

The San Francisco Farm-to-School Report: Results from the 2003 Feasibility Study

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Report Prepared by

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Executive Summary

For the past two years, San Francisco Food Systems has examined pathways to improving regional self-sufficiency in agriculture by investigating and identifying opportunities that allow the City and County of San Francisco to buy and promote regional agriculture. In addition to this, San Francisco Food Systems has explored ways that the City and County can increase local residents' utilization of government food assistance programs such as food stamps, WIC, and the National School Lunch Program. Our farm-to-school project combines these goals and works to understand how we can open urban markets for small and medium sized local farmers and bolster the school meals programs through institutional purchasing of local agricultural products by San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD).

These efforts reflect our commitment to promoting and reinforcing local food systems and regional agriculture by actively increasing the public's understanding of food systems issues and making explicit the ways in which health, economics and a sustainable environment come together to support and maintain ecologically sound agricultural practices and improve the health and well being of communities. This report reflects San Francisco Food Systems' work for the past year in understanding the feasibility of implementing a farm-to-school program within SFUSD.

The Farm-to-School Concept

"Farm-to-school" is a general term that is used to describe efforts that connect schools and school districts with local agriculture. These projects are appearing in communities across the country including Santa Monica, Berkeley, Sacramento, Hartford, Madison and more, and there is now legislation in the 2002 Farm Bill supporting these projects. While "farm-to-school" can take on a number of different forms, it has typically revolved around the following key components: (1) improved school lunches using fresh produce sourced from local growers; (2) school gardens in which children obtain hands-on experience in growing food; (3) field trips to local farms and classroom visits from food producers; (4) integrated nutrition curriculum that connects experiential learning at the farm and in the garden to healthy choices in the lunchroom; and (5) waste reduction, composting, and recycling strategies.

Elements of farm-to-school initiatives nationally have sought to significantly improve the nutritional quality of food choices for school-age children, develop new markets for local and regional farmers, increase knowledge and awareness of local and regional food systems, and/or help extend the renewed interest in farm-to-consumer or direct marketing strategies, such as farmers' markets. Preliminary data from California has shown that student access to salad bars as part of a comprehensive program involving classroom, staff and community elements improves consumption of fruits and vegetables and has led to improved perception of the school meals program among students, parents and school staff. These projects have also increased incomes for local farmers and several have improved the financial situation of student nutrition services due to increased usage of the school meal program both by students receiving free and reduced meals and students and other adults paying for meals.

Background for the San Francisco Project

In 2002, San Francisco Food Systems began assessing the feasibility of incorporating fresh, locally grown foods into the National School Lunch Program within SFUSD so that children of all income levels could access high quality agricultural products from the Bay Area and so we could support small, sustainable farmers in the region via institutional purchasing. From initial research, staff of San Francisco Food Systems observed that the manner in which farm-to-school initiatives had historically been established was not always equitable or sustainable. While farm-to-school as a concept has earned a great deal of appeal and support, children in low-income urban communities were not necessarily reaping the benefits. In regards to sustainability, most farm-to-school initiatives start out as pilot projects which are dependent on grants and enthusiastic staff and volunteers. While some districts have been able to scale up and institutionalize the farm-to-school program, these districts have been small in scale compared to the City and County of San Francisco. This project was built on the premise that farm-to-school should be as equitable and sustainable as possible.

Approach

San Francisco Food Systems embarked on this project with the purpose of understanding the local school food environment as it would impact the sustainability of a farm-to-school project. Our research included a look at the District's assets and constraints in such areas as food service facilities, labor and training, nutrition policy, school gardens, nutrition education, as well as mechanisms for communication, ordering and delivery. Our primary activities involved: (1) conducting best practices research around farm-to-school projects, (2) building relationships and partnerships within SFUSD administration to understand district-wide food service, (3) conducting a *School Food Environment Survey* in order to explore the school-specific factors that might support and/or inhibit a lasting farm-to-school project, and (4) identifying and evaluating barriers to project implementation and providing recommendations to overcome such barriers.

Some of the difficulties identified in our research included bureaucratic challenges, the scarcity of resources within the District, competitive food sales, lack of integration between District departments, lack of communication and connection with communities, and the lack of poverty level adjustments for the City and County that consider the higher standard of living in San Francisco. Current activities within SFUSD are helping to address these challenges by connecting students to better, more appealing food choices and increasing the capacity of school sites and of Student Nutrition Services to provide healthier food while ensuring financial stability and sustainability. Considering both the district-level and school-specific factors that can help or hinder the creation of an equitable and sustainable farm-to-school project in SFUSD, San Francisco Food Systems has proposed areas of focus for building on the work which has been conducted in the past year. We will continue to work on the supply side (with produce suppliers, and distributors) as well as on the demand side (to garner support from food service personnel, parents, students and staff in the school community) of the farm-to-school equation. We will continue working on local policy and also initiate a pilot farm-to-school salad bar in at least one school. By advancing our project plan in the years ahead, we hope to ensure that our local community, including the San Francisco Unified School District, is vested in food systems activities that support sustainable environments and healthy, sustainable communities.

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Section 1

Introduction and Project Background

The Conventional Food System

The term “food system” is used frequently in discussions about food, nutrition, health, community economic development and agriculture. The food system includes all processes involved in keeping us fed: growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, transporting, marketing, consuming and disposing food. It also includes the inputs needed and outputs generated at each step. The food system operates within and is influenced by social, economic and natural environments.¹

The conventional food system places a detrimental burden on the world’s natural and social resources. Today’s agricultural activities ensure large scale productivity and a steady supply of cheap food through the use of chemicals - fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides. At the same time, however, increasing negative outcomes are being reported from these chemically-intensive activities. For instance, the ground water in regions where industrial agriculture is present has become progressively more contaminated with toxic chemicals. In some parts of the United States, the contamination of drinking water from pesticides is so high that by the age of 10, children have been exposed to the maximum allowable "life dose" of such chemicals. In addition, thousands of farm workers experience health problems including acute poisonings, hormone or endocrine disruption, delayed neuropathy and neurobehavioral effects, cancers, birth defects, and even death from the use of these chemicals every year. Between 1997 and 2000, the average number of reported cases of occupational pesticide poisoning in California was 475 each year.² Yet this number likely omits a large number of unreported cases as well as cases of chronic illness resulting from pesticide exposure that are not tracked in the state’s surveillance program. Experts on agriculture and ecology are realizing that this system of agriculture is unsustainable.³

Small farmers have also been feeling the economic crunch of decisions made in the modern-day food system. Small farmers find challenges in competing with agricultural industry. Large, industrial operations have been the recipients of huge government subsidies, not only in the form

¹ Definition from Cornell University Cooperative Extension, Agriculture Food and Communities. www.cals.cornell.edu/agfoodcommunity/

² Pesticide Action Network of North America. Fields of Poison 2002: California Farmworkers and Pesticides

of direct government payments, but also in public services such as government subsidized loans, research and extension services, and export promotion. In 1999, large farms (the 7 percent of farms nationwide with gross agricultural sales of \$250,000 or more) received about 45 percent of federal payments. The 17 percent of farms that are medium-sized (gross sales between \$50,000 and \$249,999) received 41 percent of the payments. The remaining 14 percent of the payments was shared by the 76 percent of farms that are small (gross sales under \$50,000). Small farms substantially outnumber medium and large farms, but because payments are generally based on volume of production, the average payment that small farms receive is much less.⁴

Traditional small and medium-sized farms are on the brink of extinction in America. Of all occupations in America, farming has faced the greatest decline.⁵ Between 1993 and 1997, our country lost over 74,000 family farms.⁶ According to the U.S. Agricultural Census, the “average farm size” in California was 374 acres in 1997. However, of all 74,126 farms surveyed, 75% were less than 180 acres. These two statistics demonstrate that a very small percentage of farms account for a very large percentage of the state’s total farm acreage.⁷ In order to survive, small and medium-sized farms must find consistent and reliable markets that promise a reasonable return. The average share of every food dollar going back to farmers, however, dropped from 41 cents in 1950 to 20 cents in 1999, with the rest going to brokers, processors, retailers, and for transportation, packaging, and marketing.⁸ With increasing globalization and industrialization of the food system, small and medium-sized farmers find fewer and fewer places to sell their products at a fair price.

In 2002, there were nearly 10,000 new food and beverage products introduced in the United States.⁹ The top categories in terms of the number of new products have recently included

3 Physicians and Scientists for Responsible Application of Science and Technology, 2003

4 U.S. General Accounting Office. Farm Programs: Information on Recipients of Federal Payments, June 2001, available at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d01606.pdf>

5 U.S. Department of Labor. Occupational Outlook Quarterly, Winter 1999/2000.

6 U.S. Department of Agriculture. A National Agricultural Statistics Service, “Farm and Land in Farms: Final Estimates, 1993-1997.”

7 U.S. Department of Agriculture. National Agricultural Statistics Service, 1997 Agricultural Census, State of California.

8 U.S. Department of Agriculture. Food Review 2000; 23(3): 27-30.

9 The U.S. Food Marketing System, 2002: Competition, Coordination, and Technological Innovations into the 21st Century, June 2002, available at www.ers.usda.gov/publications/aer811/

candy, gum, and snacks; condiments; beverages; bakery products; and dairy. New products aren't necessarily needed or even beneficial for the nation's health – as nutrition guidelines promoting consumption of whole fruits, vegetables, and grains have not noticeably changed in decades. Despite these longstanding nutrition guidelines, it is estimated that 64% of U.S. adults aged 20 years and older are either overweight or obese.¹⁰ Research has shown that obesity rates are higher among individuals of low socioeconomic status, especially women.¹¹ Resource poor families may come to rely on inexpensive highly processed food products from fast food restaurants, liquor stores, and/or corner stores, if these are the only food outlets in their neighborhoods. Markets that carry fresh and locally grown fruits and vegetables are not always cited in or located near resource poor neighborhoods.

