FARM to SCHOOL
FIELD GUIDE
FOR FOOD SERVICE DIRECTORS

A publication of the Community Alliance with Family Farmers’ Farm to School Initiative
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What is FARM to SCHOOL?

Farm to School Programs connect farms with school cafeterias and classrooms. These programs can include everything from farm field trips to nutrition education in the school garden to farm-fresh salad bars. The programs come in all shapes and sizes, but they fall into two main categories: Farm to School Education programs and Farm to School Produce Distribution programs.

A comprehensive Farm to School program puts both elements together: Fresh, locally-grown produce appears on the school menu, while students learn about local agriculture. Farm to School programs are sprouting up across the country!

How Can Food Service Directors Join the FARM to SCHOOL movement?

Food Service Directors have a key role to play in making farm to school happen. Purchasing fresh, locally grown foods for your school meals can increase participation rates, expand fresh food offerings, excite students, staff & parents about school food and support your local farming economy.

Although the idea of Farm to School programs appeals to many food service directors, the implementation of these programs can be quite challenging. With tight budgets and strict USDA regulations, producing school meals that keep budgets in the black and that kids will eat everyday can be more than a full time job.

However, many food service directors across the country are finding ways to bring local foods into their cafeterias and are reaping tremendous rewards for this effort. We hope that this guide give you a place to start and answers some basic questions you might have about Farm to School.

Check out these web sites for more information about Farm to School:
Community Alliance with Family Farmers—www.caff.org
National Farm to School—www.farmtoschool.org
California Farm to School—www.caff.org

Since 2001, CAFF’s Farm to School Initiative has developed and coordinated on-the-ground programs connecting schools and school children to their local farming communities, while also creating resources, workshops and materials that help further the Farm to School movement in California. CAFF runs Farm to School programs in Monterey, Humboldt, Santa Cruz and Santa Clara counties, and connects local farmers to school cafeterias in the Sacramento Valley, Ventura and Bay areas.

For more information, please contact:

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Step One: Planting the Program

Figuring out what you need to get started

Purchasing fresh locally grown foods and incorporating them into your districts’ meal programs is one side of the equation of Farm to School. Ideally, you will find teachers and interested parents who are involved in school gardens, nutrition education and other food and farming education in your district, who will complete the other side of the equation. These folks will be your allies in getting the kids to happily eat whatever new exciting fruit or veggie is on the menu, and can be advocates for the changes you are hoping to implement in your program. These tips are the place to start preparing your program:

1) Start with the Seasonal Low-Hanging Fruit. And that’s fruit. Whole fruit requires no extra processing, is easily added as a side dish or healthy dessert without having to change the main menu, and the enhanced taste is instantly enjoyed.

2) Create a Short List of Seasonal Swap Out Options. Pick a handful of items you’re regularly buying and have a local farmer or distributor identify which are regionally available. Swap those handful of items for locally grown goods while they’re in season. As you look to expand your local sourcing program, you can adjust dishes to incorporate more seasonality and explore unique local varieties. But you can start implementing local sourcing with a focused and manageable short list of produce with any menu.

3) Engage Your Distributor. Tell your distributor of your interest in purchasing local and regional food. Ask them to label items that are already in their catalogue that are local and then consider if you would like to ask them to expand these options. If your distributor won’t work with you, consider renegotiating your distribution contract to include this availability.

4) Develop Annual Goals. As with many institutional goals, if you don’t measure outcomes, they don’t matter. Decide where you want to be in one year’s time and then created monthly and weekly purchasing targets to get you there. Annual goals can be set as a ratio of your total food buy. The metric can be number of boxes, weight, sales amount or food mile reduction. The easiest to measure is boxes and dollar amount. Our experience shows that a solid goal for the first year is five percent of produce purchases, with the aim of increasing by five percent each year.

