



Community  
Food  
Security  
Coalition



**STRENGTHENING  
FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAMS**  
A POLICY BRIEF FOR STATE & LOCAL LEGISLATORS

A publication of the Community Food Security Coalition | [www.foodsecurity.org](http://www.foodsecurity.org) | [info@foodsecurity.org](mailto:info@foodsecurity.org) | 503.954.2970

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Community Food Security Coalition is a leader in the field of community food systems. We build the capacity and connections of our members, and implement programs and policy change efforts to strengthen and accelerate the food justice movement. To learn more about our work visit our website or contact us.

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The National Farm to School Network envisions a nation in which Farm to School programs are an essential component of strong and just local and regional food systems, ensuring the health of all school children, farms, the environment, economy and communities. It supports the implementation of Farm to School in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

[www.farmtoschool.org](http://www.farmtoschool.org)

## INTRODUCTION

Farm to School programs are strengthening communities by serving healthy meals made with local and regional food in school cafeterias, creating economic development opportunities for farmers by connecting them with school cafeterias, and teaching school children about agriculture, health and nutrition through school gardens and experiential education. Farm to School programs have exploded across the U.S. in the last decade. In 2001, there were just six documented Farm to School programs. By 2004, this number had grown to 400, and today there are more than 2,350 documented programs. The first Farm to School legislation at the state level was passed in 2001 and, today, 36 jurisdictions have passed a total of 74 pieces of legislation supporting Farm to School.

This policy brief provides an overview of the benefits of Farm to School programs, as well as the history of the development of local and state Farm to School programs and legislation. This brief also illustrates the current landscape of national and state Farm to School legislation and shares information about important initiatives and agencies that support Farm to School programs. Finally, this brief outlines five specific recommendations about the types of legislation lawmakers could introduce to support local and state Farm to School programs. These recommendations include Farm to School legislation that:

1. Provides incentives and allows food service directors and/or school nutrition directors to purchase more local, regional and in-state food
2. Brings together diverse individuals and organizations from agriculture, public health, education and community development to form a Farm to School network, advisory board, task force or working group
3. Establishes a designated Farm to School day or week within the National Farm to School Month
4. Establishes an official, state Farm to School program in a state department of agriculture, education, public health or cooperative extension service
5. Creates a Farm to School grant program to fund Farm to School pilot projects, needed infrastructure, school gardens, experiential education programs or the purchasing of more local and regional healthy foods

Recommendations one through four can be achieved at no or minimal cost to the state or locality, while still strengthening schools' ability to purchase more food from local and regional farms. When exploring which types of legislation to introduce, it's important to understand where the state or locality is within the process of developing Farm to School programs, and what is needed, given

the level of progress. Although we recommend legislation as the best way to institutionalize Farm to School, we understand it may not always be appropriate.

The purpose of this policy brief is to provide local and state lawmakers with specific examples and recommendations for Farm to School legislation, as well as provide detailed information about the significant role it can play in addressing problems related to child health and wellness and agricultural viability. This document is not intended to provide a comprehensive overview of every Farm to School policy or piece of legislation; rather it is designed to provide examples of successful policies and legislation. It is also intended to provide information about additional resources for further exploration on the development of Farm to School legislation.

## FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAMS ARE SPREADING

Farm to School programs connect schools (K–12) and local farms in order to:

- Serve healthy meals in school cafeterias
- Improve student nutrition
- Provide opportunities for experiential education in agriculture, health and nutrition
- Support local and regional farmers<sup>1</sup>

The benefits of Farm to School programs are many:

- The creation of local and regional jobs
- Positive impact on community and farm economies
- Greater access to healthy foods
- Increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables
- Experiential education programs that teach students about the origins of food

Since the inception of the first Farm to School program more than a decade ago, they have grown to include more than 2,350 local programs involving approximately 10,000 schools across all 50 states and the District of Columbia.<sup>1</sup> These programs are supported by many diverse entities including schools, nonprofit organizations, colleges and universities, state agencies and other community-based organizations. Activities in these programs include buying local food for school cafeterias, planting school gardens, and in-class and on-farm educational learning opportunities.