All things considered, the conventional food system described above is inequitable and unsustainable. By prioritizing production and profit over people, it actively destroys natural resources and ecosystems, rural economies, and promotes unhealthy food environments.

A More Sustainable Food System

As written in the U.S. Farm Bill, the term *sustainable agriculture* means “an integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will, over the long term:

- satisfy human food and fiber needs;
- enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agricultural economy depends;
- make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls;
- sustain the economic viability of farm operations; and
- enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole.”¹²

10 Flegal KM, Carroll MD, Ogden CL, Johnson CL. 2002. Prevalence and trends in obesity among US adults, 1999-2000. *JAMA* 288(14):1723-7.

11 Crawford PB, Townsend MS, Metz DL, Smith D, Espinosa-Hall G, Donohue SS, Olivares A, Kaiser LL. 2004. How can Californians be overweight and hungry? *California Agriculture* 58(1):12-17.

12 Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 (FACTA), Public Law 101-624, Title XVI, Subtitle A, Section 1603 (Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1990).

According to Dr. John E. Ikerd, Extension Professor at University of Missouri,

"A sustainable agriculture must be economically viable, socially responsible, and ecologically sound. The economic, social, and ecological are interrelated, and all are essential to sustainability. An agriculture that uses up or degrades its natural resource base, or pollutes the natural environment, eventually will lose its ability to produce. It's not sustainable. An agriculture that isn't profitable, at least over time, will not allow its farmers to stay in business. It's not sustainable. An agriculture that fails to meet the needs of society, as producers and citizens as well as consumers, will not be sustained by society. It's not sustainable. A sustainable agriculture must be all three – ecologically sound, economically viable, and socially responsible. And the three must be in harmony."¹³

Part of the movement away from the vertically-integrated, corporate controlled, environmentally unsustainable food system is the creation of alternative local food systems. Regional self-sufficiency in terms of food production is now virtually nonexistent, as most areas are unable to purchase locally produced food in commercial retail outlets. Still, greater community control over the resources in and decisions related to the food system can bring equity and social sustainability to a society. As an alternative to the conventional food system described above, a *community food system* is “a collaborative effort to promote sustainable food production, processing, distribution and consumption in order to enhance the environmental, economic and social health of a particular place. Farmers, consumers and communities are partnering to create more locally based, self-reliant food economies. One of the most important aspects of these community projects is that they increase resident participation to achieve the following goals:

- Improved access by all community members to an adequate, affordable, nutritious diet;
- A stable base of family farms that uses less chemical and energy-intensive production practices and emphasizes local inputs;
- Marketing and processing practices that create more direct links between farmers and consumers;
- Food and agriculture-related businesses that create jobs and recirculate financial capital within the community;
- Improved living and working conditions for farm and food system labor; and

¹³ Presentation by John Ikerd at the March 2001 Partnerships for Sustaining California Agriculture: Profit, Environment and Community conference, Woodland, California. <http://www.sarep.ucdavis.edu/newsltr/v13n2/sa-5.htm>

- Creation of food and agriculture policies that promote local or sustainable food production, processing and consumption.”¹⁴

Driven by a set of values that goes beyond production and profit, a community food system not only generates food for markets, but also contributes to a range of public goods, such as clean water, wildlife preservation, carbon sequestration in soils, flood protection, landscape quality as well as social cohesion in urban environments.

Significance of Institutional Purchasing

One pathway to build and strengthen community food systems is through the support of sustainable agriculture and the establishment of institutional purchasing mechanisms that connect local or regional sustainable agriculture to urban markets and communities. Understanding that small and medium-sized farmers need markets to sell their products and that communities need fresher, more appealing and less processed food, institutional purchasing is an avenue towards creating and supporting a more sustainable food system. Public institutions such as schools, hospitals, and correctional facilities can support small local farmers through the purchase of their agricultural products. Over the course of the past year, San Francisco Food Systems has been examining ways to improve regional self-sufficiency in agriculture by investigating and finding opportunities for San Francisco to buy local agriculture through institutional purchasing.

How Farm-to-School Supports Sustainable Agriculture and School Health

The Farm-to-School Concept

"Farm-to-school" is a general term that is used to describe efforts that connect schools and school districts with local agriculture. While "farm-to-school" can take on a number of different forms, it has typically revolved around the following key components: (1) improved school lunches using fresh produce sourced from local growers; (2) school gardens in which children obtain hands-on experience in growing food; (3) field trips to local farms and classroom visits from food producers; (4) integrated nutrition curriculum that connects experiential learning at the farm

¹⁴ UC Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program, <http://www.sarep.ucdavis.edu/cdpp/cfsoverview.htm>

and in the garden to healthy choices in the lunchroom; and (5) waste reduction through composting and recycling strategies.¹⁵

This kind of collaboration has increasingly gained support and publicity in several different arenas. In 1997 the USDA Food and Nutrition Services Division initiated a “Small Farms/School Meals Initiative” to encourage small farmers to sell fresh fruits and vegetables to schools and to encourage schools to buy wholesome produce from small farmers. More recently, Section 4303 of the 2002 Farm Bill encouraged institutions participating in the school lunch and breakfast programs “to purchase locally produced foods, to the maximum extent practicable.”¹⁶ On a state level, former Governor Gray Davis launched a “Buy California” campaign in February of 2002.¹⁷ Included in this \$79 million initiative was the goal of boosting consumer awareness and consumption of California agricultural commodities. In the City and County of San Francisco, a local team of 22 key stakeholders came together in 1997 to draft a sustainability plan for the city.¹⁸ As part of the plan’s chapter on food and agriculture, one objective stipulated that by the year 2002, 25% of all produce purchased by government institutions, schools, restaurants, and other food-related establishments would come from sustainable Bay Area sources, while at least 70% of the rest would be acquired from other California sources. Until now, this important objective has been completely forgotten.

Elements of farm-to-school initiatives nationally have sought to significantly improve the nutritional quality of food choices for school-age children, develop new markets for local and regional farmers, increase knowledge and awareness of local and regional food systems, and help extend the renewed interest in farm-to-consumer or direct marketing strategies, such as farmers' markets. Preliminary data from California has shown that student access to salad bars as part of a comprehensive program involving classroom, staff and community elements improves consumption of fruits and vegetables and has led to improved perception of the school meals program among students, parents and school staff. These projects have also increased incomes

15 Smart Food: An assessment of Farm-to-School opportunities for schools and the schoolchildren of Monterey County, 2003. Available at http://science.csUMB.edu/~watershed/pubs/WI_SmartFoodReport_030604.pdf

16 U.S. Department of Agriculture. Farm Bill 2002. <http://www.usda.gov/farmbill/>

17 California Department of Food and Agriculture. http://www.cdFA.ca.gov/mkt/mkt/BuyCalif_intro.htm

18 Sustainability Plan for the City of San Francisco, 1997. <http://www.sustainable-city.org/>

for local farmers and several have improved the financial situation of the school food service department due to increased usage of the school meal program both by students receiving free and reduced meals and students paying full price.

Supporting Sustainable Agriculture

Small farmers are increasingly in need of profitable and stable markets in which to sell their products. Farm-to-school programs support regional agriculture by utilizing the purchasing power of a school system and offering a regular, stable market for agricultural products. In the state of North Carolina, the farm-to-school program generated an additional \$289,000 in sales for local farmers in 2002.¹⁹ The New York City Department of Education, by partnering with the Department of Defense (DoD Fresh) Program, contributed over \$300,000 to the local farm economy in just a couple months by purchasing a portion of their product from local farmers.²⁰

In the conventional food system, small farmers have not been able to benefit from relationships with institutional markets such as schools. First, up to 20% of a typical school food service budget consists of commodities (cheese, meat, butter, canned fruits and vegetables) which are heavily subsidized by the federal government. These items generally support the income of only large agricultural producers and can actually act as a disincentive to purchasing fresh produce for schools. Secondly, there is usually a lack of infrastructure which supports relationships between small farmers and a school or school district. The majority of today's institutions use food obtained through national food distributors. Administrators prefer to deal with one vendor, one order form, and one delivery. Vendors who can supply a high number of value-added products and a dependable delivery system win the contract. Because school food service runs like a business that must conform to state and federal regulations, consistency is valued over seasonality and variability. Small and medium sized farms are at a disadvantage in this environment. Individual farmers do not ordinarily produce adequate quantities to supply a large school district. They generally do not have the capacity to process their products especially for

¹⁹ North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. <http://www.ncagr.com/fooddist/Farm-to-School.html> [Accessed December 9, 2003]

²⁰ Communication with New York State Office of General Services, Food Distribution and Warehousing. November 26, 2003.

institutional food service settings. Finally, they have limited ability to deliver to multiple locations.

According to the USDA Agricultural Census, in 1997 there were 7,413 farms in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area (Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, and Sonoma). Over 2 million acres were used for farming in this region, representing 39% of the total land. The average farm size ranged from 2 acres in San Francisco to 563 acres in Alameda. Branching out to surrounding counties adds substantially to these numbers: Mendocino (1,092 farms and 638,566 acres), Lake (776 farms and 138,482 acres), Yolo (923 farms and 536,595 acres), Sacramento (1,288 farms and 308,035 acres), San Joaquin (3,862 farms and 808,838 acres), Stanislaus (4,009 farms and 732,736 acres), Merced (2,831 farms and 881,696 acres), San Benito (562 farms and 511,571 acres), Santa Cruz (722 farms and 71,115 acres), and Monterey (1,209 farms and 1,544,064 acres). San Francisco sits in an extremely fertile region with a year-long growing season. Taking advantage of this fresh and nutritious abundance and supporting small regional farmers makes sense. If we want to support the sustainability of small and medium-sized farms in our state and region, we need to create and bolster markets that support them, including institutional markets in urban areas.

