hancock, Peterborough, Sharon and Temple in the Monadnock region of the state.

In his early days as Con Val's food service director, Geraci sent surveys out to all K-12 students asking them to write about their food memories. The results of the survey were shocking: only the names of fast food and other chain restaurants were recalled! There were no references to local restaurants—and not one student mentioned a family member's cooking. Geraci decided to tackle the problem head on: he initiated a food education campaign, including cooking demonstrations and opportunities for kids to touch, feel, taste and smell food.

When Geraci heard of the NH Farm to School Program, he started purchasing local apples and cider for the schools. As he realized the importance of purchasing locally, he added bakery products, water, dairy, eggs, beef, seafood and other non-food goods such as cleaning and food service supplies to that list.

Bringing in Revenues

Tony Geraci was willing to go the extra mile to buy the fresh, healthy, local products. In fact, he saw it as a great business opportunity. Not only could he help support local farmers and businesses, but he also realized he could strengthen and expand his own food service operation. He strengthened the catering functions of the food service department to generate revenues he could divert to the school meal programs. A Sports Nutrition Program was marketed to athletes and sports teams, providing nutritious meals designed for caloric burning and hydration at \$5 each. Geraci recalls the skepticism from the hockey coach when he introduced the concept. However, after the overall performance and endurance of the team improved, requests from other coaches to supply

meals to all the sports teams in the district poured in, bringing with them a steady revenue stream for the food service.

Through catering contracts with the local Rotary Club, a summer feeding program, a mobile concessions stand, and a staff dining program that sold adult meals at \$3.75, Geraci generated community and staff buy-in for his efforts. The high quality of meals served in the cafeterias also ramped up the total meal revenue from \$600,000 to a million dollars in three years. The overall food service budget spent on fruit and vegetable purchases was less than 10% before Geraci took charge of operations. Now, the total budget for local products is close to 16% of the total budget, which includes produce, bakery items, cheese and water. The district buys local produce mainly from the NH Farm to School program distributors, but also directly from farmers and farmers' markets in the summer months.

The Con Val Farm to School Program has been mostly self-funded. It has received limited external support from the National Dairy Council and some state funds to promote physical activity and nutrition. Before taking on his role at Con Val, Geraci had worked for many years as a chef and food broker in New Orleans, and was thus focused on running a self-sustaining program. To prove that nothing in the kitchen goes to waste, Geraci asked a local baker to use a load of refried beans he had in the kitchen pantry to develop a tasty recipe. The beans would have gone to waste if not used. The "Mexican Cookies" that emerged are now a regular on the school menu.

Serving Healthy Meals and Education

A typical meal at the Con Val schools has five choices of fruits and vegetables at every meal, with two to three choices from a hot bar, salad bar and sandwiches, and plenty of vegetarian options, as well as whole grain bread from local artisan bakeries. A hot breakfast is available to all school children. All the eleven schools in the district have school gardens and a farm to school program in place. The district has three production kitchens that supply meals cooked from scratch to all the 11 schools. Meals are transported by vans owned and operated by the district. The district serves close to 3,000 students daily, and has 16% of those enrolled for free and reduced meals.

Geraci clearly invested in his staff, training them for "real" cooking, and negotiating a good benefits package for the 38 full time and 12 part time staff he managed. He also encouraged greater community collaborations by bringing in help from outside: disabled children from the Crotched Mountain Rehabilitation Center for chopping fruits and vegetables, and seniors to serve breakfast. The helpers felt valued for their efforts in preparing a school meal, and the work load on the food service staff was reduced considerably. The food service at Con Val also offers a work program for high school students and parents who are in need of extra cash.

Several innovative programs are operational in the district that involve students at all levels of planning the school meals. A "Fruit of the Month"



Con Val School District



Building a Supportive Environment

Geraci has been very focused on building community partnerships and collaborations to contribute to and support his efforts. He worked with a farmer to develop new germination techniques, and sought help to set up the greenhouse at South Meadows. Due to his efforts towards streamlining food purchasing in the region, Geraci was also named the Director of Procurement for the Statewide Food Bank operations. The district administration has forged partnerships with the NH Farm to School Program at UNH Durham, Keene State College, Antioch College, school nurses, local rotary club, community fairs, PTA, PTO, Wellness Committee, and local doctors, and works closely with the school board to run various aspects of this multi-faceted program.

program promotes the consumption of fruits. Students get stars for trying out new fruits, and get a special treat when they have collected a pre-determined number of stars. A "Recipe Contest" for school meals was conducted: students could submit recipes that followed certain nutritional, portion size and pricing guidelines. The student response was phenomenal, and an entire month of student-developed recipes was instituted in the cafeterias. Students took pride in their recipes like "Real Deal Nachos" (multi bean chili with veggies and home made chips), and also learned how to calculate serving sizes and recommended daily allowances, purchasing and preparation costs, and total price per meal. Geraci and the school nurse support the school's radio station by hosting a show, where students can call in with questions about health and nutrition. The Breakfast Grab n' Go program involves fifth graders in taking orders, doing the logs, and writing the checks—providing an opportunity for children to contribute to the food service operations and at the same time learn essential life skills.

