



GETTING STARTED WITH FARM TO SCHOOL

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NATIONAL FARM to SCHOOL NETWORK

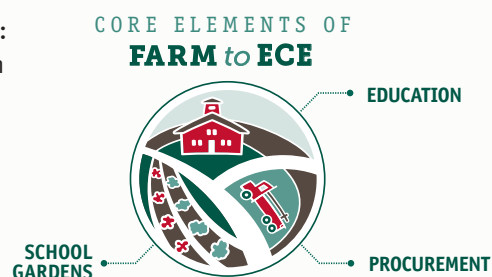
GROWING STRONGER TOGETHER

The National Farm to School Network is an information, advocacy and networking hub for communities working to bring local food sourcing, school gardens, and food and agriculture education into school systems and early care and education settings.

What is Farm to School?

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

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



Getting Started

Farm to school offers multiple strategies to improve the health of children and communities. However, getting started can be daunting. These simple first steps will help you develop a lasting farm to school initiative in your community.

- 1 Assess where you are and where you'd like to be.** Are your goals centered on:
 - Procurement of local foods to be served in school?
 - Establishing a school garden?
 - Integration of food and agriculture within education and learning?
 - All of the above?
- 2 Form a team and collaborate.** School food service staff, educators, administrators, local farmers and producers, students, parents, and community organizations each have an important role in establishing a farm to school initiative.
- 3 Establish one or two attainable goals to get started.** Some ideas include:
 - Identify a menu item that you would like to transition to a local product.
 - Find a farmer or distributor to connect you to local items.
 - Plan and promote a special meal featuring local foods.
 - Determine training needs to assist food service staff with incorporating farm fresh items in meals.
 - Bring a school garden planning team together.
 - Identify curriculum opportunities to connect to a school garden.
 - Bring a farmer or chef into the classroom or cafeteria.
 - Plan a farm field trip or host a tasting event featuring local produce.

WHY FARM TO SCHOOL?

KIDS WIN

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

FARMERS WIN

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

COMMUNITIES WIN

Farm to school benefits everyone from students, teachers and administrators to parents and farmers, providing opportunities to build family and community engagement. Buying from local producers and processors creates new jobs and strengthens the local economy.

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

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- 4 Learn from others.** If you are running into an obstacle, there is likely someone who has run into it before. Connect and learn from others through:
- The National Farm to School Network (www.farmtoschool.org). Find abundant resources and contact information for people in your state and region who are working on farm to school.
 - Your state's School Nutrition Association. Learn how others in your state are approaching farm to school in their school/district.
 - The Child Nutrition Program at your state agency (typically your Department of Education or in some instances, Department of Agriculture).
 - The USDA Office of Community Food Systems Regional Leads (www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool).

5 Promote farm to school in your school and community.

- Posters in the cafeteria or classroom
- Bulletin boards throughout the school
- School newsletters (print and electronic)
- School website
- School events and parent teacher associations
- Local media



KEYS TO FARM TO SCHOOL SUCCESS IN ACTION

Community collaboration equals farm to school success in Oregon

Working with community organizations can help build strong, sustainable farm to school initiatives. Local food coalitions, extension agencies, and food or education focused non-profits can help implement comprehensive farm to school initiatives in schools and districts. Community partners might provide educational activities including classroom lessons, farm field trips, food preparation activities, school garden sessions, family engagement activities, or local food tasting tables at schools or community events. By partnering with community organizations, students enjoy more healthy farm-fresh foods and have a greater understanding of where their food comes from. The district and community partners gain valuable community connections that can help sustain farm to school initiatives.

Local proteins that make sense for your state

Local foods can span the whole plate, and many districts are creatively incorporating local proteins. In coastal regions, farm to school isn't just for landlubbers. School districts in places like Alaska are building key partnerships with local fishermen, processors, and cafeteria managers in order to bring "fish to school" meals to cafeterias in the region. There's also opportunity for education by having students meet local fishermen and learn about both traditional and commercial processes, not to mention conservation and cooking. Landlocked states are getting into the local protein game as well. Montana and Wyoming schools are getting local beef to cafeterias across their states through partnerships with ranchers, processors, and distributors.

School gardens as experiential classrooms

Incorporating school gardens as experiential classrooms allows students to enjoy the fruits of their labor – literally. School gardens are not only a great place for learning, but they can supply produce for school salads bars and meals where students can eat food they grew themselves. Garden produce can also be used for tastings with the children to encourage them to try new foods. School gardens are even an opportunity to learn about entrepreneurship. Students at some schools create and manage a business with their garden, selling their produce to the school or local restaurants and businesses and learning valuable lessons about economics, business, and agriculture along the way.