Supporting Healthy School Food Environments

Children in America today are facing a health crisis. Poor diet and inactivity are resulting in an alarming increase in the rate of childhood obesity and the appearance of health problems in children that used to occur primarily in adults. Overweight in childhood is associated with numerous health risks, including increased stress on weight-bearing joints, high blood pressure and abnormal blood lipids, insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes mellitus, and respiratory problems. Furthermore, overweight during childhood can also have a damaging impact on psychosocial and emotional development, contributing to problems like discrimination, low self-esteem, poor body image, and eating disorders. The prevalence of overweight among 6- to 17-year-old youth has more than tripled since the 1960's. In California, nearly one-third of children (aged 9-11) and youth (aged 12-17) are already overweight or at-risk for overweight.^{21,22} This

21 Special Report on the Policy Implications from the 1999 California Children's Eating and Exercise Practices Survey (CalCHEEPS). Public Health Institute. 2000. [<http://www.calendow.org/pub/publications/calcheeps050701.pdf>]

results in \$1.8 billion worth of medical costs in the state of California alone. In the San Francisco Unified School District, 28% of middle school students and 23% of high school students were either overweight or at risk for overweight in 2001, according to data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS).

Schools can play an important role in influencing children's nutrition, health, and academic performance. Many low-income children rely on the USDA sponsored National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program for up to 50% of their daily energy, protein, cholesterol, carbohydrate and sodium needs and 40% of their daily intake of fat. These programs are crucial as the relationship between nutrition and a child's ability to learn is well established. Poorly nourished children are often tired, apathetic, and unable to concentrate. Their cognitive development may even be impaired. The school breakfast and school lunch programs have improved the nutritional quality of low-income children's diets. Over 2 million students (38%) in California participate in free or reduced price meal programs. According to data from the California Department of Education, 59% of children in San Francisco Unified School District were enrolled in free or reduced price meal programs in 2002-03.

In the current climate of severely under funded educational systems, many school districts turn to food sales outside of the USDA sponsored School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program as a way to generate extra revenue. They increasingly sign contracts with fast food companies, hospitality services, and soft drink companies. They sell more branded, familiar food items in snack bars, stores, and vending machines to guarantee increased sales and profit. In a survey conducted in 2000, 95% of responding California school districts reported that they sell fast food, the most common of which were sodas, pizza, cookies, chips and burritos.²³ Unfortunately, food options outside of the USDA sponsored school lunch and breakfast (e.g. foods sold à la carte, in school stores, in snack bars or in vending machines) do not currently have to meet any federal standards for nutritional quality. However, the Pupil Nutrition, Health, and Achievement Act of 2001 (SB19) established nutrition guidelines which

22 1998 California Teen Eating, Exercise, and Nutrition Survey: Media Highlights. Public Health Institute. September 2000.

[<http://www.phi.org/news/Calteen/study.pdf>]

23 2000 California High School Fast Food Survey. Public Health Institute. [www.californiaprojectlean.org]

California schools have to enact by 2004. In addition, individual school districts are increasingly writing their own nutrition policies which typically include restrictions or nutrient standards for competitive food sales. SFUSD has also been writing a Student Nutrition and Physical Fitness Plan to improve the SFUSD school food environment.

The distinction between meals in the National School Lunch Program and food and beverages served à la carte (via the snack bar, school store, or vending machines) is progressively widening. This has led to issues of stigma for those participating in USDA sponsored school meal programs, instigating decreased usage of the program and increased desire for more familiar, branded food items. More and more children opt for unhealthy snacks instead of eating nutritionally balanced meals at school. Children from low-income households may not be eating because they are embarrassed to participate in the program and they do not have money to purchase à la carte items. With the underutilization of USDA sponsored meal programs, schools and school districts lose much-needed funding since federal and state dollars are brought in with each meal served. This school food environment does not seem to “safeguard the health and well-being of the nation's children,” as promised at the inception of the National School Lunch Program.²⁴

Of all the food groups, fruits and vegetables are most likely to be consumed in *inadequate* amounts by children. During an average day in 1999, only 21% of children ate five or more servings of fruits and vegetables.²⁵ Studies with adolescents reveal similar findings -- almost half of 1,200 teens surveyed in 1998 reported eating no vegetables at all on a typical day.²⁶ Only about one in ten adolescents reported having eaten green salad on the day preceding the interview. In 1997, only 34.1% of San Francisco youth surveyed by YRBS had eaten five or more servings of fruit and vegetables on the day preceding the survey. Data from the 2001 High School YRBS showed that during the week prior to the survey, 19% of students had eaten fruit, 23% had consumed fruit juice, and 16% had eaten green salad or other vegetables two or more

24 Section 2 of the National School Lunch Act (NSLA), 42 U.S.C. 1751. National School Lunch Program instituted by Congress in 1946.

25 1999 Children's Healthy Eating and Exercise Practices Survey (CalCHEEPS). California DHS, Cancer Prevention and Nutrition Section, Research and Evaluation Unit.

26 1998 California Teen Eating, Exercise, and Nutrition Survey: Media Highlights. Public Health Institute. September 2000.

<http://www.phi.org/news/Calteen/study.pdf>

times per day. Only 4% of students reported eating fruits and 2% reported eating vegetables four or more times a day. Among middle school students 76% had eaten fruit, 67% had consumed fruit juice, 60% had eaten cooked vegetables, and 36% had eaten green salad one or more times on the day before completing the survey. If we expect children to eat fruits and vegetables, these items must be readily available, economically within reach, and socially accessible to them.

Background for the San Francisco Project

In 2002, San Francisco Food Systems began assessing the feasibility of incorporating fresh, locally grown foods into the National School Lunch Program within San Francisco Unified School District so that children of all income levels could access high quality agricultural products from the Bay Area and also to support small and medium-sized, sustainable farmers in the region via the institutional market in San Francisco.

From initial research, staff of San Francisco Food Systems observed that the manner in which farm-to-school initiatives had historically been established was not always equitable or sustainable. While farm-to-school as a concept has earned a great deal of appeal and support, children in low-income urban communities were not necessarily reaping the benefits. A study published by the USDA in 2002 found that schools offering a salad bar lunch at least once per week had a lower percentage of students eligible for free and reduced price lunch compared to schools without a salad bar.²⁷ Additionally, urban schools were less likely to have a school salad bar than rural schools. In regards to sustainability, most farm-to-school initiatives have started out as pilot projects in just a few select sites. Very often initiatives are dependent on grants and enthusiastic staff and volunteers. While some districts have been able to scale up and institutionalize the farm-to-school program, these districts have been small in comparison to San Francisco. This project was built on the premise that farm-to-school should be as equitable and sustainable as possible. In this regard, the feasibility study was to explore the larger structural issues that might support and/or inhibit a lasting farm-to-school project in San Francisco Unified School District.

Best Practices Research

We began our project with a thorough review of models of farm-to-school projects both in California and across the nation. This process included a review of reports and documents circulated by statewide and national farm-to-school projects as well as participation in numerous meetings and national conferences.

There are several models of farm-to-school projects – everything from doing weekly taste tests in the classroom to receiving a regular produce box from a community supported agriculture (CSA) program, selling local produce à la carte, incorporating fresh local ingredients in the reimbursable USDA sponsored lunch line meal, or starting up a farm-to-school salad bar that is also available to students eating USDA sponsored free and reduced meals. There are also different approaches to procurement and distribution systems including shopping directly at the farmers’ market, using the contracted produce vendor but adopting new purchasing and procurement practices, acting as a forager between small farmers in the region and the school district, or setting up a new growers’ cooperative or collaborative.

Some of the accomplishments cited among early farm-to-school projects are the following:

- In Santa Monica Malibu Unified School District, the utilization of the lunch program increased among both students and staff with the inception of a farmers’ market salad bar. On average, more than three times the number of children selected the Farmers’ Market Salad Bar option than the conventional salad bar during the previous year.
- In Ventura Unified School District, when students were presented with the option of the farm fresh salad bar lunch or hot lunch, students chose the salad bar at nearly a two to one ratio. Staff overwhelmingly chose the salad bar over the hot lunch, with an average of fourteen staff choosing the salad bar on days when the option was available, compared to an average of only one staff member choosing the hot lunch option.
- In Ventura Unified School District, the district’s food service converted a \$231,000 deficit to \$80,000 in revenue during the first year of the Healthy Schools Project. The program also reduced food waste by 90%.

27 “School Lunch Salad Bars.” Nutrition Assistance Program Report Series. USDA Office of Analysis, Nutrition and Evaluation, April 2002.

- In Davis Joint Unified School District, students eating a *Crunch Lunch* farm-to-school salad bar meal were found to select an average of 3-3.5 servings of fruits and vegetables per meal compared to less than 1 serving from the hot meal.
- In Los Angeles Unified School District, after the implementation of a salad bar lunch option in three elementary schools, the mean frequency of fruit and vegetable consumption among students increased while the mean caloric and fat intake decreased.

Some of the pitfalls identified in previous farm-to-school projects are the following:

- Not paying enough attention to all stakeholder groups (school and district administration, students, food service managers, and frontline cafeteria employees) when planning, implementing, and evaluating programs.
- Using grant funding for the cost of operations instead of planning for and developing the project to be self-sustaining from the beginning.
- Lofty expectations – not being clear with farmers and/or food service directors about the quantities that will be ordered, the duration of the contract relationships, the quality of produce, and/or the prices.
- Lack of trucks and transportation – undeveloped distribution infrastructure for purchasing local produce from small and medium-sized farmers.