Geraci found his match in Richard Dunning, the principal at South Meadows School. Together, they have transformed this school's environment completely, and made it a demonstration site for the farm to school efforts in NH. South Meadows operates a year-round greenhouse with a hydroponics growing system that circulates through a fish tank. Children grow lettuce, herbs, peppers, tomatoes, and also harvest fish for a "Year-end Fish Fry." The greenhouse now supplies almost half of the greens on the salad bar at South Meadow.

Students who have participated in the farm to school program have developed an interest in farming, and some even want to become farmers. Geraci has made linkages with local farmers to guide and mentor these budding farmers. The local bagel mill has been able to expand business due to the school account and is an avid supporter for the farm to school program at Con Val. Through the "Buy a Friend a Meal" program, parents and students can contribute towards purchasing a meal for a child or family in need. Due to the low participation in the free and reduced meal program, the district invested in a "Families at Risk" program to provide in-house assistance for families to fill out the Free and Reduced Meal application.

After three wonderful years at Con Val (2003-2006), Geraci is now an independent consultant with school districts across the country to spread his knowledge, experiences and his unwavering enthusiasm for healthy changes in school food service. His efforts at Con Val are well institutionalized at the district level. Those programs should continue into the future.

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MORE INFO

NH Farm to School Program website offers free resources for farmers, food service, parents and school administrators; templates for letters and posters; and provides locations of apple growers in the region:

🌐 www.nhfarmtoschool.org

Yearly program reports from the NH Farm to School Program at the Northeast SARE website:

🌐 http://www.sare.org/reporting/report_viewer.asp?pn=LNE03-183

The farm to school program in western North Carolina began a few years ago, when Harold Davis heard from a neighbor that the schools in Yancey County couldn't afford to buy lettuce because the price had become too high. Davis, a Yancey County farmer who was growing lettuce at the time, took enough samples of his crop to the school system's central office for several people to take home and try. Soon he was supplying the Yancey County Schools with homegrown lettuce that was fresher and tastier than anything they could have bought from their usual supplier.

"It was that entrepreneurial spirit of farmers," says Emily Jackson, Growing Minds project director for the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) that started the farm to school project in North Carolina. Harold Davis and his wife, Sandra, whose farm and produce stand are located near Burnsville, became pioneers, the first farmers in the region to tap into a national movement that encourages school cafeterias to buy food they serve from local farmers.

It was good timing on their part – in 2003 the North Carolina Department of Agriculture made available special grant monies for local school systems to purchase from local farms. About the same time, Harold and Sandra participated in the ASAP Transition Program and received a \$5,000 grant to expand their hydroponic system. This system made it possible for them to grow lettuce year round and supply the Yancey County school system with a local source of lettuce. The Yancey County Health Department proposed a proclamation, written by the Yancey County School Board, to support purchasing food from local farmers.

Growing the Movement

To help move things along, ASAP held a farm to school workshop at Jubilee Church in Asheville in 2004. Food service directors, nutritionists, farmers and others from school systems in six western North Carolina counties were invited. The workshop was led by the Community Food Security Coalition, which is dedicated to building strong, sustainable, local and regional food systems. "What came from the day was a real sense that people thought it was a great idea, and a desire on the part of people to continue to work on it," Jackson said. There was also a realization that school food service workers didn't know what local farmers grow.

Two actions resulted. A Farm to School Committee was formed that included farmers, school nutrition directors, cooperative extension agents and others, and farm tours for food service workers were organized with grants from the Risk Management Agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the N.C. Health and Wellness Trust Fund, a tobacco buyout program.



Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project

North Carolina: How the Price of Lettuce Started a Farm to School Program

While local purchasing is a key aspect of farm to school work, Jackson sees the program as more than good nutrition for children. It's an opportunity to educate children about food systems and the environment. She says there are four components to the farm to school program: cafeterias serving locally grown produce; farm visits by students; school gardens; and nutrition education. Because western North Carolina is a rural area, Growing Minds has been able to arrange field trips to farms, including one where students were able to participate in the harvest and then return to a local restaurant, work with a chef, and prepare a meal. A K-2 class is also writing a book about their experiences. In the cafeteria, there is a "Who Grows Your Food?" theme, with farmer profiles decorating the cafeteria walls. The farm to school program has also inspired a parent group – Eat Better, Learn Better – to promote ASAP's efforts in the Asheville area.

This year, 12,000 children in four school systems - Mitchell, Yancey and Madison counties and Asheville city schools - will be eating produce from local farms. There is a small, informal network of 7-10 farmers providing lettuces, apples, potatoes, squash, cucumbers, greens, okra, tomatoes, decorative pumpkins, turnips, red cabbage, watercress, year-round hydroponic lettuce, zucchini, and apples. Most of these farms are less than ten acres and many are tobacco farmers who are transitioning to new crops. A couple of the farmers are expanding their greenhouses so that they can grow vegetables year-round. The farmers deliver directly to the schools, traveling an average of 30 miles. In Madison and Mitchell counties, farmers deliver their product to

one designated farmer who then delivers for the group. Local products make up 3–5% of all produce purchased by the schools.

As is often the case with schools in rural areas, the schools in these four counties are equipped with full kitchens, and food service workers are accustomed to preparing fresh fruits and vegetables. The only additional facilities needed by a few schools were cold storage units.

Farm to school has found strong supporters among school food service staff as well as the school administration. In Madison County, the idea for farm to school came from the superintendent of schools, and the school board organized a “thank-you” presentation for farmers involved in the program. In Mitchell County, a presentation to the county board about the Asheville farm to school program took place in the “Good News” section of the meeting. Madison, Yancey and Mitchell also have a Farm to School Committee, consisting of the food service director, a Cooperative Extension staff person, a farmer (from each of the three counties), ASAP staff, as well as representatives from the health department and staff from a processing facility.

Connecting to Rural Roots

One of the biggest benefits of the farm to school program in western North Carolina is that it provides a connection to students’ rural heritage. Many of these children are just one generation removed from agriculture, and the exposure to farmers and farming helps them to understand the history of the area as well as how their predecessors lived and worked. Farm to school also helps to keep growers in business with additional market opportunities while keeping development forces at bay. Incorporating local products into school meals also helps to keep dollars in the local economy and develops ties between the farming and school communities.

Perhaps the impact of the farm to school program can best be summarized by the experience of the classic Southern vegetable – okra. Students have been involved in growing and harvesting okra and eat it raw in the field. The kids respond to the height of the plant and the beauty of the flower. According to Emily Jackson, if they are familiar with the plant and help to grow it, they will eat it. Children also had the opportunity to taste okra prepared two ways by a local chef – pickled, and fried in corn meal. They wolfed it down and wanted more. Because of this experience, one family purchased okra for the first time – helping to change family eating habits.

Obstacles and Answers

The farm to school workshop held in 2004 helped identify some of the issues and challenges Growing Minds faced in developing a farm to school program. Cafeteria staff admitted that many of them did not even know what products were grown locally. Child nutrition directors and farmers alike were concerned about costs, distribution, storage and other logistics. Identifying obstacles

Students were asked, “What impact has the garden had on you?”

– It helps me learn outside of school. It let me be able to smell different smells. I like to taste things in our garden.

– It helps me make good food choices when I’m shopping with my folks.

– It helps us eat healthy and get all kinds of vitamins.

– I like to walk around and pick up thags around the garden. I plant and help other people.

– It makes me think about plants everyday. I always want plant plants in my backyard sine I have started planting in ower garden.

– I have always whated to do a garden. I think of our school garden it is my garden.

– The garden has made me more interested in fruit and vegetables. I used to hate working in the garden but now I know what I am doing it is not that bad. It take resonsibility to work in the garden. Because if you weren’t responsible the plants would die.

– We talk about eating healthy things like vegetables.

– The garden helps me on learning because we do alot with the garden. It also influence me to have a garden of my own. I think it helps me learn alot.

– The garden also make us curious.

was the first step, but they were not accepted as excuses for why farm to school would not work in western North Carolina.

Child Nutrition Director Brenda Spence was encouraged by her superintendent to buy local whenever possible and made it happen in Madison County. Cafeteria managers and staff were hesitant at first, unsure of what to expect from produce straight from the farm. After adjusting to the occasional spider, cafeteria staff now complain if local lettuce does not come in with a delivery. “It just tastes better,” one cafeteria manager stated. Although resistance to change has been one of the obstacles to overcome, once folks see the benefits of the program they often become its biggest supporters.