5) Set Financial Guidelines. To alleviate the anxiety, confusion, and possible disconnect of interest amongst different employees — establish budgetary guidelines. Consider setting a maximum dollar amount, a maximum additional cost per serving or year, or approve the cost for a short-list of items. There is no simple answer to how much more it is going to ‘go local’—but a rough estimate for a basket of items is 20 percent increase. Keep in mind that your local produce buy is only one fraction of your food buy which is a fraction of your food service budget. Spending more on local food is about investing in a healthier, more sustainable, equitable and better tasting food system—and can increase the participation rates in your program, which brings in more revenue. Also remember that buying at the height of the season reduces the cost of purchase, so you’ll want to take a careful look at your menu and make sure it’s aligned with local seasonality.

Sound like a lot to organize? Don’t be overwhelmed! The strongest Farm to School programs start small and grow like pumpkin plants, extending vines in many directions and producing fruit that slowly ripens! If you’re inspired to plant the seeds of a Farm to School program, start with a manageable project and have fun.
Step Two: Getting Started with Your Farm to School Program

Once you’ve got a Farm to School program planted, here are some suggestions to help your program take off:

1) Use Your Wellness Council to Get Buy-In. To reach a broad set of resources for local food procurement and to institutionalize the commitment to buying locally, make sure you involve your School Wellness Committee in setting Farm to School goals. Such committees are most effective when they consist of people with a wide background – including district administrators (someone from finance or purchasing), teachers and parents. A network of supporters facilitates a broad commitment and range of support services that your program will need as it makes changes.

2) Communicate the Challenges and Benefits to Staff. There are challenges to local sourcing, and it’s important to anticipate and communicate expectations around these challenges to the procurement and kitchen staff. This new model requires some extra effort, so make sure to communicate to all staff and management that we all understand the extra challenges, and in light of the host of benefits – consider it a worthwhile investment. Challenges may include: additional time to work with another distributor, different delivery schedule, less consistent sizing, varying colors, processing time, and additional communication time with local growers. Benefits of local sourcing include: increased student and teacher participation and satisfaction, healthier and tastier meals, community investment in small family farms, and even sometimes district or media attention.

Things to Keep in Mind When Talking with Frustrated Parents:

• Remember the things you have in common: You all care about kids, you care about their health and wellbeing, and want to see them eating nutritious foods.

• Most parents have little knowledge of the complexities of school lunch programs and the long list of regulations and budget pressures you deal with. Have a ready made script to inform them of the challenges you face, but also brainstorm some meaningful suggestions on how they could help you.

• Sometimes the most vocal and frustrated parent can turn into your greatest ally and supporter. Harness their energy and passion to assist you in making changes to your meal program. Parents can help research produce availability from local farms, and act as cafeteria monitors to help out during the lunch rush or train students on using a new salad bar.

• Sometimes interacting with frustrated parents can be very challenging, but if you already have brainstormed some ways parents can feel involved and have their voices heard, then working collaboratively on mutual goals is much easier and can really benefit your meal program.
3) Be Flexible. This is Different. While communicating your essential expectations is recommended, it is also important to consider which conventions you can live without. For instance, while you may be used to having all your peaches the same exact size, is that really necessary for all your recipes? Many small farms don’t have the machines, yields, time, or pesticide-intensity that are used to create that uniformity of size and color. So remaining flexible with sizing and coloring can be a huge help to working with local farmers.

4) Educate! Build the tangible connection between local farmers and your school community by taking the opportunity to educate your student body, and connect with teachers who are teaching students about food and farming in their school garden or classroom. Often as food service makes changes students and staff need to know the reasons why. Connecting your menu changes with a nutrition and food education program like Harvest of the Month greatly increases the chances of success (see page 7 more information). These programs help expand students’ pallets and prepare them to try the new produce offerings you are putting on the menu. Reinforce these concepts by posting colorful fruit and veggie posters and pictures of farms and farmers in the cafeteria, and label the local produce on your salad bar or lunch line to forge the connection between the cafeteria and classroom.

AND REMEMBER: IT’S NOT ALL ON YOUR SHOULDERS!