What Would It Take?

Research and testimony from other districts reflect the great deal of energy and resources needed to make the transition from a conventional school food service arrangement to a farm-to-school model. A school must have the necessary equipment to handle the ordering, storing, prepping, and cooking of fresh raw ingredients. Schools must have dry and refrigerated storage space, kitchen facilities with sinks and tables, an operational stove and oven. They may need additional equipment like salad bar units, crocks, utensils, salad spinners, cutting boards, knives, and ice makers. Schools must also be able to provide the labor to prepare the food, serve the food, monitor the lunch line, and deal with any additional waste generated. Additionally staff must also be trained and certified to prepare meals from fresh, raw ingredients. Because farmers

generally sell their products unprocessed, farm-to-school projects are almost always more labor intensive than conventional food service models.

Aside from these facility needs, there is a need for a system of regular and effective communication. Growers need to know school district's produce demands and ordering habits in order to plan for the appropriate variety, quantity and specifications (size, value enhancement, packaging, nutrient content, etc.). School districts need to know which growers they can contact in their region, seasonal availability of local and regional produce, and the price ranges for the desired local products. Thinking seasonally is not something food service directors typically have to do. Schools typically prefer to order products that have undergone a bit of processing like washing, peeling, chopping, and/or shredding. They also need high quality products, reasonable costs, easy ordering processes and a dependable delivery system. Many early forms of farm-to-school projects managed to fulfill all these requirements in a contained setting like an individual school site served by a few regional farms. However, an operation involving a large urban school district with centralized production, and high dependence on processed or value-added products has yet to be seen.

San Francisco Unified School District Demographics

San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) is the fifth largest school district in California. SFUSD serves nearly 60,000 students through a network of 116 schools. In addition to the K-12 schools, San Francisco Unified School District also oversees 36 Child Development Centers. The overall ethnic breakdown of the student population is roughly 43.7% Asian, 21.4% Latino, 14.7% African American, 10% Caucasian, 6.6% Filipino, 0.9% Pacific Islander, and 0.6% American Indian or Alaska Native.²⁸ According to the 2002-03 data from the California Department of Education (Educational Demographics Unit), 59% of the children in San Francisco public schools are enrolled in free- or reduced-price meal programs. This number captures the number of students actually enrolled in the program, not necessarily the full population that is eligible to receive free meals nor the number of students actually using the

²⁸ California Department of Education, Educational Demographics Unit. Data for the year 2002-03. <http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>

program. Seventy-five of the 116 schools in the district have a student population in which over 50% qualify for free- or reduced-price meals.

Our Approach

Following recommendations from previous farm-to-school projects, a major emphasis of this project has been on building and sustaining relationships with key players in San Francisco Unified School District, including district administrators and food service management. In November 2002, San Francisco Food Systems signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with SFUSD Student Nutrition Services (SNS) and with the Occupational and Environmental Health Section of San Francisco Department of Public Health. This MOU outlined the specific goals and the nature of the farm-to-school feasibility project as well as the roles and responsibilities of each party involved. This proved to be very useful for sharing information and accessing data throughout the year. We had regular meetings with SNS to answer questions and map out the operations of SFUSD school food service. (See Section 2.)

Beginning in January of 2003, San Francisco Food Systems coordinated and convened a project Farm-to-School Planning Group. Planning Group membership included representatives from SFUSD SNS, SFUSD School Health Programs, Parents for Public Schools, teachers, and administrators. The Farm-to-School Planning Group shared a vision of incorporating fresh, local produce into the District's schools while acknowledging the need to take a pragmatic approach, and to consider the capacity of SFUSD to build and sustain such a program.

Section 2

Food Service Operations in SFUSD

Operations within Student Nutrition Services

Administration

The SNS Division of SFUSD directs and coordinates meal programs for the entire school district – ensuring the safe handling, storage and preparation of all food for the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, and After-School Snack Program. The mission of the department is “to support the education of students in the San Francisco Unified School District by providing nutritious and well-balanced meals through compliance with all District, City, State and Federal Regulations....purchasing and providing the highest quality food and services to the students of the San Francisco Unified School District.” Throughout the school year, SNS serves an average of 10,000 breakfasts, 30,000 lunches and 5,500 afternoon snacks each day.

Budget

The annual budget for SNS is \$15 million. SNS is required to generate enough revenue to sustain itself and is prohibited from drawing money from the District’s general fund. Revenue for SNS comes from federal and state reimbursement for the lunches and breakfasts it serves, from payments for meals from “unqualified” students and adults, and from à la carte sales in the school beaneries. During the 2002-03 school year, SNS received USDA reimbursement in the amount of \$2.14 per free, \$1.74 per reduced, and \$0.20 per paid lunch served. Federal reimbursement for the breakfast program was \$1.17 per free, \$0.87 per reduced, and \$0.22 per paid breakfast served. SNS also received reimbursement from the State of California in the amount of \$0.1343 per free and reduced meal served. For after school snack programs, the reimbursement rate was \$0.58 per free and \$0.29 per reduced snack served. These rates are slightly higher in schools that are “especially needy” or serve 60% or more free and/or reduced price lunches. Finally, government commodities such as meat, cheese, and canned vegetables are available to SNS in the amount of \$0.1802 per meal. Although these commodities are offered as an entitlement to school districts, SNS must provide for transportation costs, processing fees and the assessment fees in order to receive them. While the aforementioned reimbursement rates increase at an average of approximately 2.3% per year, the costs of labor, food, and transportation typically increase more rapidly. According to the Director of SNS, salaries in San Francisco have risen approximately 5.5% over the past two years. Food costs

have increased approximately 6-8% in the last year. Lastly, food transportation costs rose approximately 20% in the last year.

Aside from government reimbursement, the department generates additional income (about \$3 million annually) from food sales at the school beaneries, which are à la carte stands selling (non-reimbursable) snack foods like chips, soda, sandwiches, pizza and cookies. Such beaneries are found in most middle and high schools, but almost no elementary schools. SNS does not receive any income from food and beverages sold on school campuses via vending machines, school stores, fundraising events or concessions at special events. Profit from these sales generally goes to the school site – most often to the principal, student body, the PTA, or to a specific school program like band or athletics.

Free and Reduced Price Meals

On the first day of school, each student in the district receives an application for free and reduced price meals to be filled out by his or her parent or guardian. This application is used to determine if a student is “qualified” for free or reduced price meals through the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program. In SFUSD, the count of students “qualified” for free and reduced price meals is taken within 30 operational days from the first instructional school day. Although applications can be turned in at any time throughout the year, eligible students who do not turn in paperwork by this date (within 30 days) are not captured in the schools’ percentage of “qualified” students and therefore do not bring any government reimbursement dollars into the department for these students until their applications are processed.

The procedure by which applications are distributed to students is decentralized and not controlled by SNS. The primary responsibility for organizing and following up on this important application falls on the principals at each school site. In the past, SNS has experienced difficulty in encouraging principals and students to return school meal applications by the due date. Data on free and reduced meal eligibility in SFUSD is used to determine a number of different funding levels including district grant funds, Erate funding, Title I funding, Child Care Food Program reimbursement rates, etc.

Several schools within SFUSD had previously operated under Provision 2, an option in the National School Lunch Program that aims to reduce the application burden and simplify meal counting and claiming procedures. Under Provision 2, schools with populations in which at least 50% of students are eligible for free or reduced meals can serve meals to all students at no charge for a four-year period. These schools are required to pay the difference between Federal reimbursement and the cost of providing all meals at no charge. Large urban school districts like Los Angeles and Long Beach use a combined free and reduced percentage of 90% to register for Provision 2 status for the whole district. On a whole, the San Francisco Unified School District had an average combined free and reduced eligibility percentage of 59.03% in 2002-03, but chose not to exercise this option due to other district priorities.

The District's Provision 2 status expired during the 2001-02 school year. Since it has been discontinued, many parents of children in previous Provision 2 schools have not been paying for lunches because they were accustomed to the former "universal free lunch" policy. SNS cannot deny children these meals according to an unwritten rule within SFUSD. Consequently, following the Superintendent's decision to discontinue Provision 2, SNS has had to bear a substantial financial burden resulting from lack of payment among students from previous Provision 2 schools.

Due to lack of payment, the under enrollment and underutilization of meal programs, and because of a high prevalence of competitive food sales in the district, SNS has had a difficult time of sustaining itself financially. According to the District's Chief Business Officer, SNS's budget shortfall amounted to \$514,000 in school year 2001-02 and \$439,000 in 2002-03. SNS has cut expenses by minimizing labor costs and providing less costly items on the school menus. It was estimated in August of 2003 that the department budget would experience a shortfall of \$381,000 in the 2003-04 school year. As of December 2003, the department was in the black with the district's general fund having paid off the previous deficit.

Purchasing/Suppliers

The meals produced in SFUSD derive many of their ingredients from USDA commodities such as cheese, ground beef, chicken, and canned vegetables. The dollar value of commodities

received by SFUSD is tied to the total number of meals served during the previous year and has increased over the last two years. In 2001-02, SFUSD received \$815,937 worth of such donated commodities. Each January, SNS receives a commodity order form and entitlement dollar amount for the coming year and must plan its menus and place its order by mid-February. All other foods that are purchased for meal programs must be solicited through a bidding process if the amount of the purchase order is above \$1,500. For orders between \$1,500 and \$59,599 buyers can follow an informal bidding process, soliciting at least three bids but not advertising publicly. However, for orders that surpass the discretionary spending cap of \$59,600, SFUSD must go through a formal bidding process, advertising publicly for a period of two weeks and soliciting at least three bids. Vendors who supply the lowest bid must be approved by the school board before purchase orders can be processed. Contracts are for one year. All food, beverages, and food service supplies for SFUSD are on contract and ordered through SYSCO with the exception of dairy and produce orders which are independently contracted through Berkeley Farms and Piranha Produce, respectively.