Across the country farm to school programs have developed in different ways, adapting to community needs and differences. While some programs have handled issues of storage and distribution by a non-profit acting as a broker, ASAP is taking a different approach. The goal is to make this program both profitable for farmers and feasible for local food service. In order to do this sustainably, ASAP has worked towards creating a food system that is not artificially subsidized. Although it takes longer to establish an unsubsidized food system that can meet the demands

of schools, it will be sustainable if it is also economically driven.

Schools are fast becoming a viable market for farmers in western North Carolina, and the challenge is to attract farmers to the program. The tobacco buyout has helped some, but growing tobacco and growing for a market with a face are very different processes. Farmers need to develop relationships with buyers in the school systems and ASAP has recently hired a farm outreach



Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project

specialist to help match farmers to markets, with schools being one of the markets.

The success of ASAP and the Growing Minds program is due to a number of factors. First, staff sees their role as facilitating and maintaining relationships among the parties, through conferences and the Farm to School Committee – they do not attempt to act as a broker. Through Growing Minds, they have also found that by starting with the other components of farm to school programs, such as school gardens and farm field trips, they are able to generate buy-in for the incorporation of farm products. ASAP has also learned that the involvement of the cafeteria staff is key to the success of the program. Interviews have been conducted one-on-one with the cafeteria workers, they have been taken on farm field trips, and ASAP purchased a farm share (through a Community Supported Agriculture Program) for cafeteria staff so that they could enjoy and learn about the bounty of locally grown food.

Future Plans

ASAP staff is enthusiastic about working with a Head Start group, which will provide the opportunity to serve the youngest children, and could result in a huge impact, as they learn at an early age to appreciate fresh, locally grown food. Other plans include offering workshops and field trips to different audiences, including farmers and teachers. One of the expectations is that each group will make the most of the experience and that teachers will tie it into the curriculum. Growing Minds is also focusing on nutrition education by collaborating with chefs who are eager to offer students the opportunity to cook with them. The staff has found that this culinary experience resonates not only with the children, but also with their teachers and families as well.

In the policy arena, the model wellness policies, which schools across the U.S. were required to have in place by June, 2006, could use some attention. These policies have not been well developed in western North Carolina, and at this point are fulfilling a requirement without acting as a transformational tool. This is an area to be developed more fully in the future.

On the farm side, growers are continuing to pursue adding value to their products by developing a processing facility. Initially, an existing processing facility experimented with the cutting and dicing of potatoes. However, what the farmers discovered is that the low cost of potatoes made it difficult to add value and receive a price high enough to cover the processing. Instead, the farmers are now looking to develop their own minimal processing of products in-house.

Spreading the Word

Through ASAP, the western North Carolina Farm to School Program has been active in promoting farm to school activities in the region and beyond. They have participated in workshops at the following conferences: the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group; Georgia Organics; the Children and Youth Gardening Symposium; the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association; the Community Food Security Coalition's annual conference; and ASAP's own annual conference.



ASAP's farm to school work has been well documented in a number of articles, which can be viewed on their website at www.growing-minds.org. There is also a wealth of information about their farm field trips, nutrition education, and school gardens, as well as additional resources. Here are a few colorful excerpts:

Nutrition Education

With the loss of connection to where food comes from, there has also been a disconnect with preparing food and healthy eating. The nutrition component of Growing Minds consists of cooking demonstrations and classes to help students learn to enjoy preparing and eating healthy fresh foods.

Carrot and kohlrabi stew?! What first or second grade student would eat that? Even ASAP staff were surprised when students were eating up this stew, but of course - they made it themselves. The term "nutrition education" often brings to mind fruit and veggie coloring books and the food pyramid. Today ASAP's Growing Minds program is moving with the trend to involve kids in both growing and preparing fresh healthy foods. Maybe it is the pride of making it themselves or knowing what they are eating, but having students participate in cooking classes has been a successful way to get students to eat healthier.

Farm Field Days

"What wonderful smells!" Jordan exclaimed when she stepped off the school bus at Flying Cloud Farm. After exploring the long

rows of chard and herbs, students from Isaac Dickson Elementary's K-2 class got to help farmer Annie Perkinson wash lettuce to prepare it for market. "How do you wake up in the morning?" one child asked. "I have an alarm clock and electricity, just like you," she replied.

Stories of life on the farm are often associated with "a simpler time," where the farmer was awakened by the crow of a rooster and had to heat their hot water over a wood stove. Although these stories may be part of our agricultural heritage, farm fieldtrips offer students the chance to connect with how the food they eat is grown today and who is growing it.

