

Media Overview: Oregon Farm to School Policy



Introduction

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.

Why this study?

Over 1,000 farm to school policies have been proposed in U.S. states and territories since 2002. As the advocacy leader and hub of farm to school policies, the National Farm to School Network has challenged itself to research which policies are best for fostering a better environment for the three core elements of farm to school: local procurement, agriculture and food education, and school gardens.



Specifically this study looked to:

- Identify the design attributes of Oregon's Farm to School Grant legislation that have successfully leveraged limited state resources to improve farm to school access for schools and districts.
- Quantify the reach of Oregon's farm to school legislation to schools and districts, particularly schools with low-income students.
- Investigate the extent to which Oregon's schools and districts are reducing the disparities in availability of healthy food through the adoption of the reimbursement and/or farm- and garden-based education grant program provisions of the legislation.

How was it conducted?

This study was a cross-sectional design employing primary qualitative data collection and secondary quantitative program-level data.

First, we elicited expert opinion from an advisory panel of state policy makers, advocates, and local researchers on how farm to school legislation can improve program access to low-income schools and districts. The advisory panel was convened in January 2017.

Second, we conducted key informant interviews with farm to school stakeholders in Oregon.

Last, we used existing data to examine the reach and adoption of Oregon's farm to school legislation among low-income schools and districts and students of color. Data sources were:

- Oregon Department of Education (ODE) Farm to School Baseline and Progress Reports submitted by both the procurement and the competitive education grantees
- ODE annual reports on race, free and reduced-price lunch eligibility, and average daily participation in the National School Lunch Program
- NFSN's National Survey of Early Care and Education Providers

What did we learn?

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

All Participating Districts: increased local purchases by 5% and spent 19% of total food budget on local products; largest percentage change in amount spent on Oregon products was other meats (179% increase) and processed fruits and vegetables (96% increase).

Low-income Participating Districts: increased local purchases by 13% and spent 18% of total food budget on local products; largest percentage change in amount spent on Oregon products was grains (207% increase), processed fruit and vegetables (174% increase).

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 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 policy. For example, through this study, we learned that during the early implementation phase, school districts were purchasing milk and bread 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,”

Change in Number of Participating Procurement Districts and Children Affected Within Grantee Districts Since Policy Implementation					
	# of Grantee Districts	# of Students	# of Non-White Students	# Eligible for Free & Reduced-Price Lunch	Average Daily Participation in NSLP
HB 2649 (SY 2013-15)	22	232,771	95,131	112,641	104,063
SB 501 (SY 2015-17)	124	508,092	186,766	250,800	235,309
Change from SY 2014-15 to SY 2015-16	102	275,321	91,635	138,159	131,246

The process of conducting the study also revealed some challenges with the legislation, such as with logistics, purchasing strategies, and grant administration. 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 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

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.

How to use this report

Many state agencies, nonprofits, and farm groups look to procurement policies as one of the ways to increase and support farm to school programming in their respective states. The lessons learned from this report can better guide these stakeholders on how to write such a policy and what challenges they might avoid. Most importantly, this report shows decision makers and advocates one way to ensure that low-income districts can participate in farm to school programs when writing procurement policy.

Read the full report at www.farmtoschool.org/oregon-policy-study.