

Title: Scaling Up Farm to School in New York State through Extension Educator Leadership

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Project Goal:

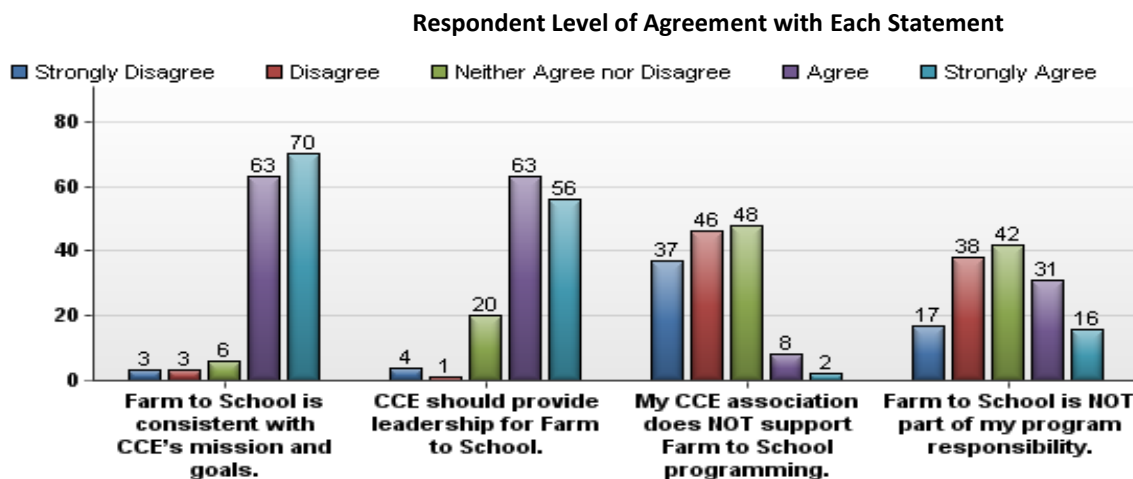
Our goal was to identify ways for Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) to effectively replicate, scale-up and strengthen existing Farm to School (FTS) programming across New York State, and to provide training, technical assistance and resources to support CCE's FTS efforts. FTS programs connect students with agriculture by serving local foods in school meals and involving students in school gardening, farm visits, special local harvest events and classroom or lunchroom nutrition education.

In 2012, we developed an on-line survey to learn about CCE's involvement in FTS, identify challenges to involvement and needs for training, technical assistance and resources to support Farm to School efforts. The survey was distributed electronically through listserves used to communicate with county and regional CCE executive directors of county offices and personnel with responsibilities in agriculture, nutrition and 4-H.

Survey Results:

Respondents: Of 511 unique individuals invited to take the survey 131 (25.6%) completed; and another 24 started it. Nearly half of the respondents had worked for Cooperative Extension for more than 10 years. Respondents had primary or secondary work responsibilities in all off CCE's five broad program areas: Agriculture and Food Systems , Children, Youth, & Families, Nutrition & Health, Community & Economic Vitality, and Environment and Natural Resources.

Alignment of FTS with CCE Mission and Goals: Most respondents (n=144) strongly agreed /agreed that "FTS is consistent with CCE's mission and goals (93.0%)," and "CCE should provide leadership for FTS (82.6%)." There was less agreement that CCE currently provides such leadership, as shown in the following graph.



Past-Year Involvement with FTS: Asked to indicate frequency of past-year involvement with 14 listed FTS activities, the number/percent of respondents (n=140) involved one or more times with each is shown below.

- 63 (40.7%) fostering FTS stakeholder relationships
- 56 (36.1%) establishing/sustaining school gardens
- 53 (34.2%) training/technically assisting teachers
- 49 (31.7%) attending FTS meetings/conferences
- 46 (29.6%) training/technically assisting farmers
- 44 (28.4%) conducting nutrition education with local foods in schools
- 44 (28.4%) organizing/participating in farm trips for students
- 42 (27.1%) organizing/participating in local food events for students
- 35 (22.5%) assisting schools procure local food

- 33 (21.3%) conducting school cooking/tasting with local foods
- 27 (17.4%) developing local food distribution systems/processing facilities
- 22 (14.2%) training/technically assisting food service personnel
- 20 (12.9%) organizing FTS meetings/conferences
- 14 (9.0%) developing FTS-related policies
- 9 (6.4%) other: Agriculture in the Classroom (2); applying for FTS grants (3); gardening (3); supervision (1)

Perceived Benefits of FTS: Almost all respondents (n=144) strongly agreed/agreed that FTS can: build awareness about agriculture and food systems (97.9%); strengthen local communities; support local economies (93.6%); and promote the NYS agriculture system (93.6%). Over three-quarters of respondents also strongly agreed/agreed that FTS can enhance the health of school children (84.9%) and be profitable for farmers (76.3%). Only about half strongly agreed/agreed that FTS can be cost-effective for schools (53.6%).