## GROWING U.S. CHALLENGES: THE LANDSCAPE OF FARM TO SCHOOL

Across the United States, growing agricultural viability and public health concerns have sparked numerous individuals and organizations to examine and question today's global food system.

### AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AND VIABILITY

- Between 2002 and 2007, the U.S. lost 16.2 million acres of farmland.<sup>ii</sup>
- Today, farms in the U.S. are only receiving approximately 16 cents of every dollar spent on food.<sup>iii</sup>
- According to the 2007 U.S. Census of Agriculture, the largest farms in the U.S. (those grossing more than \$250,000 per year) account for only 9.5 percent of all U.S. farms, but are capturing 85 percent of the total gross U.S. farm income. In contrast, small and medium farms (those grossing less than \$250,000 per year) account for 90.5 percent of all farms, are only capturing 15 percent of the market, and only earn an average \$22,715 per year in sales.<sup>iv</sup>
- According to the 2007 U.S. Census of Agriculture, the total value of agricultural products sold directly to individuals for human consumption represents only 0.4 percent of U.S. agricultural production output.<sup>v</sup>

### PUBLIC HEALTH AND CHILDHOOD OBESITY

- One in every three U.S. children (31.7%) age 2–19 is overweight or obese; and one third of all U.S. children born in the year 2000 are expected to develop diabetes during their lifetimes.<sup>iv,v</sup>
- Almost 60 percent of American children age 5–18 participate in the National School Lunch Program at least once per week and almost half of all lunches served are provided free to students, with an additional 10 percent provided at reduced prices.<sup>vi</sup>
- More than one quarter of all Americans age 17–24 are unqualified for military service because they are too heavy.<sup>vii</sup>

In 2006, researchers at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Service found that for Americans to meet the national fruit, vegetable and whole-grain daily dietary recommendations, domestic crop acreage would need to increase by an estimated 7.4 million harvested acres. Additionally, Americans would need to increase daily fruit consumption by 132 percent, increase daily vegetable consumption by 31 percent, and increase daily milk consumption by 66 percent. The mix of vegetables consumed would also need to change in order to meet the national recommendations. Furthermore, to meet the dietary recommendations, Americans would need to increase their daily consumption of whole grains by an estimated 248 percent and reduce their consumption of total grains by approximately 27 percent.<sup>viii</sup>

“Everything is right about Farm to School: healthy fresh food, enhanced economic opportunity for farmers, and education for children about where food comes from. That’s a trifecta!”

Kathleen Merrigan, Deputy Secretary,  
U.S. Department of Agriculture

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To help address these growing agricultural and public health challenges, America's rural and urban communities are cultivating new and innovative ways to strengthen local and regional food systems. Communities are creating local and regional food systems that cultivate community food security and improve agricultural profitability. Farm to School programs are leading the way to a healthier nation by creating increased economic opportunities for local and regional farmers, greater access to fresh and healthy foods for children, and promoting a greater understanding of agriculture and healthy nutrition for all those involved.

## THE GROWTH OF FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAMS THROUGH STATE LEGISLATION

### ORIGINAL FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Farm to School programs have been occurring at a small scale in some form for decades; however, the concept first began to emerge in the 1990s from the work of two different individuals and programs.<sup>ix</sup> The first was an initiative, started by a USDA consultant in Florida, designed to support underserved minority farmers by establishing school districts as a potential market source for certain crops. Through this initiative, developed by the New North Florida Cooperative, low-income farmers began selling collard greens and sweet potatoes to a low-income school district in Florida in 1995. Today, the program consists of 60 to 100 farmers based in Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Arkansas and serves more than a million students in 72 school districts.<sup>x</sup>