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MORE INFO

The Growing Minds website includes lesson plans, recipes, toolkits for farmers and child nutrition directors, related articles and research:

🌐 www.growing-minds.org



Bend-La Pine School District

Oregon: Getting Farm to School Programs Started

Farm to school efforts in Oregon are fairly new, with several school districts in the pilot stage or in the first stages of implementation. In Oregon as in other states, rising rates of childhood obesity and its contributing factors have fueled the development of nutrition and physical activity strategies at the school level, including farm to school programs. In 2005, 1 in 4 eighth graders in Oregon were overweight or at risk for overweight; at the same time 3 out of 4 eighth graders did not eat the recommended five or more servings of fruits and vegetables daily. As a result, the Oregon departments of Human Services and Education are closely involved with local efforts to promote healthier lifestyles and eating in children and adults. Here are some examples of farm to school efforts in Oregon.

Purchasing from the Local Farmers' Market: Bend-La Pine

For Katrina Wiest, working on a farm to school program was a no-brainer. Ms. Wiest is a school wellness specialist at the Bend-La Pine school district in Oregon, and also a manager at the local farmers' market in the summer. Her understanding and involvement in both the farm and the school side of the farm to school equation has significantly helped facilitate the relationship between the farmers and the school district, and supported the development of a strong farm to school program in the district.

For the last two years, Wiest has facilitated weekly deliveries of fresh, local produce to all the schools in the district (14 elementary, 8 middle, 7 high and alternative schools), 3 private schools and 3 Head Start programs. The farmers harvest the product on Tuesday, inform Wiest of the quantity and product they will be bringing in, and bring it in to the school nutrition services warehouse on Wednesdays before heading off to the farmers' market. The product is then divided into equal portions and transported to the schools, where the kitchen staff clean and prepare it to serve to students.

In the spring, a variety of products such as strawberries, blueberries, green beans, cucumbers, cauliflower, broccoli, melons, watermelons, tiny watermelons, cantaloupe, cassava, tomatoes, cherry tomatoes, peppers, celery, carrots may be available in a school produce box. Fruits from the farmers market are also used in the "Breakfast in the Classroom" program in seven schools. There isn't much wasted from the produce, but if there are leftovers, they get used up in the after school snack program that feeds 300 children or the supper program that feeds 150 children. Any leftovers from the farmers' market are also served up in the cafeteria the next day.

The produce is served in the cafeteria before hot lunch, so students can choose the fresh fruits and vegetables. It is not used in the hot entrée only because the volume of fresh product available to the school is limited. Wiest says that the sky is the limit for the farm to school program to expand into all aspects of the students' food experience at school, but she needs more farmers in the local area. The district also operates a successful summer feeding program that buys from the farmers' market.

A Financially Viable Program

Unlike some other farm to school programs in which start-up costs to cover equipment and labor can be prohibitive, Bend-La Pine had school kitchens already equipped with facilities for scratch cooking. As a result, each school serves a choice of up to five hot entrées each day that are cooked on site. Students can choose from bean and cheese burritos, homemade sloppy joes, turkey egg rolls, homemade bread sticks, chicken sandwiches on whole wheat. All breads are baked fresh in house at a central bakery. On the labor side, the food service staff have been very supportive of the farm to school program and have not had any complaints about additional work with washing and preparing fresh product. Terry Cashman, the district's food service director, goes to farmers' market regularly to meet the farmers and to find out what products are in season that could be used in the cafeteria.

The school district has found that the cost of fresh, local produce is not prohibitive. Wiest has been able to negotiate wholesale prices for the product, so the food service budget is able to absorb the entire cost of the program and has not required additional grant support. The district receives Department of Defense (DoD) program dollars, but is unable to use it for buying local product. Bend-La Pine has also applied for the Free Fruit and Vegetable program to be implemented in the district, with the intent to use those dollars for purchasing local produce as much as possible.



The district serves up close to 14,000 meals a day for breakfast and lunch. Average spending on local product is \$1,500 per week split up among four farmers. Of that approximately \$1,200 is spent on fruits and the rest on vegetables. The school district pays the farmers directly within 30 days of delivery. Most of the product comes from farms located more than 40 miles or two hours away. However, parents who hear about the program are now taking weekend day trips to visit the farm.