Role for CCE in Overcoming Potential Challenges to FTS: Presented with a list of potential challenges to scaling up FTS, respondents indicated whether CCE should play a role in overcoming, and personal confidence in addressing each one, as shown in the following table. (For each challenge, at least a quarter of respondents who thought CCE should play a role in addressing it also indicated that they were personally “not at all” prepared to address it (data not shown)).

CCE Role in Addressing Potential FTS Challenges & Confidence to Address Challenges						
Potential Challenges to Scaling Up FTS	Should CCE play a role in overcoming this challenge?			How confident do you feel to address this challenge?		
	Should	Should not	No opinion	Very	Somewhat	Not at all
Limited school administrator support (130)	110 (84.6)	6 (4.6)	14 (10.8)	20 (15.5)	63 (48.8)	46 (35.7)
Limited farmer interest (132)	108 (81.8)	3 (2.3)	21 (15.9)	19 (14.5)	69 (52.7)	43 (32.8)
Limited school food service interest (132)	101 (76.5)	12 (9.1)	19 (14.4)	17 (13.0)	62 (47.3)	52 (39.7)
Lack of seasonality in school menus (130)	89 (68.5)	19 (14.6)	22 (16.9)	14 (10.9)	59 (46.1)	55 (43.0)
Lack of school food service skills (130)	88 (67.7)	22 (16.9)	20 (15.4)	20 (15.5)	40 (31.0)	69 (53.5)
Limited/no policies supporting school use of local foods (131)	88 (67.2)	19 (14.5)	24 (18.3)	18 (14.2)	46 (36.2)	63 (49.6)
Mismatch between whole local foods & forms schools want/need (131)	76 (58.0)	26 (19.8)	29 (22.1)	7 (5.4)	52 (40.0)	71 (54.6)
Inadequate local distribution/ delivery channels (130)	68 (52.3)	25 (19.2)	37 (28.5)	12 (9.4)	43 (33.6)	73 (57.0)
Insufficient school funding for FTS (131)	55 (42.0)	42 (32.1)	34 (26.0)	8 (6.3)	43 (33.9)	76 (59.8)
Inadequate school equipment/facilities to prepare / use local foods (130)	40 (30.8)	46 (35.4)	44 (33.8)	10 (7.8)	27 (20.9)	92 (71.3)
Fluctuation in local foods costs (130)	28 (21.5)	55 (42.3)	47 (36.2)	5 (3.9)	25 (19.5)	98 (76.6)

Interest in Learning More about FTS: Given a list of 12 FTS topics, respondents were asked to rank up to five of interest. The total number of times/percent each topic was ranked by respondents (n=121) is shown below.

- 70/ 57.9% Integrating FTS content into existing CCE programs
- 67/ 54.5% Building supportive FTS partnerships with farmers, school representatives, parents, etc.
- 64/ 52.9% Planning, initiating and sustaining FTS programs
- 54/ 44.6% Potential funding sources for FTS programs
- 50/ 41.3% Creating educational farm field trips and events for schools
- 44/ 36.4% Starting and/or sustaining school gardens
- 47/ 38.8% Local food procurement strategies
- 37/ 30.6% Realities and constraints of school food service

- 35/ 28.9% Conducting local food cooking/tastings in schools
- 31/ 25/6% Safe handling practices for local foods
- 28/ 23.1% Realities and constraints of farm businesses
- 25/ 20.7% Evaluating FTS programs

When asked to select up to three out of six potential FTS resources, those chosen as most useful were: descriptions of successful NYS FTS programs (66.8%); FTS funding sources (59.6%); sample school menus maximizing use of local foods (51.7%); primer on local food purchasing policies/procedures (45.6%); NY crops and value-added products served in school meals (41.2%); and harvest calendar showing local/seasonal availability (22.8%).

Summary:

Survey results support the premise that with additional training, technical support and resources CCE professionals, who are variously involved with FTS, would be well positioned to replicate, scale-up and strengthen FTS programming across NYS. Most respondents agreed that FTS is aligned with CCE’s mission and program areas, CCE should provide FTS leadership, and there are many potential benefits associated with FTS programs for communities, farmers and children. There was less agreement that CCE associations currently support FTS programming or that FTS programming is part of a respondent’s program responsibility. Interestingly, the potential benefit with which respondents were least likely to agree is “FTS can be cost-effective for schools,” highlighting a concern that local food may be too costly for schools.

Respondents had been variously involved with FTS, most often fostering FTS stakeholder relationships, establishing/sustaining school gardens, and training and technically assisting teachers; least often with training and technically assisting school food service personnel, organizing FTS meetings or conferences, and developing FTS-related policies. Respondents also indicated that CCE should play a role in addressing a wide array of potential challenges to FTS programming, including “limited/no policies for supporting school use of local foods.” Yet less than 10% of respondents indicated past-year involvement with developing FTS-related policies. Furthermore, at least a quarter of respondents who thought CCE should play a role in addressing a particular challenge also indicated that they were personally “not at all” prepared to address it. This suggests a need for more training, technical assistance, and resources – a view that was also confirmed by respondents’ expressed interest in learning more about specific FTS topics.