The second initiative, launched as a pilot at a low-income school in the Santa Monica–Malibu Unified school district in California, focused on connecting a local-area farmers' market to school cafeterias through a fruit and vegetable salad bar. This option, offered in place of the standard hot meal during school lunch, was enormously successful, and was expanded to every school in the district by the third year of operation.<sup>xi,xii</sup> The Santa Monica program received a number of awards and emerged as the standard for this new movement known as Farm to School. From these beginnings,

Farm to School programs quickly spread across the U.S. However, as more and more schools and communities began to explore Farm to School alternatives, individuals started to run into policy barriers preventing them from buying local and regional food for their cafeterias. Because many of these barriers were situated at the federal and state levels, such as procurement specifications and lack of sufficient funds, securing policy changes became a top priority. State governments took the lead in passing legislation to remove these barriers and improve schools' ability to source food from local and regional farmers.

### SECURING STATE POLICY CHANGES

The first two pieces of state-enacted Farm to School legislation were adopted in 2001 in California and New Mexico.<sup>xiii</sup> In California, Senate Bill 19 (2001) increased the per-meal reimbursement a school receives for free and reduced-price meals and permitted school districts to convene a Child Nutrition and Physical Activity Advisory Committee. The committee was encouraged to increase the availability of organic produce, establish school gardens and collaborate with local farmers' markets. This policy addressed funding needs, as well as provided guidance to schools about how to source local produce. In New Mexico, House Joint Memorial 34 (2001) requested the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Education to collaborate and evaluate opportunities for public schools to use New Mexican agricultural products in preparing school meals, providing the opportunity for state governments to research how to make local purchasing work within federal regulations.

These pieces of legislation have varied from place-to-place and evolved during the past decade as the barriers to creating successful Farm to School programs have changed. Many early state policies focused on creating taskforces, councils or working groups to develop state Farm to School programs, or on providing the authority to use a geographic preference at the state level (e.g., requesting New York apples) to help give local and regional sourcing an advantage. As these barriers were eliminated, state policy development shifted to focus more on project implementation and support.

### FARM TO SCHOOL POLICY CATEGORIES

There has never been a one-size-fits-all approach to state Farm to School legislation, but many policies tend to fit into several categories:

- Farm to School task forces, councils and work groups: Legislation that establishes a task force, working group, or intra-agency council to implement and assess Farm to School programs; or directs state agencies to collect data and make recommendations. At least nine jurisdictions have passed this type of legislation. For example, in Wisconsin, legislation created a Farm to School council to advise the

Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, a full-time Wisconsin Farm to School coordinator position, and a Wisconsin Farm to School grant program to support school districts, nonprofit organizations and other community groups in order to create and expand Farm to School programs.

- Farm to School promotional events and directories: Legislation that establishes a state promotion program or event that promotes local agriculture and foods to children, or directs state agencies to establish a website or list of participating schools and producers to facilitate local procurement. At least 12 states have implemented this type of legislation. Examples include Maryland's "Jane Lawton Farm to School Program," which establishes Farm to School in the Department of Agriculture to promote the sale of Maryland-grown farm products to schools, or the "New York Harvest for New York Kids Week," where cafeterias feature New York farm products, classrooms have food-tastings, students visit farms and farmers' markets, or harvest their school gardens.
- Farm to School project implementation: Legislation that establishes a state Farm to School program and provides support from local and state government agencies. Fifteen states have implemented this type of legislation. In North Carolina, this legislation establishes a position in the Department of Agriculture dedicated to the administration of the state Farm to School program.

## CASE STUDIES:

### ALASKA

Due to the challenges of utilizing produce harvested in the state, Representative Carl Gatto introduced House Bill 70 into the Alaska State Legislature in January 2009, officially creating the Alaska Farm to School Program. Passed in May 2010, this bill initiated a permanent, full-time position in the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Agriculture and directed this individual to develop the Alaska Farm to School Program ([http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag\\_FTS.htm](http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag_FTS.htm)) by connecting Alaska farmers with public school cafeterias, creating school gardens, school farms and conducting farm visits.