Education and Outreach Efforts

The farm to school program is expanding the horizons for students at Bend-La Pine school district. Several students who had never tasted fresh strawberries are now avid lovers of the fruit. One school implements a vegetable garden that teaches students about the seed to table cycle. Another school is developing a green house that will be used by disabled students. The school plans to sell the product at the farmers' market as a revenue stream. The Future Farmers of America program is operational at one high school, where Wiest would like to see more fruits and vegetables growing that can be used for education and served in the cafeterias. The kindergarteners have cooking demonstrations and have used apples to make applesauce. Occasionally the district conducts fun activities such as a watermelon seed spitting contest, which are a big hit with students. One student who had recently moved from Liberia and had never seen a watermelon found the contest particularly interesting. Teachers report that students are being exposed to new foods they have not tasted before. Tammy Doty, a teacher at La Pine Elementary, says that the kids love the fresh produce: "I had one student state that they never had a fresh blueberry before being served one at the Jump Start program at La Pine Elementary. The staff love it too!"

The farm to school program at Bend-La Pine has been featured in local media and school newsletters. Wiest, her colleagues from food service, and the farmers supplying to the district have also done presentations about their farm to school program at conferences such as the Oregon School Nutrition Association Annual

Conference, and the Oregon Small Farm Direct Marketing Conference. Their efforts have created a lot of interest about farm to school programs in the region.

The policy environment at the district and within the State Department of Education is supportive of farm to school efforts. The Bend-La Pine District's School Wellness Policy does not mention the farm to school program, though Wiest is confident that the student support for the program will keep it operational for many more years. The school board is behind the program and has been made aware of the various aspects of the farm to school approach through presentations. At the state level, a recent proposal for statewide policy includes farm to school program implementation.

Exploring New Opportunities and Overcoming Barriers

The response from students to the farm to school program has been extremely positive, and the district would like to buy more local product, if possible. However, despite Wiest's close connections with farmers in the region, she is unable to locate more area farmers who can supply to the school district, which is a major stumbling block to efforts to expand the program. Wiest says that most farmers in the region are at least 40 miles away from the school district. In addition, several organic farmers have started Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, and hence do not have excess product to sell to other markets, such as schools.

However, those farmers that have sold to the district are reaping benefits. Early on in the program, the district wanted to buy 20 crates of Sweet Peas from a Farmer and he stated that "if we did that, we would wipe him out for the season." The farmer stated that "he would ramp up for our needs for next year." Jeff Rosenblad from Happy Harvest Farms, who supplies to the district, has started expanding to other institutional markets and is selling to the University of Portland. Mr. Rosenblad is also organizing his fellow farmers to think about forming a cooperative so that they can undertake more institutional deliveries effectively.

Food On! Farm to Cafeteria in Lane County

Food On! Farm to Cafeteria is a program of the Willamette Farm and Food Coalition (WFFC), a community-based organization in Lane County, OR. With an interest in sustainable food issues, the organization has been working with several school



districts to implement farm to school programs, and develop comprehensive wellness policies. WFFC has conducted outreach to over 16 districts in the county about local wellness policies, and successfully introduced language supportive of local and organic purchasing in the wellness policies instituted by the Eugene 4J and Springfield districts.

First Efforts in Eugene

In 2004 a pilot local/organic salad bar was started at a high school in Eugene School District 4J. The program, run by high school students, bought product from local farmers in the spring, and served a salad bar in the hallway. In the end, the three weeks allotted to the pilot project proved insufficient time to take hold and give life to a permanent local/organic salad bar.

Organic Salad Bars in Springfield

In the Springfield School District, the food service director was personally committed to serving healthy and organic food in the salad bars. WFFC helped facilitate connections with farmers in the region. The program's focus was on healthy, organic purchasing for over three years. At the peak of its operation, the district served almost 50% organic in the salad bar as well as healthy options such as whole wheat breads. The organic salad bars at Springfield operated till the spring of 2005, but were removed when the district outsourced food service operations to Chartwells Thompson, a private food service company. The food service director responsible for starting the salad bars retired just before the transition. Currently, the school nurse is pushing Chartwells to include healthier local foods in its cafeteria offerings, but it is yet to be determined what the end result of farm to school efforts in this school district will be.

Crow Applegate Lorane School District (CAL)

The CAL project is the model farm to school project facilitated by WFFC. This program is a collaboration with the School Garden Project of Lane county and Oregon State University Extension. Through the farm to school program, school gardens are being set up at two elementary schools, and OSU staff will teach an eight week garden-based curriculum. WFFC's role is to plan and coordinate the program—giving farm tours, conducting tastetests, and facilitating purchasing

from local farmers. So far, the district's administration has been agreeable to trying local foods in the cafeteria. Food On! Farm to Cafeteria has also organized community and parent meetings to help plan this project, and feels that an in-house committee is needed so that the project will be self-sustaining.

