

Summary: State Policy Development for Oregon's Farm to School Grant Program



State Policy Development for Oregon's Farm to School Grant Program: Successes and Lessons Learned, examines the ins and outs of Oregon's procurement policy efforts to provide an analysis of successes, challenges, and lessons learned for future farm to school policy in both Oregon and other states and territories.

The study finds that Oregon's Farm to School Grant legislation has been overwhelmingly successful in meeting its intended impacts, especially as they relate to the effectiveness of the state's farm to school grants in providing access to locally grown, nutritious foods to school districts, principally low-income districts.

Successes and challenges of Oregon's farm to school grant legislation include:

1. Increased the equity of the policy by removing the application requirements and creating an opt-out procurement grant which ensures all districts get the benefits.
2. Increased awareness of fresh fruits and vegetables, especially through education grants
3. Increased engagement from producers and distributors because farm to school provides a market for unique produce and high-volume orders
4. Logistical challenges for districts, producers, and distributors
5. Grant administration challenges, such as reporting and technical assistance

Farm to school policy advocates in other states and territories can learn from these findings to support their own policy efforts. The four overarching lessons from this study include:

Importance of Inclusion: Not all school districts were able to participate in the Oregon Farm to School Grant program when it was a competitive grant program. When the program was converted to an opt-in program and grants were distributed to schools based on the number of lunches served, participation increased among low-income school districts, distributors, and farmers.

Importance of Training: Although school districts may be somewhat familiar with administrative processes related to grants, the claim process for accessing the reimbursements through the grant program was significantly different, and districts would have benefited from additional training.

Preparation of Implementing State Agencies: State agencies that will be implementing the state policies must be on board and adequately staffed to ensure timely processing of claims and provision of technical assistance.

Clarity in Bill Language: The language of any farm to school legislation must specifically describe the intent of the farm to school policy. For example, through this study, we learned that during the early implementation phase, school districts were purchasing milk and bread produced in the state using grant funds. Although these were local products, schools were already purchasing them before the grant was available. Evolution of the policy resulted in new language that restricts "prior purchased processed or produced foods," which now fully ensures that the grant funds go toward purchasing new locally grown and produced Oregon products, thereby stimulating the state's economy as it was originally intended.