The most important piece of advice we can give you is to build a Farm to School team. Farm to School programs can involve a lot of people, from students to teachers to custodians to parents. To create a sustainable project, you’ll need to invite participation (and help!) from a diverse group of school staff and community members:

- **Teachers** prepare their students to eat new fruits and vegetables on the school menu by: educating their students about healthy eating using school gardens, nutrition education, and farm field trips.

- **Parents** can be great allies and volunteer their time to help run healthy fundraisers, volunteer to lead nutrition education lessons in classrooms, and act as liaisons with teachers.

- **School Board and Wellness Committees** hold the power of shaping policies that support your Farm to School efforts, and can help you fulfill requirements of your district’s Wellness Policy.

- **Community Organizations and Farm to School Programs** are here to help with the logistics of fresh produce purchasing, and to provide education to students about healthy eating and their local farming community.
STEP THREE: REAPING THE REWARDS
Once you’ve nurtured a Farm to School program, be sure you harvest the fruits of your labor!

1) Track results. Analyze your meal participation rates for increases and note changes in student consumption of fruits and vegetables. Has putting more fresh and local produce on your menu resulted in reduced food waste by students? Make sure to capture and record staff and student enthusiasm for the program. Have a parent or teacher take photos of students eating from the salad bar, and happily munching on local fruit or a piece of broccoli.

2) Promote your program! Present your results, accomplishments and pictures of happy kids to your School Wellness Committee, PTA, School Board, and local media. Everyone wants to see students making healthy choices, so share and celebrate your successes!

3) Plan for next year. Once you have implemented and tracked your program, review how the year went, and set goals for next year. Maybe you can increase the amount of produce purchased from local farms? Maybe you can highlight a local fruit or vegetable on your menu twice a month, instead of just once?

OTHER GREAT FARM TO SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR FOOD SERVICE

CAFF has created many guides and publications. You can find these resources and more at www.caff.org:

- Food Service Guide to Handling Harvest of the Month Produce
- Tips for Institutional Buyers
- Companion Farm to School Field Guides for:
  - Parents and Community members
  - Teachers
  - School Boards and Administration

Other resources include:

- Glynwood Center’s “A Guide To Serving Local Food on Your Menu” - www.glynwood.org
- Re-thinking School Lunch Guide - www.centerforecoliteracy.org
- The National Farm to School web site - www.farmtoschool.org/publications for great how-to’s and case studies from other farm to school purchasing programs
## What's in Season in California?

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## Spotlight on Harvest of the Month:

One simple way to introduce food and farming lessons to kids is through a **Harvest of the Month program**. Harvest of the Month is a statewide program offering free educational resources to teachers, parents and food service staff that highlights a certain California fruit or vegetable each month. Visit [www.harvestofthemonth.com](http://www.harvestofthemonth.com) for more information and to get free resources.

**Harvest of the Month Programs** offer the perfect opportunity to merge food and farming education happening in the classroom, to new local produce offerings appearing in the cafeteria. Ask if teachers are using this free curriculum and try to coordinate with what students are learning about in their classrooms by featuring the produce item on a Harvest of the Month salad bar one time each month. If no schools or teachers in your district are utilizing this great free standards linked curriculum, propose implementing the program on a school-by-school or district level. Note changes in student behavior by tracking their consumption of your offerings before and after the program.

In certain locations, CAFF offers its own Harvest of the Month Tasting Kits for classrooms that feature a fresh, locally grown fruit or vegetable each month—and includes more suggestions for easy classroom activities, recipes and farm profiles. Contact harvestofthemonth@caff.org to see if the program is in your area.
Contact:

School Garden Coordinators
Names: Contact:

Champion Teachers
Names/Grades: Contact:

PTA/PTO Allies
Name: Contact:

Other Fired Up Parents and Community Members
Name: Contact:

Community Alliance with Family Farmers advocates for California family farmers and sustainable agriculture. CAFF’s Farm to School Initiative and the Buy Fresh Buy Local Campaign connect communities with local food and farming. CAFF is located across California, with offices in Berkeley, Davis, Watsonville, Ventura, Humboldt and Sunnyvale. For more information about CAFF’s programs, please visit www.caff.org.

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