Unlike Springfield, CAL moved away from Chartwells and started its own food service operations two years ago. CAL is a rural district with a total of 400 students in three schools (two elementary schools and one high school). The district reports a hike in meal participation rates after the switch from Chartwells. WFFC is moving ahead steadily with the CAL project, and is planning to continue implementation of the various pieces of the garden-based project in the coming year.

WFFC feels that policy plays a critical role in school food and is thus drafting a sustainability contract modeled on the Portland State University (PSU) sustainability contract. The PSU contract was written in conjunction with the Food Alliance and has been agreed to by the food service provider Sodexo.

WFFC and related community organizations plan to lobby school boards to attach the sustainability contract to the food service contracts when they come up for review or renewal. The contract would include specifications for quantities of local and organic product purchased, along with any other related clauses the school board may desire.

A Whole Food System Approach: Abernethy Elementary School in Portland

Abernethy Elementary School in the Portland Public School District operates a holistic farm to school program that incorporates three key elements:

1. A Scratch Kitchen, where meals from scratch are cooked on site using fresh ingredients. The kitchen was first started on a pilot basis in 2005-06. (A detailed quantitative and qualitative assessment of the Abernethy Elementary Scratch Kitchen model has been undertaken by a partnership between Abernethy Elementary, Ecotrust, Injury Free Coalition for Kids, and Portland Public Schools Nutrition Services.)
2. Garden of Wonders, an outdoor garden where students participate in growing plants and which serves as a living laboratory for students.
3. Garden of Wonders Classroom, a physical classroom space where the Garden of Wonders and the Scratch Kitchen are used as the centerpiece for practical, hands-on classroom science, math, language, history and art lessons.

Expanding the Movement

Clearly, the efforts of the programs highlighted above have spurred the interest in farm to school in Oregon. As this report was being finalized, we heard of farm to school efforts underway in the Sisters School District, Canby School District and Woodburn USD, and we are confident that there are others out there trying to make farm to school happen in their communities.

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MORE INFO

"NW School Districts Welcome Farm-to-Cafeteria Programs," by Karol Massey, Capital Press, January 13, 2006.

"New on the Menu," a summary of the 2005-06 Abernethy project :
🌐 www.ecotrust.org/farmtoschool/Abernethy_Report.pdf

The Spork Report: Increasing the Supply and Consumption of Local Foods in Portland Public Schools, by the Multnomah Food Policy Council:
🌐 www.portlandonline.com/shared/cfm/image.cfm?id=116850

Assistance From the National Farm to School Program

The National Farm to School Program

The National Farm to School Program is a collaborative program of the Center for Food & Justice (CFJ), Occidental College and the Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC). Initiated in 2000, the National Program has spearheaded the development of the farm to school movement across the country, successfully assisting organization in starting up and sustaining farm to school efforts, fundraising, providing informational resources, and training for farm to school stakeholders.

What Assistance does the National Farm to School Program Offer?

Workshops and Presentations

The Program is organizing workshops and presentations across the United States to share information about farm to school projects and the benefits they offer; and bring together farmers, school food service directors, parents and community organizers to address the barriers and opportunities involved in creating a farm to school project.

Technical Assistance

Contact Anupama Joshi, CFJ's National Farm to School Program Director or Marion Kalb, CFSC's Farm to School Program Director with your questions about starting a farm to school program. Assistance will be provided on a variety of topics, including how to find farmers, crops, and seasonality, transportation/distribution issues, and forming a farm to school advisory committee.

For state by state information on farm to school projects, check out www.farmtoschool.org, which also contains case studies, sample surveys, toolkits, and funding information. A free resource packet is also available through this website.

Publications

The following publications are available through www.foodsecurity.org. Sample farm to school wellness policies are also found at this site.

- Linking Farms with Schools: A Guide to Understanding Farm to School Programs for Schools, Farmers and Organizers
- Feeding Young Minds: Hands-on Farm to School Education
- Healthy Farms, Healthy Kids: Evaluating the Barriers and Opportunities for Farm-to-School Programs

Developed by the National Farm to School Program
Center for Food & Justice, Occidental College and
Community Food Security Coalition
www.farmtoschool.org



Center for Food & Justice

Help us Build a Network

In order to sustain and build on the momentum created through the National Farm to School Program, over 300 organizations across the nation have been collaborating to explore the opportunities for a collaborative national farm to school structure that strengthens and expands activities in states with existing programs and assist others that do not yet have programs. The National Farm to School Network planning process is supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. For more information see www.farmtoschool.org or contact the national farm to school program staff.