Produce Ordering

The San Francisco Unified School District's \$200,000 produce contract is with Piranha Produce, based in Modesto, California. Piranha Produce first won the district's produce bid in July of 2001 and is due for a re-bid each July. Piranha services Northern California and Nevada and currently holds 52 contracts with school districts. Piranha carries over 1,000 different fruit and vegetable items as well as Odwalla juices and pre-cut/value added products. Some of the produce items Piranha offers are available year-round, but produce availability lists and pricing generally change weekly. The district's only standing order is for petite bananas, while all other items and quantities ordered change from week to week according to the school menus.

When fresh produce is available through the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), the District acquires it in this way since government subsidies keep the price per case considerably lower than Piranha. The Supply Center for the Department of Defense, located in Philadelphia, PA, controls the operations of field buying offices throughout the United States. There are 10 regional Produce Buying Offices (PBOs) that handle customers in their geographic area only, the closest office being in Los Angeles. These field offices purchase produce through terminal

markets, field growing areas, and from vendors throughout the country and deliver to the U.S. Military, the Defense Commissary Agency, and the National School Lunch Program. In this way, the Defense Supply Center acts essentially as subcontractor with the USDA's Commodity Procurement Program. School districts that choose to utilize the DoD for fresh produce procurement currently pay a straight overhead fee of 5.8% for these services. The Produce Business Unit's field offices provide accounting and billing services for their school food service clients and take responsibility for arranging replacements if their customers are disappointed with the quality of the merchandise they receive. The DoD entitlement for San Francisco Unified School District was \$50,630 during the 2002-03 school year. Although the District receives a list of available items at the beginning of the year, it is unclear how much of those items will be available after distribution to other programs throughout the state. DoD only provides SFUSD with extra produce a couple months out of the year. The program gave approximately 4,000 cases of fruit to the District last year, with an average cost of around \$14 per case. These products tend to be very popular with students and with food service departments like SNS. In some cases, the regional DoD produce buyer is able to preferentially purchase local produce on behalf of school districts. In the case of California, however, there is no well-established effort to give preference to local produce via DoD.

SNS offers all schools fresh and/or cooked fruits and vegetables every day based upon the entrée that is served. The top produce items ordered fresh by the District (listed in order of total dollars spent) include the following: apples, carrots, bananas, celery, oranges, nectarines, lettuce heads/salad mix, peaches and tomatoes. SNS can offer fresh cut up fruits and/or vegetables when funds are available. However, value-added products like cut fruits and vegetables are consistently costlier. For example, while a whole apple costs approximately 10 cents, the same portion of cut up apples may cost 19 cents. For 25,000 students a variance of 9 cents costs the department approximately \$2,250.

Production/Preparation

Several school meal menu items come from approved processors which take USDA commodities like mozzarella cheese and tomato paste and turn them into end products like pizzas or hot pockets. In 2002-03, there were about 60 approved processors according to the CDE Nutrition

Services Division. Commodity-based menu items for SFUSD have come from vendors in other cities like Salinas or Los Angeles or from other states such as Arizona, South Carolina, South Dakota or Wisconsin. Most of what is produced within the School District is prepared in one of two central processing stations or production kitchens. The North Center processing station is located at Marina Middle School and produces 13-14,000 lunches per day, while the South Center processing station is based out of Visitation Valley and Denman Middle School, producing 11-12,000 lunches per day. Elementary schools' meals are produced at these sites and are then shipped and reheated at each school site. Several middle and high schools have "scratch kitchens" which are equipped to produce up to 600 total meals per day from raw ingredients. Of all the lunches served in the district, roughly 20% are produced in these "scratch kitchens." According to the SNS Director, schools that have a "scratch kitchen" including a cook manager, cook, and operable kitchen equipment are the following:

- High School: Burton, Galileo, Lincoln, Lowell, Mission, School of the Arts, and Washington
- Middle School: Aptos, Burbank, Denman, Giannini, Hoover, Presidio, and Roosevelt

There are no fast food vendors or commercial caterers in any of the SFUSD schools. The San Francisco School Board voted against commercial food sales in June 1999.²⁹ The District does outsource some beanery items from neighborhood food producers (e.g. Chinese restaurants) that are able to deliver to some schools following the food service specifications. These sites supply pre-portioned items (e.g. fried rice and noodles) for sale in the school beanery and are inspected by SNS Area Supervisors for food safety and sanitation practices.

Labor

A substantial portion of the budget for SNS (approximately half) is used to cover the cost of labor. Food service in the school district is a unionized workforce of about 300 persons, with about 20 working in administration and the rest working in individual school sites' cafeterias. In order to oversee the full delivery of breakfast, about 2-3 employees are needed per middle and high school and one employee is needed per elementary school. To run the lunch program, 8-13 employees are needed per middle and high school and 1-2 employees are needed per elementary

school. Food Service Staff are Local 790 members and must pass a National Safety Exam to ensure food safety. All cook managers and cooks are SERVSAFE Certified. Salaries in SFUSD typically range from \$20-33 per hour, including benefits. This is considerably higher than the labor costs in other districts which have implemented farm-to-school projects. Although many farm-to-school projects have utilized the help of volunteers in cafeterias and kitchens, the fact that SFUSD cafeterias are unionized calls into question the use of volunteers for a farm-to-school project in SFUSD school cafeterias.

Distribution/Delivery

Distribution and delivery of food, beverages, and supplies occurs at several different levels within SFUSD. SYSCO delivers a wide variety of products (e.g. dry goods, perishables, meats, cleaning supplies) to all middle and high schools with scratch kitchens that prepare food onsite. SYSCO delivers Monday through Friday in a staggered fashion. Elementary schools, on the other hand, receive pre-fabricated meals from SNS central production kitchens by way of contracted delivery trucks. An independent contractor, J & B Delivery Service, loads pre-packaged foods at production centers and delivers them to school sites.

Menus

There are separate menus for elementary schools and for secondary (middle and high) schools.³⁰ A vegetarian option is offered each day in elementary, middle, and high schools. These menus must comply with regulations from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. School lunches must provide at least 30% of a child's protein, vitamin, and caloric needs. In addition, they are required to contain 30% or less of calories from fat and 10% or less of calories from saturated fat, when averaged over a week's time. SNS uses a food-based (rather than nutrient-based) menu-planning process. According to the October 2002 CDE audit (Improvement Plan for School Meals) of SFUSD meal programs, San Francisco's school meals were meeting all nutrition standards. The goal for the department was to improve the variety in the elementary school breakfast. The report stated that cold cereal and crackers were offered each day and recommended that the department provide alternative bread/grain items at least twice a week.

29 San Francisco Commercial Free Schools Act. <http://www.newrules.org/info/sanfran.html>

30 See SFUSD website for sample menus <http://portal.sfusd.edu/template/default.cfm?page=ops.nutrition>

There are currently no schools in SFUSD that are offering a salad bar option. In the past, some schools attempted to establish salad bars, but the district was unwilling due to food safety and contamination concerns. Additionally, due to labor constrictions, the management of SNS is not able to inspect regularly. Salads have been offered in prepackaged form (e.g. chef salad, green salad) in the school beanery but not in the National School Lunch Program in any schools. In 2003, students participating in focus groups in two SFUSD schools reported that their school lunch programs provided substandard meals.³¹ Participants expressed that the food was “nasty,” “unappealing,” and that even when salads were available, the lettuce was often brown or soggy. Students commented that they would like the school lunch program to serve more appealing, healthy food choices like seasonal fresh fruit and salads.

Marketing

SNS, due to financial and personnel constraints, has few resources with which to market its meals and à la carte items. Menus are handed out to parents and are available via the SFUSD website, but there is little signage and promotion of the meals and à la carte items sold by the department. The School District has an Office of Public Engagement and Information which became involved in communications regarding school nutrition in the fall of 2003 following the passage of the School Board Resolution. Interestingly, on the point of promoting California-grown produce, some District offices and schools bear promotional signage for “Washington Apples” and “Florida Grapefruit” but nothing around produce from California.

Meal Prices

The price of the school lunch in SFUSD is currently \$1.50 in elementary and \$1.75 in middle and high schools. The price charged for school breakfast is \$0.80. There is no charge for those students qualifying for “reduced price” school meals. These meal prices have not changed for several years. Compared to other school districts in the surrounding Bay Area, it appears that SFUSD charges substantially lower prices for meals even though the standard of living may be comparable or higher in San Francisco. For example, West Contra Costa Unified charges \$1.75 for an elementary school lunch and \$2.45 for an adult lunch. Davis Joint Unified and Novato Unified both charge \$2.25 for a student lunch. Novato charges \$3.50 for an adult lunch and also

³¹ Focus groups conducted by LEAF grant evaluator in Lowell and Mission High Schools, 2003

allows buyers to add an extra entree for \$1.00. Lagunitas School District charges \$2.75 for a student lunch and \$4.00 for an adult lunch. Palo Alto Unified charges \$2.75 for the elementary school lunch, \$2.85 for the middle school lunch, and \$3.00 for the high school lunch. Berkeley Unified charges \$2.50 for the elementary school lunch, \$3.00 for the middle school lunch, and \$3.50 for the high school lunch. Prices charged for breakfast are higher in these districts as well.