Since the passage of House Bill 70, the Alaska Farm to School Program has completed two Farm to School summits, bringing together more than 100 different stakeholders who provided valuable input to the program and creation of an Alaska Farm to School strategic plan. The Alaska Division of Agriculture has also funded 17 local Farm to School projects through a mini-grant program designed to fund projects that connect more local and regional food to public school cafeterias, develop school gardens, and implement nutrition and agriculture education through taste tests. During this time, the Alaska Farm to School program also conducted three farm tours with the three largest school districts, visiting five diverse farms around Anchorage, Fairbanks and the Delta regions of Alaska.

Having a state-funded Farm to School coordinator was critical to the Alaska Farm to School Program's success. Alaska continues to play an active and **leading role within the National Farm to School Network and movement.**

### WASHINGTON, D.C.

In December of 2009, Mary Cheh, D.C. Councilmember, and now-mayor Vincent Gray, D.C. Councilmember at the time, introduced the Healthy Schools Act in an effort to improve child health and wellness. In May of 2010, the bill passed unanimously by the council and was signed by then-mayor Adrian Fenty, effective for the 2010-2011 school year.

The Healthy Schools Act requires D.C. schools to meet USDA Healthier U.S. Gold Standards for nutrition in school meals and to serve minimally processed foods from sustainable, local growers whenever possible. The legislation also creates an extra five-cent reimbursement for meals that include locally grown and unprocessed foods and a 10-cent reimbursement for meals that meet the updated nutrition requirements. Schools are required to promote local and sustainable foods, educate students and staff about eating them and participate in at least one Farm to School educational event each year (e.g., Farm to School Week). The Healthy Schools Act requires schools to be held accountable to their local wellness policies, which should include a Farm to School component. Finally, the Healthy Schools Act establishes a school garden grant program within the state education agency. To pay for the new provisions in the Healthy Schools Act, specifically the increase in reimbursement for school meals, the legislation extended the D.C. sales tax to include soda purchased within the district.

Many community partnerships were formed among the D.C. Farm to School Network (<http://dcfarmtoschool.org>), teachers, parents, farmers, food service, environmental organizations, farmers' market directors, and health advocates during this legislative process. These partnerships proved essential when advocates had to go head-to-head with the soda industry to keep this revenue stream, and then again to defend funding for the act from budget cuts across the district in 2010.

- **Farm to School pilot program implementation:** Legislation that establishes a temporary pilot program for Farm to School activities in school districts. At least three states have enacted this category of Farm to School legislation. In Vermont, this legislation directs the Commissioner of Education, the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets, and the Secretary of Human Services to work with the congressional delegation to develop a pilot program to test the feasibility of centralized statewide purchasing of milk and meat for school meals and to offer technical assistance to schools regarding the use of local foods.
- **Grant programs to support Farm to School activities:** Legislation that authorizes grants for implementation of Farm to School programs. At least eight jurisdictions have authorized a Farm to School grant program. In Illinois, legislation created the Farm Fresh Schools Program within the Department of Agriculture and established a competitive grant program for the implementation of Farm to School programs.
- **Funds for additional reimbursements to purchase local and regionally produced foods:** Legislation that allows schools to receive additional reimbursement money for serving local food in meals. California's Fresh Start Pilot Program encourages and supports schools to provide additional portions of fresh fruit and vegetables in the School Breakfast Program. California was the first in the nation to earmark state funds with the hopes of increasing the consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables in a school food program.
- **Local food preference authorization:** Legislation that encourages state organizations, agencies and schools to use local produce by allowing purchasing preferences for state-produced agricultural products. At least 15 states have pursued and implemented this type of policy. This legislation has now been extended nationwide with the implementation of the geographic preference rule through the 2008 Farm Bill.

A variety of other categories of Farm to School policies exist, primarily related to wellness, food security policy, and broader economic policy and goal setting.

For a complete state-by-state listing of all state enacted Farm to School legislation, visit the National Farm to School Network website: <http://www.farmentoschool.org>.