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Frequently Asked Questions About Farm to School

Is there a farm to school program in my area?

The National Farm to School Program estimates that there are over 950 farm to school programs operational in more than 35 states. Go to www.farmentoschool.org and click on your state profile for information and resources about programs in your area. If your state is not listed, please contact the National Program staff for assistance.

Why should schools buy local products?

Farm to school programs, which buy from local farmers, bring additional educational opportunities for children by way of farm tours, farmer visits in the classroom, waste management and recycling programs, and school gardens. Connections with the local farms and agriculture help children better understand the cycle of food – how it grows and who grows it, and how it impacts their bodies, health and the community. All these experiences complete the educational framework that motivates children towards healthier eating habits that will last a lifetime.

Consumers all over the United States are realizing the benefits of establishing closer ties with the food producers and farmers in their region. Buying local is good for the economy as it contributes to the growth of small businesses, generates jobs and supports local farming; it is good for the environment as food produced locally consumes less fossil fuel for transportation and requires less materials for packaging; it is good for your wallet as local food tends to be cheaper as it doesn't need to include the costs of transportation; and it is good for you and your community because you can eat the best quality, seasonal foods that are flavorful and fresh, and at the same time support a local farmer in your community.

Is there data to show that National School Lunch Program participation rates increase when a farm to school program is offered?

Yes, participation rates in the National School Lunch Program increase due to a farm to school program. Trends show that participation rates increase substantially when a program is started, and that numbers then level off after an initial rush. Data from selected programs show that meal participation may increase in the range of 3-16% due to a farm to school program.

How do I find farmers to supply to my school?

Visit the local farmers market in your area to connect with local farmers. Other agencies that work with farmers such as Farmers Market Associations, Farm Bureaus, state departments of agriculture, and Cooperative Extension Services can also provide a listing of farmers in the area. Online, local farmers can be found at www.localharvest.org, and in the "Farms and Farmers" section of your state on the farm to school website.

How are farmers benefited by farm to school programs?

Farmers can diversify their markets by supplying to local schools. This is especially important when farmers are dependent on limited commodity or wholesale markets. Schools represent a steady, reliable demand that helps farmers plan their crop planting, harvesting and marketing more effectively. Limited research on existing farm to school programs has shown that school sales can comprise a significant portion of sales for farmers who supply to a farm to school program. Besides direct revenues, farmers are motivated to participate in these programs as it provides an opportunity to contribute to the health and education of children. The interaction with students, parents and the community often results in additional sales through farmers markets and other avenues.

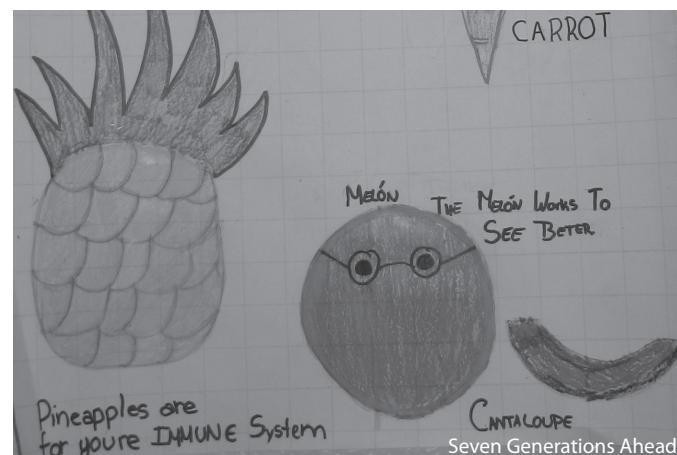
How can I sell to a local school?

Farmers can call and make an appointment directly with the food service director in a local school district. Take your business materials (price and crop list, business card, references) and perhaps a sample. Or you can inquire about existing farm to school programs that might connect you to a group of farmers that sell or deliver together. Your local or state agricultural organizations or agencies may have someone who can help you find useful resources on selling to local schools.

How can I support farm to school projects locally?

Farm to school projects are popping up all over the country, so you may already have a project locally to get involved in. Many people are interested in or proposing new farm to school projects around the country and would love your support. Inquire with your local school or district. There is a variety of support that would be useful - from financial help to volunteer time. School gardens, farm tours, classroom presentations (nutrition or agriculture oriented), or help to begin to buy from local farmers for the cafeteria are all a part of farm to school.

(Adapted from www.farmentoschool.org Frequently Asked Questions)





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