Meal Times and Locations

The schedules for breakfast and lunch are decided at the school level by the principal. The cafeteria staff (SNS) runs according to the hours set by the school, however labor costs influence the hours of operation of the meal programs as do the bus schedules. Decisions about open campus and meal locations are also made at the school level. These decisions are largely influenced by the space available for accommodating students in the cafeterias or in other areas of campus.

Waste/Recycling/Composting

Waste management is handled at the individual school sites. SNS is responsible for providing garbage cans and liners to all schools, but the custodial staff at each site handles the emptying and the site administrators are responsible for the garbage expense. The San Francisco Department of the Environment currently has a program called “Food to Flowers!” which collects leftover food and soiled paper from K-12 schools. The Department provides free instructional assemblies, materials, and green carts for collecting leftovers, which are then picked up by the waste hauler with the garbage. Sunset Scavenger, the City’s waste management company, and the Department of the Environment meet with individual school site administrators to promote recycling and composting programs in the schools. Decisions around recycling and composting programs are typically made by the principal, so not all schools have these in operation. According to one SNS Area Supervisor, there is not much food waste generated at the two central production kitchens for the district, since much of what is acquired and served comes in pre-packaged form. All food that remains after preparation and service is thrown out in the same day, i.e. leftovers cannot be retained due to health codes.

Operations within Individual School Sites

Conversations with parents, teachers, school administrators and food service managers revealed that competitive food sales in SFUSD were abundant and largely unregulated. Many middle and high schools have sold snack foods and beverages in vending machines housed in the cafeteria – a direct violation of the federal law regarding competitive food sales. Teachers and parents have sold snacks (e.g. cup of soup, homemade baked goods) to students in classrooms, competing with the school lunch program. Schools stores and kiosks might sell the same food and beverages as the beanery, but the profits would go to the school instead of to SNS, the officially authorized and recognized food service entity. This phenomenon has caused a hemorrhaging from the revenue stream for SNS, inhibiting its abilities to maintain and improve its programs.

Although the school meals within San Francisco Unified School District are under the discretion of SNS, regulated by the USDA, and produced largely in a centralized fashion, there is still a great deal of variability in what food and beverages are offered and sold at each individual school site and in the success of the school meal programs. School administrators are able to make decisions in regards to the process of distributing school meal applications, the number of breakfast and lunch periods, the degree to which food is sold as a fundraiser on campus, the school's interest in starting recycling, composting, and gardening programs, and more. In order to capture the autonomy of each school site in such administrative decisions and practices, San Francisco Food Systems and its project Planning Group developed a *School Food Environment Survey*.

Survey Development and Dissemination

The *School Food Environment Survey* was developed over the course of four months. The Farm-to-School Coordinator worked on the project half-time and solicited regular feedback and recommendations from the Farm-to-School Planning Group. The final document was a 10-page, 11-section survey that was sent to all school principals within the District. Before distribution, the survey was reviewed through the District's formal approval process and Sponsored Projects Office. This process took approximately three weeks.

On May 6, 2003, San Francisco Food Systems mailed the *School Food Environment Survey* to 113 school principals of San Francisco Unified School District. A cover letter described the project in brief and explained that administrators who completed and returned the survey by May 30, 2003 would receive a gift certificate of appreciation. Principals were given the option of mailing, faxing, or emailing survey responses.

Survey Results

By the May 30th due date, 37 (or 33%) of all surveys were returned. By June, we received 48 (or 42%) of all surveys. Of all schools in the district, 28 elementary schools (40%), 9 middle schools (53%), 11 high schools (55%) and no K-8 schools (0%) responded. The Farm-to-School Coordinator made follow-up calls, faxes, and emails to administrators who turned in surveys in order to get as complete of information as possible. The complete data from the *School Food Environment Survey* questions are provided in Section 6.

Section 3

Key Themes, Current Food Systems Activities and Opportunities

Key Themes Stemming from Research

A number of key themes emerge from the *School Food Environment Survey*, our work with the SNS and outreach efforts with parents, teachers, and students of the San Francisco Unified School District. These themes represent challenges in our work to bring fresh, local and sustainable produce into SFUSD and should be aptly considered when planning next steps.

1. Traditional approach to education: Strong emphasis on academic scores

The main emphasis within the San Francisco Unified School District is on educating students. Concerned with maintaining high test scores and ensuring that student academic performance is held to the maximum standards, the San Francisco Unified School District has stressed academic performance. While academic achievement is important, an overemphasis on numeric outcomes encourages the rejection of pragmatic, comprehensive approaches to education like systems-based, ecological instruction. The conventional approach disregards important connections that can be made between healthy food environments, nutrition education, and academic performance.

2. Federal poverty rate: Unrealistic within local context

The federal poverty rate by which families become qualified for free and reduced meals is inordinately low for families in San Francisco. The California Budget Project estimates that it takes \$61,986 for a single mother of two to live in San Francisco Bay Area.³² The federal poverty level provides only a fraction of what families need to live minimally comfortably in San Francisco. In order for a child to be qualified for free lunches, a family of three (e.g. single mother with two children) cannot earn over \$19,838 per year. This leaves a significant gap between what it really takes to live in San Francisco and what the federal government determines as eligibility for this program. Families who are truly in need in San Francisco are not being served due to the federal government's archaic poverty rates.

3. Resources: School District is strapped and scarcity creates competition

Like many other government agencies, the San Francisco Unified School District has been experiencing massive budget cuts and financial shortfalls. Due to scarce resources, hiring freezes, cuts and lack of incoming funds and resources, District departments have found themselves competing to save programs and sustain projects. Departments such as SNS must ensure that they are financially viable to perform their duties (i.e. providing meals to students) without the option of utilizing the District General Fund. School sites have also been struggling to maintain school programs while continuing to provide students with diverse educational opportunities and cultural experiences. The scarcity of resources has forced many school clubs and departments (e.g. band, athletics) to rely on outside funds to support their activities. These funds have primarily been generated by food sales which compete with SNS and the National School Lunch Program. Competitive food sales, open campuses, food fundraisers and food activities outside of SNS's jurisdiction contribute to the financial difficulties of this department. If the school food and nutrition environment had the full support of the entire District, SNS would be better poised to generate more revenue and, in turn, improve its meal programs. If these entities were not in competition and if the District had more money, it could better foster collaborative and integrative activities rather than reinforcing fragmentary, siloed work plans. The Student Nutrition and Physical Fitness Plan currently being drafted begins to address these issues.

4. Politics and Policies: Heavy bureaucratic structure, lack of departmental integration

Like most institutions, San Francisco Unified School District operates under a heavy bureaucratic structure. Departments must operate within established processes which many times slow down efforts towards change. Communications to administrators must be reviewed by appropriate committees before they are permitted to reach administrators. Finding decision makers can be a challenge. Oftentimes decisions are deferred to committees or to supervisors. In order to work within this structure, it is important to identify and utilize established mechanisms for communication and decision making, and allow adequate time for maneuvering within this structure.

5. Food Service: Business focused on outcomes

School food service, similar to other institutional food service establishments, runs very much like a business due in part to the scarcity of resources (time, space, and money) for feeding such a large student population. The food service industry (i.e. food producers, suppliers, and distributors) responds to this shortage by streamlining processes in a way that is financially affordable for such institutions. Food service administrators in school districts and other institutions are not typically mandated nor encouraged to think in a seasonal way when ordering for meal programs. Meals must meet rigid federal and state requirements in terms of quantity, nutrient content, food safety, and serving sizes. This increasing standardization fails to recognize the freshness, quality and superior nutrient content of locally-grown produce which is in peak season.

While a number of key themes present challenges in implementing a farm-to-school program, San Francisco Food Systems is working closely with the San Francisco Unified School District in order to find solutions to these challenges. Current food systems activities within SFUSD are also helping to address some of these issues by connecting students to better food choices and more hands-on nutrition education and increasing the capacity of school sites and of SNS to provide access to healthier food while ensuring financial stability and sustainability.

Current Food Systems Activities at SFUSD

San Francisco Unified School District is an especially fertile ground in which to plant the seeds of food system change. Over the course of the last year, several initiatives have been introduced in SFUSD which have collectively begun to revamp the school food environment. There are many initiatives of parents, teachers, administrators, and the larger community that are impacting the District's food system, but we will provide only a sample of them below:

San Francisco Board of Education Resolution

On January 14, 2003 the San Francisco Board of Education passed Resolution 211-12A8, *Healthy School Nutrition and Physical Exercise Policy for San Francisco Unified School District*. (See Section 7) Among other things, this resolution required the phasing out the sale of

sodas and unhealthy snacks by the start of the 2003-04 school year. In addition, the policy recommendations established a cap on competitive food fundraisers on school campuses. While the State has historically regulated the degree to which food could be sold in competition with the National School Lunch Program on campus, most principals had not acknowledged this rule or considered that it might be enforced.

Another provision of the policy document required the formation of a School Nutrition and Physical Fitness Advisory Committee charged with gathering information and presenting recommendations to the School Board. The Advisory Committee, made up of a diverse panel of teachers, administrators, doctors, public health professionals, and District employees (SNS and SHPD), was first convened on April 2, 2003. San Francisco Food Systems is actively participating in the drafting of the nutrition policy recommendations serving as chair of one of the working subcommittees - *Food Sales* and actively participating on the *School Meals* subcommittee. Members of the various subcommittees and the larger Advisory Committee met several times over the course of a two month period to write and revise recommendations around food, nutrition, and physical activity for the San Francisco Unified School District.

