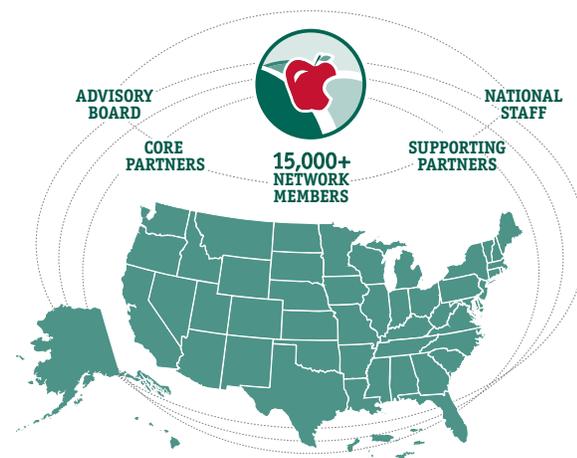




## 2017-2019 Strategic Plan

The National Farm to School Network (NFSN) is an information, advocacy and networking hub for communities bringing local food sourcing, school gardens and food and agriculture education into schools and early care and education (ECE) settings.

Farm to school initiatives include the core elements of local procurement, gardens and food and agriculture education and offer far reaching benefits to kids, farmers and communities. Farm to school empowers children and their families to make informed food choices while providing new and diverse market opportunities for farmers and producers, strengthening the local economy and contributing to vibrant and engaged communities. NFSN has supported the growth of farm to school from a handful of schools in the late 1990s to over 42,000 schools in all 50 states, Washington, D.C. and U.S. Territories, and expansion to 1,516 preschools in school districts and 812 ECE sites in non K-12 locations implementing farm to ECE activities.<sup>1,2</sup>



### Process

Initiated in June 2016 at the NFSN Annual Meeting and completed in May 2017, the Strategic Planning process focused on taking stock of the farm to school movement's gains over a decade of phenomenal growth, and NFSN's role in this progress<sup>3</sup>; articulating a distinct role for NFSN to institutionalize farm to school and ECE in the future; and identifying refinements to existing processes and structure to ensure sustainability. Managed internally with leadership from NFSN staff and the Strategic Planning Committee of the Advisory Board, a diverse set of stakeholders provided input and ideas on emerging themes. Organizations serving as Regional Lead Agencies and State Leads through October 2016, Advisory Board members, national staff, external stakeholder groups (national partner organizations and funders), and NFSN members were engaged in a combination of small group conversations, phone interviews, webinars, online surveys and an in-person kick-off discussion. The Strategic Plan was approved by the NFSN Advisory Board in May 2017 and will serve as a guiding document for NFSN activities over the 2017-2019 timeframe.

### Key Takeaways

- NFSN's focus in the next three years will shift to respond to the needs of the growing movement with an eye towards sustaining progress and institutionalizing farm to school and ECE. Previously, NFSN focused on creating awareness and expanding farm to school activities nationwide
- Fine tuning NFSN's policy advocacy, programs and partnerships to distinguish the organization from others in the field and to improve on existing functions and activities
- Capacity building for Core and Supporting Partners to build state networks that represent multi-sectoral partnerships, and expand state policy efforts
- Advancing racial and social equity, as inequities are barriers to farm to school implementation
- Securing a diversified and stable revenue model, and streamlining systems and operations to improve network services and long-term viability

<sup>1</sup> United States Department of Agriculture Farm to School Census 2015

<sup>2</sup> National Farm to School Network Farm to ECE Providers Survey 2016

<sup>3</sup> NFSN was founded in 2007, marking 2017 as the ten-year anniversary



## Priority Areas

### Priority 1: Expand and refine policy advocacy, programs and partnerships to institutionalize farm to school and ECE

To maintain and advance the growth of the farm to school and ECE movement, it is critical for NFSN to update existing activities by elevating initiatives unique to NFSN's niche and refining ongoing core functions aimed at the institutionalization of farm to school and ECE at the state and national levels.

Niche areas where NFSN can make the most impact:

- Capacity building for NFSN Core and Supporting Partners: Advance state policies and develop robust state networks that include multi-sectoral partnerships
- Policy advocacy: Explore new opportunities for federal policy advocacy and expand guidance and analysis to facilitate state and local level policies
- Advance equity: Frame racial and social equity as a central tenet of farm to school
- Metrics and measurement: Leverage national role to foster research-focused partnerships and opportunities for standardizing national data collection and analysis

Refine and expand focus to support institutionalization:

- Farm to ECE: Align farm to ECE benefits with ECE community's priority areas, and establish new partnerships
- Farm to school in Native communities: Explore partnerships with tribal or sovereign entities to expand activities and impact
- NFSN hosted events such as National Farm to Cafeteria Conference and Annual Meetings: improve value for participants and streamline planning processes
- National Farm to School Month: Articulate clear goals and outcomes, improve branding
- Strategic partnerships: Leverage partnerships with national organizations and federal agencies

### Priority 2: Diversify revenue generation

Carrying forward this priority from NFSN's 2014-2016 strategic plan, we aspire to:

- Earned income: Implement a strategy to raise at least 30 percent of annual budget through earned income by 2019
- Donor cultivation: Add a minimum of five new funders per year (foundation, federal, donor advised funds, social investors or corporate sponsors)
- Training: Build internal staff capacity to engage in development activities
- Network capacity: Explore funding partnerships with Core and Supporting Partners
- Ensure financial stability: Define a funding reserve target and seek to grow it incrementally through diversified revenue strategies

### Priority 3: Streamline organizational operations and activities for sustainability

Since its inception, NFSN has undergone significant growth, both internally for national staff and externally for network partners. The goals for the next three years are to stabilize operations to support an increasing number of Core and Supporting Partners and an evolving movement. Priorities include:

- Staffing: Revise staffing plan, address work-life balance and staff morale and improvements to the remote work environment; create an emergency back-up plan and succession policy for leadership positions
- Systems efficiency: Establish effective database and tracking processes, streamline website structure and work flow, conduct an annual review of all NFSN guiding documents and branded materials
- Relationship with fiscal sponsor: Leverage relationship with Tides Center and re-evaluate spin-off to establish separate non-profit organization