## CASE STUDY:

### COMMUNITIES PUTTING PREVENTION TO WORK SUCCESS: WISCONSIN

By strengthening local and state Farm to School programs, Wisconsin is addressing growing concerns about public health related to childhood obesity and diabetes, and stimulating rural and agricultural economies by supporting small and medium farms. With support from a Communities Putting Prevention to Work (CPPW) grant, diverse stakeholders, including teachers, farmers, public health advocates, and community-based educators are promoting more physical activity, greater health and nutrition, and economic development in La Crosse and Wood Counties, and across Wisconsin.

Organizations and individuals are also updating school wellness policies to include Farm to School goals, encouraging healthy vending options, and organizing more physical activity opportunities for youth and the community at-large. At the state level, CPPW funding has provided for training and technical assistance across the state, including the completion of two web-based Farm to School toolkits specifically targeting school nutrition directors and producers with the tools, resources, and strategies to successfully purchase and market local and regional foods. With CPPW support, Wisconsin is able to direct expertise and resources to support, develop and evaluate its Farm to School programs in hopes of changing state policy to include funding for Farm to School.

## HISTORY OF THE FARM TO SCHOOL MOVEMENT

### NATIONAL FARM TO SCHOOL POLICY CHANGES

As states were advancing policy change around increasing nutritional standards in schools, the federal government began to notice and take some of its own steps forward. In the summer of 1997, the USDA developed the Small Farms/School Meals Initiative (popularly called the “Farm to School” initiative) which had two goals: (1) encourage small farmers to sell fresh fruits and vegetables to schools, and (2) encourage schools to buy this wholesome produce from small farmers.<sup>xiv</sup>

With an emerging national emphasis on connecting local farms to school cafeterias, there was an increased growth in the number of local Farm to School programs. According to the National Farm to School Network, there were just six Farm to School programs documented in 2001, but by 2004, 400 were documented, and by 2011 there were more than 2,350 programs.<sup>1</sup> As individuals working to create these programs pursued state policy changes to further reduce barriers, advocates and the federal government took notice and began to explore similar policy changes at the federal level. National policies have helped to ensure all states have an equal opportunity to develop local Farm to School programs.

One example of such a policy change is geographic preference. The 2008 Farm Bill (Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008) amended the National School Lunch Act to allow institutions receiving funds through child nutrition programs to apply a geographic preference when procuring unprocessed locally grown or locally raised agricultural products. Prior to 2008, according to federal guidelines, a food service director could not specify that s/he wanted a New York apple when sourcing fruit for a school lunch. All federal child nutrition programs, as well as the Department of Defense’s Fresh Program, may now apply a geographic preference to agricultural products. The final rule, published in April 2011, allows for each institution to determine how to define the local geographic area, and allows food service directors to spend a little more on local foods if desired, rather than requiring them to go with the lowest bid.

### FEDERAL FARM TO SCHOOL GRANT PROGRAM

Recognizing that another significant barrier to establishing sustainable Farm to School programs was start-up costs, advocates pursued the creation of a federal Farm to School grant program. This grant program was meant to serve as a national pot of money that all states could apply for to support the establishment of effective relationships among school food service personnel, distributors, farmers and growers, establishment of school gardens, purchases of appropriate school kitchen or on-farm processing equipment, and training and education. Such a grant program was

authorized in the 2004 Child Nutrition Act reauthorization, but never received funding. As the 2010 Child Nutrition Act reauthorization approached, advocates were determined to get funding for this program. Largely due to the growth of the movement combined with national and state policy advances, including the creation of similar state-level grant programs, advocates were successful. On December 13, 2010, President Obama signed the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act into law, further strengthening Farm to School nationally. In this bill, several significant policies were enacted supporting Farm to School (Section 243), child nutrition and access to these important programs.

Section 243. Access to Local Foods: Farm to School Program requires the USDA to implement a national competitive grants program to foster and strengthen local Farm to School Programs. Beginning October 1, 2012, \$5 million will be available annually to provide grants, not to exceed \$100,000 each, to schools, state and local agencies, and Indian Tribal Organizations for Farm to School activities.