On May 21, 2003, the final recommendations were presented to Committee co-chairs, Trish Bascom (Director of School Health Programs) and Gwen Chan (Chief Development Officer). Recommendations included language around increasing the offerings of fresh fruits and vegetables in schools, piloting salad bars, and giving preference to California-grown produce. While this language is very much in line with the goals of San Francisco Food Systems, there is no discretionary funding available to initiate these changes. The recommendations were reviewed by the Superintendent and the Board of Education and were scheduled to be phased in throughout the school year 2003-2004. (See Section 8) In October 2003, the SFUSD School Nutrition and Physical Fitness Advisory Committee was reactivated at the direction of Superintendent Arlene Ackerman, in order to lend support to SFUSD as it worked toward implementation of the policy. Chief Academic Officer Elois Brooks is the staff co-chair of the committee and Dana Woldow is the parent co-chair.

Aptos Middle School Model

Aptos Middle School, located in southwestern San Francisco and known as the city's most diverse middle school, is at the forefront of a nationwide movement to provide healthier food at school. Parents and staff at Aptos proposed a pilot project in 2002 to San Francisco Superintendent Arlene Ackerman. Through this pilot project, Aptos Middle School would eliminate junk food from its school beanery and introduce healthier options like sandwiches, soups, and sushi.

The pilot was readily approved and initiated in January 2003 with support from parents and the school administration. Aptos, with 860 students, was the first San Francisco middle school to make such menu revisions. The project's success surprised even its most enthusiastic supporters. The project resulted in better student behavior, less litter, more nutritional savvy among the diverse students - and higher sales for the beanery and vending machine.

Linking Education, Activity and Food (LEAF) Grant

The LEAF (Linking Education, Activity, and Food) project came out of a grant from the California Department of Education with funds from the California Department of Food and Agriculture. LEAF grants were designed to reflect the intent of: *The Pupil Nutrition, Health, and Achievement Act of 2001*, signed by Governor Davis in October 2001, that implements changes in school nutrition and physical activity policies and practices to improve children's lifelong health; and Governor Davis' *Buy California* Initiative, unveiled February 2002, that provides funds from the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) for public schools to increase the offerings of California's fruits and vegetables.

The San Francisco Unified School District received a two-year, \$246,500 LEAF grant to write and implement a school nutrition and physical activity policy and to pilot various activities at two of its school sites: Lowell High School and Mission High School. San Francisco Food Systems partnered with the LEAF project team in 2003. We have shared data and resources with the LEAF project, and have provided resources and technical assistance to project coordinators. The LEAF project hosted a Fall Harvest Day at Lowell High School in November as an event to educate student about local agriculture. The event featured a fruit farmer from the Central

Valley and taste tests of seasonal fruit. Students and faculty overwhelmingly supported the event and were enthusiastic about tasting new produce and meeting a local farmer. Eighty-five percent of Lowell students surveyed at this event said they would like to see more California-grown, pesticide-free produce in their school. Subsequently, the LEAF project team decided to prioritize California-grown produce in the two pilot schools, and ordered only those products from Piranha Produce that were grown in California.

San Francisco Green Schoolyard Alliance (SFGSA)

Formed in March 2001, the San Francisco Green Schoolyard Alliance promotes inclusive, community driven processes that create and maintain healthy, environmentally sustainable learning environments in San Francisco's schools. Since its inception, the SFGSA has advocated for the greening of schoolyards and provided support in their creation, as during their multi-site conference. The SFGSA was successful in advocating for \$2 million for the greening of schoolyards from the recently passed school bond. This additional revenue will support the building of school gardens in 17 schools in the district.

Harvesting Health Art Contest

At the beginning of the 2003-04 school year, San Francisco Food Systems organized an art contest for SFUSD students entitled “Harvesting Health: Food, Health and the Environment.” The contest was open to all K-12 students, who were instructed to illustrate how growing, sharing, and eating good, nutritious food contributes to the health and well-being of communities and populations. A total of 166 entries were submitted and fifteen students were selected as winners. Winning artwork was displayed at the Moscone Convention Center during the annual meeting of the American Public Health Association, at the San Francisco Public Library, and on the San Francisco Food Systems website.

Farm-to-school Opportunities and Possibilities

From the beginning, San Francisco Food Systems approached the farm-to-school feasibility study with equity and sustainability in mind. In this regard, we have worked closely with key stakeholders in the district to understand their situation and capacity to take on a new project.

We have found that there are two key questions when approaching farm-to-school projects in any district. One is how to bring regional farm fresh produce into the district. The other is how to widely distribute it throughout the district. For each of the following possibilities, one has to consider the difficulty or resistance to implementation and weigh these factors against the impact on students and the rest of the school community.

Procurement of farm fresh produce

The first option in procuring farm fresh produce would be to work within the existing channels of a conventional produce distributor (e.g. SYSCO, Piranha Produce, or DoD), advocating for the inclusion of produce from small local/regional farmers in their product mix. This approach has the benefit of working within an already developed infrastructure, which includes such things as an easy ordering system, refrigeration, trucks, and the ability to deliver at any time.

According to a Piranha Produce representative, the company “makes every effort to buy local from California growers whenever possible according to availability and seasonality.” However, for some of the District’s biggest orders like apples, Piranha is only able to source from California growers for a few months out of the year (August through October). If it so desired, the School District could make the case that locally- and sustainably-grown produce was a priority for students’ health, the environment, and for the local farm economy. This could be written into the produce specifications during the next bidding cycle. When asked whether Piranha would be able to give preference to organic or sustainably-grown produce if this was the specification of the school district, a representative responded, “It depends on the time of year. It would have to be cost effective for both Piranha Produce and the School District. We are very respectful of the tight price constraints under which the School District operates and it would have to be in both our interests.”

Other procurement strategies involve working more directly with farmers. For example, staff at Santa Monica Malibu Unified School District shop at the local farmers’ market for their schools’ salad bar needs. The food service director enjoys a strong relationship with several farmers and orders extra cases ahead of time to be picked up at the weekly farmers’ market. The district provides a van and a driver who picks up from the market and delivers to each of the district’s 15 schools. Although certified farmers’ markets are prohibited from selling their produce at

wholesale prices, this “shopping at the farmers market” model has worked for some farm-to-school projects.

Some school districts, such as Davis Joint Unified School District, have used a forager to act as a broker between the district and small- to mid-sized farmers in the region. The forager is able to provide the district with the information it needs in regard to what product is available, in what quantity, and in what season. Farmers deliver products to a central production kitchen in the school district. With this model, the forager can reach out to farmers that are not necessarily selling at the farmers’ markets and relieve the food service director from doing the ordering process. However, both the food service director and the farmers are dependent on the forager, which has traditionally been a grant-funded, non-sustainable position.

Finally, one other procurement model is to start a consolidation from scratch, i.e. a growers’ cooperative or non-profit collaborative. In this scenario, small- to mid-sized farmers work together to ensure that there is enough variability and quantity of product available to supply a school or school district. They may also be able to add value to products collectively, for example, supplying washed, peeled, or chopped produce. This model is helpful for food service directors because it involves one price list, one order, one phone call, and one delivery. There is also a benefit from growers sharing one insurance policy and equipment like trucks and storage space. Examples of such a model are GROWN Locally, Inc. (IA), News North Florida Cooperative (FL), Red Tomato (MA), Ripple Riley Thomas (CA), and most recently a collaborative in Ventura Unified School District (CA) which is supported by Community Alliance with Family Farmers.

Distribution of farm fresh produce

The second question mentioned was the spread of produce throughout the District or the student reach and impact. As mentioned previously, the District could work with the contracted vendor, Piranha Produce, to advocate that all produce be sourced from local, regional, and sustainable sources. If this option was pursued, it would have the widest reach or student impact. Working with Piranha Produce could change the nature of all 30,000 lunches served in the school district,

and potentially those of other school districts since the company maintains contracts with over 50 other school districts throughout California and Nevada.

As an alternative to working with the contracted produce vendor, the District could also bring in locally and sustainably grown produce from another supplier to the central level processing centers in the District (Marina and Visitation Valley Middle Schools) so that these fresh produce items get into all the meals that are prepped at one central location, and then are shipped to more satellite elementary school sites, affecting about 24-26,000 lunches per day. This would not interrupt the regular distribution systems that are already in place in the District's food service operations and would use the cooking facilities that are already available. A similar option is to order fresh local produce for the individual scratch kitchens, of which there are about fourteen at the middle and high school level. This could change the nature of about 6,000 lunches served daily and might not require any additional equipment since the change is happening at a cooking site, although this would require additional labor. In addition, the Child Development Centers are a promising venue to target since all 36 sites are equipped with adequate cooking facilities and enough staff to handle the preparation of meals from fresh ingredients.

Most farm-to-school projects have introduced fresh local produce directly into individual school sites that then prep onsite for their own self-serve salad bar. If adopting this approach, schools that may have the right facilities but are not producing food currently could be included. It is certain, however, that additional equipment (e.g. salad bar units, prepping tools and utensils) and additional labor would be needed. It may be easier to work in an individual school site if there is significant support from faculty, staff, parents and students. However, the reach or spread of impact is significantly smaller, probably influencing about 100-500 lunches.

Another way to educate the school community about local food systems is to work with individual school sites' faculty and staff to encourage them to sign up for a share(s) of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), meaning they would receive a regular box of local, seasonal produce delivered from a farm or group of farmers to their classroom every week or so. This is great for educational purposes, building relationships with regional farmers, and learning about seasonality. Several CSA programs include materials on nutrition and cooking in their

regular delivery box. Some schools have used a mobile produce cart or visits from farmers in the classroom as ways to engage students in taste tests in a fun, interactive way. Joining a CSA program or hosting taste tests in school classrooms are fantastic ways to promote sustainable agriculture and nutritious eating habits. However, these are not strategies for changing institutional purchasing practices.

Section 4

Farm-to-School Project Plan, Needs and Recommendations

Farm-to-School Project Plan

Because San Francisco Food Systems aims to build an equitable and sustainable farm-to-school program, we are looking at multiple approaches or points of entry into altering the school food environment. Specifically, we will continue to work on the supply side or at institutional level (with school food policymakers, food service administrators, produce suppliers, and distributors) as well as on the demand side (to garner support from parents, students and staff in the school community).

The following pages outline our farm-to-school project plan for San Francisco Unified School District. The project plan is multi-faceted and employs methodical approaches in order to help us best understand the institutional purchasing pathways and build a broad baseline of community support for the program.

1. Pilot Phase

San Francisco Food Systems is currently seeking funds to initiate a pilot farm-to-school project in one or two schools. The pilot project will establish farm fresh salad bars as reimbursable meal options in these schools and test the financial impact by weighing food, labor and equipment costs against the revenue brought in from students' payments and federal/state government reimbursements. At the present time, funding is needed to cover the costs of salad bar equipment (i.e. salad bar unit, crocks, utensils, refrigeration matting, and knives), additional labor, and food. If there is adequate funding and support, we will institute this change in both a cooking site as well as one of the satellite elementary schools to test whether there is any difference in quality, freshness, and appeal if a centralized distribution system is used. New recipes and menus will need to be created in order to incorporate fresh, regional, seasonal ingredients. Food service staff and volunteers may need to be trained to prepare meals from fresh, raw ingredients and to be shown the value in doing so. We will extend MOUs and reinforce relationships between San Francisco Food Systems, SFUSD and SFDPH. San Francisco Food Systems will work with the SFUSD Purchasing Department, SNS, School Health Programs, and school site administrators to set up effective and meaningful tracking systems. In order to evaluate the program, we will measure the utilization of the National School Lunch Program over time among both qualified

and unqualified students, as well as among faculty and staff. We will also assess the effect on student and staff perceptions of the National School Lunch Program and of SNS. We expect that significant improvements in revenue for SNS would substantiate the claim to expand the salad bar option into additional school sites and/or to change produce procurement to include fresher, locally- and sustainably-grown items. We also anticipate that a successful salad bar pilot could attract parents' attention throughout the district and generate parental pressure to get fresh and healthy salad bars in additional sites.

2. Program Enhancement and Expansion

In this phase, we will assess the District's capacity to expand the pilot salad bar project into additional school sites. We will further explore the possibility of working with Child Development Centers as an avenue for bringing farm fresh produce into the meals already produced on site. We will investigate and address any problems that arose during the pilot phase such as around labor, food preparation, or food safety and sanitation. During this phase, we will also explore ways to enhance the farm-to-school programs in place by considering such things as pilot profit sharing programs, school site collaborations and the creation of curriculum. We will generate a basic checklist of prerequisites that must be in place at a school site before a new salad bar project can be started there.

3. Purchasing and Distribution Links

After setting up the necessary mechanisms to ensure smooth operations of a pilot farm-to-school project, San Francisco Food Systems will work with SFUSD partners to improve purchasing capabilities, distribution links and food preparation practices around sustainable agriculture. San Francisco Food Systems will assist in identifying ways current vendors can buy California, preferably from regional and sustainable sources as well as identifying additional sustainable agriculture producers and distributors in the region. We will investigate ways to simplify ordering and distribution processes so that other San Francisco institutions could also source their produce from regional, sustainable sources. We will consider leveraging the purchasing power of several school districts that are using Piranha Produce and working towards the same goals of supporting California farmers. Students' comments from taste test surveys and focus groups might make the case that students desire fresh fruit and vegetable options grown

regionally and sustainably and are willing to purchase these items. We might ultimately be able to rewrite our produce specifications to include geographic or other criteria, suggesting that produce be sourced from a new produce vendor if evidence from pilots shows that students will eat more of it.

4. Policy Development

Policy work will be conducted throughout the course of this project. San Francisco Food Systems will maintain positions on the SFUSD Student Nutrition and Physical Fitness Advisory Board (School Meals and Food Sales Subcommittees) in order to lend advice to the recommendations and implementation plans. In addition, we will assist in navigating through policies relevant to institutional purchasing and in creating policies that will advance, promote, and sustain institutional purchasing of farm fresh product at SFUSD. We will incorporate recommendations from the SFUSD Student Nutrition and Physical Fitness Plan (Draft reviewed by Superintendent Ackerman and the Board of Education Curriculum Committee in September 2003) to lend support to our efforts around getting more fresh, locally- and sustainably-grown produce into the school district. Specifically, this plan states that SNS will “increase the incorporation of fresh foods (fruits and vegetables) by a minimum of 10% in the 2003-04 school year, minimize processed foods, select California grown produce and explore the feasibility of implementation of salad bars.” This article also states that “fruits and vegetables shall be offered for sale at the school site where foods are sold.”

5. Community Capacity Building and Outreach

Throughout the next year, San Francisco Food Systems will continue efforts to ensure that community participation, inclusion and capacity are reinforced through education and outreach efforts. San Francisco Food Systems will continue to build relationships within SFUSD while forging new connections with community members such as parents, community based organizations, teachers, and other interested parties. We will disseminate a farm-to-school resource guide to teachers interested in incorporating concepts into their classroom instruction. The guide will include a list of curricula on food, nutrition and sustainable agriculture as well as possible food production/processing/retail field trip sites and funding opportunities.

6. *Dissemination*

An important phase in this farm-to-school project is the dissemination of information gained from the pilot project. San Francisco Food Systems will assist SFUSD in the circulation and disclosure of any information pertaining to institutional purchasing in school food service. We will present our work around farm-to-school to the larger community through meetings of the San Francisco Food Alliance and the San Francisco Green Schoolyard Alliance. We will publicize our work around farm-to-school with print materials bearing artwork from our “Harvesting Health: Food, Health and the Environment” art contest held in October 2003.

Farm-to-school Needs and Recommendations

Based on San Francisco Food Systems’ observations and activities throughout the past year, it appears that a number of things need to happen in order to build an equitable and sustainable farm-to-school project in SFUSD. Several of the issues presented below are currently being addressed by the District’s School Nutrition and Physical Fitness Advisory Committee. As detailed in the project plan, San Francisco Food Systems recommends that SFUSD implement and evaluate a farm-to-school pilot project in order to understand how institutional purchasing of farm fresh produce can work and can be meaningful in the local context. After research on the school food environment at the district-level and school-level, San Francisco Food Systems has identified three areas of focus for future efforts. These are areas where support is needed in order to ensure that (1) SNS can continue to do its job effectively and superiorly, (2) the community is active in and aware of decisions around the school food environment, and (3) there is adequate infrastructure to support healthy school food systems in the future.

1. Ensure administrative capacity by working in the following areas:
 - Competitive foods,
 - Application and payment for Federal food programs,
 - School site relationship building.

Based on our work with the District, along with our work on the SFUSD School Nutrition and Physical Fitness Advisory Committee, San Francisco Food Systems feels that in order to run

effective school meal programs and to take on programmatic enhancements like farm-to-school, SNS must have the full support of the District. In assessing the feasibility of farm-to-school in SFUSD, we examined budgetary and labor issues, competitive food sales, and the importance of food assistance programs in SFUSD. San Francisco Food Systems recommends that better integrated and coordinated efforts be established between SFUSD administration, school site administrators, food service workers, and parents to minimize competition around food sales and to maximize a healthy school food environment. SFUSD could support SNS by restricting competitive food sales, emphasizing the importance of completed meal program eligibility applications, and building relationships between school site administrators and SNS staff. SFUSD could also consider increasing the price on paid meals and sending a clear message about the need for “unqualified” students and adults to pay for school meals so that SNS does not incur a financial loss.

2. Increase community based participation through:

- Education,
- Outreach,
- Marketing.

For the past year, San Francisco Food Systems has contributed to the active participation of San Francisco residents in food systems research and planning. In the context of SFUSD, it is imperative that parents, guardians, and community advocates be involved in the creation of food policy, in education and outreach activities, and in program planning around school health and nutrition. Policies and programs will not be as effective if the larger community is not involved in designing, understanding, and/or promoting them as well as finding relevance to their own lives. San Francisco Food Systems suggests that there be a concerted effort to disseminate information and resources to parents, teachers, and district administrators around school meal programs, school food policy, and relevant pilot projects in order to broaden community understanding of the SFUSD school food environment and to allow for participatory food systems efforts in the future.

3. Invest in the District's infrastructure and ability to prepare/serve better food by providing:
 - Better Facilities,
 - Equipment,
 - Labor,
 - Distribution links.

Concurrent to administrative and community building activities at SFUSD, San Francisco Food Systems recommends that resources and actions be funneled toward building infrastructure, including acquiring equipment, increasing labor and establishing effective distribution links that will prepare the District for the more long-term needs of a farm-to-school program as well as other school food environment improvements. Barriers to meal program improvements will continually persist so long as the necessary resources are not provided either from the School District or from outside funders.

Conclusion

Over the course of the past year, San Francisco Food Systems has worked with the San Francisco Unified School District to explore the feasibility of incorporating locally and sustainably grown produce into the school district's meal programs. Establishing an institutional purchasing program in this way holds the potential of supporting sustainable agriculture in the region and supporting healthy school food environments. San Francisco Food Systems has looked at both the district-level and school-specific factors that can help or hinder the creation of an equitable and sustainable farm-to-school project in San Francisco. Through its work with administrators, teachers, students, parents, farmers and food advocates, San Francisco Food Systems has been able to examine and understand how a farm-to-school program could be implemented in San Francisco Unified School District. By advancing our project plan in the years ahead, we hope to ensure that our local community, including the San Francisco Unified School District, is vested in food systems activities that support sustainable environments and sustainable communities.