Simultaneously, the National Farm to School Network pursued the creation of a National Farm to School Month, similar to the promotional weeks and months that had been authorized in many states. In November of 2010, U.S. Representative Rush Holt of New Jersey championed a House Resolution (H. RES. 1655) establishing October as National Farm to School Month. The resolution highlighted the benefits of a Farm to School program recognizing it as and recognized it as an effective strategy to provide immediate and long-term benefits to child health, small and medium-sized agricultural producer income, and community economic development.<sup>xv</sup>

### NATIONAL SUPPORT FOR FARM TO SCHOOL INITIATIVE

The development of stronger national child nutrition standards and an emphasis on developing local food systems at USDA has increased public understanding of the need for Farm to School programs, which has sparked unprecedented growth of the Farm to School movement.

- In 2009, First Lady Michelle Obama launched *Let’s Move!*, a program which emphasizes kids’ connection to where their food comes from and promotes kids’ ability to eat healthier local food.<sup>xvi</sup>

“Supporting farm to school programs will increase the amount of produce available to cafeterias and help to support local farmers by establishing regular, institutional buyers. Many schools are using farm to school programs as an important component of nutrition education.”

Tom Vilsack, Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture

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- In 2009, the USDA launched its *Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food* initiative, which created the USDA Farm to School Team to support and provide resources to emerging Farm to School programs. The Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food initiative promotes healthy eating habits and agriculturally based community economic development through strengthening local and regional food systems. Visit the USDA Farm to School website at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/F2S>.<sup>xvii</sup>
  - In 2010, the White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity recommended to the president that the USDA should work to connect school meal programs to local growers, and use Farm to School programs where possible, to incorporate fresher, more appealing food in school meals.<sup>xviii</sup>
  - In 2010, a report released by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation listed supporting school gardens and Farm to School programs as one of three policy opportunities to improve nutrition in school meals.<sup>xviii</sup>
  - In 2011, the National Conference of State Legislators listed state Farm to School policies as one way to reverse the trend in childhood obesity, cultivate healthy community design and improve access to healthy food.<sup>xix</sup>

## IMPACT OF FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAMS

To date, 36 jurisdictions have implemented Farm to School legislation that has helped to nourish school children by cultivating healthy school lunches while simultaneously putting money directly into local farmers' pockets. It is important to recognize that all 50 states have the opportunity to support and implement Farm to School policies; at the very least, every state school lunch program can support October as National Farm to School Month.

There are many reasons why state lawmakers should support Farm to School programs and legislation. Farm to School programs help local and regional economies, promote greater access to healthy

foods for kids, and allow students to learn more about where their food comes from through experiential learning. In 2009, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention officially stated that setting up Farm to School programs, offering salad bars, and planting school gardens are strategies states can use to help schools address the issue of childhood obesity.<sup>xx</sup>

- Farm to School programs create jobs and help contribute to local and regional economic development and impact.
  - In the Burlington, Vermont, public school system, food service directors increased purchases of local produce from less than \$1,000 in 2003 to over \$10,000 in just two years. If all school food programs in Vermont purchased a comparable amount of local produce per meal, the result would be an overall increase of \$1 million per year in state sales.<sup>xxi</sup>
  - In Massachusetts, during 2008, 29 farms grossed over \$760,000 dollars in income. In 2010, 42 farms grossed over \$1.32 million dollars by selling food directly to schools and other institutions.<sup>xxii</sup>
  - A study of two local school districts in Oregon found that every dollar spent by school districts buying Oregon foods and supporting Farm to School leads to an additional 86 cents of spending in the state.<sup>xxiii</sup> And for each job created by purchasing local foods, the successive economic activity created another 1.43 jobs.
  - A study in Virginia found if 25-cents a day per student lunch could be devoted to purchasing locally grown Virginia farm products, a total of \$170,376 would be generated daily. On an annual basis, more than \$30.7 million dollars would be reinvested into Virginia communities and the economy.<sup>xxiv</sup>

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“The Farm to School program is a vital part of Delaware’s Department of Agriculture’s goal to sustain and improve the profitability of Delaware agriculture which provides thousands of jobs in Delaware and the region.”

Ed Kee, Delaware Secretary of Agriculture

“One of my top priorities for my second term was to get more local food into Kentucky schools. When Kentucky schools buy local, they buy the freshest foods at the peak of flavor and nutritional value. They also help family farmers make a living and stay on the farm.”

Richie Farmer, Kentucky Commissioner of Agriculture

- Farm to School programs promote greater access to healthy foods and increase children's consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables and other nutritious food, reducing their risk of obesity.
  - University researchers found that after a salad bar was introduced at three Los Angeles Unified School District elementary schools, there was a significant increase in frequency (2.97 to 4.09) of fruits and vegetables consumed among the children studied.<sup>xxv</sup>
  - In Minnesota, researchers found that significant proportions of adolescents reported that it was somewhat or very important that their food be locally grown (20.9%).<sup>xxvi</sup>
- Farm to School programs allow students to learn more about where their food comes from by participating in experiential teaching and learning programs.
  - University researchers evaluated the impact of a 17-week, in-school intervention on vegetable preferences, willingness to taste vegetables and nutrition knowledge among students from three California elementary schools. They found that, compared to the control group, post-test preference scores for carrots and broccoli were greater for the garden activities and nutrition-education group and nutrition-education-only group. At six months, the garden activities and nutrition-education group retained greater preferences for broccoli, snow peas, and zucchini.<sup>xxvii</sup>
  - Researchers evaluated the impact of a 12-week in-school intervention on fruit and vegetable intake among sixth-grade students from three southeast Idaho elementary schools and found that students participating in both the nutrition education and school garden experiences increased significantly their daily intake of fruits and vegetables from 1.9 to 4.5 servings.<sup>xxviii</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE AND LOCAL FARM TO SCHOOL LEGISLATION

Supporting local, state and regional Farm to School programs can take many forms. While related legislation has been enacted in 36 jurisdictions, Farm to School programs exist in all 50 states. Often, Farm to School legislation can create the network or teams of individuals and organizations needed to bring more local and regional food to school cafeterias, plant school gardens, or include experiential education into existing school curriculum.

Below are five recommendations that state and local lawmakers should consider when drafting Farm to School legislation. Recommendations one through four can be done at no or minimal cost to the state or locality while still strengthening schools' ability to purchase more food from local and regional farms. When introducing this legislation, it is important to talk with stakeholders who are already involved with Farm to School programs to get their recommendations and support. Dedicated advocates can provide information and enthusiasm allowing for smoother passage of the bill or resolution.

We recommend Farm to School legislation that:

1. Provides incentives and allows for food service directors and/or school nutrition directors to purchase more local, regional and in-state food
2. Brings together diverse individuals and organizations from agriculture, public health, education, and community development to form a Farm to School network, advisory board, task force or working group
3. Establishes a designated Farm to School day or week within the National Farm to School Month taking place each October
4. Establishes an official state Farm to School program in a state department of agriculture, education, public health or cooperative extension service
5. Creates a Farm to School grant program to fund Farm to School pilot projects, needed infrastructure, school gardens, experiential education programs, or the purchasing of more local and regional healthy foods

Implementing these legislative recommendations will help school food service directors purchase food from more local and regional farms and teach school-age children and youth about local agriculture and healthy nutrition.

## **PROVIDE INCENTIVES TO PURCHASE LOCAL, REGIONAL AND IN-STATE FOOD**

To help create incentives to purchase more local, regional and in-state food, we recommend local and state legislators increase the small-purchase threshold for school districts, allowing them to purchase food from one vendor in the amount of \$100,000 or less (the federal rule) without formal competitive bids. Raising the state small-purchase threshold for school food purchases removes an additional state-level obstacle that discourages schools from serving local foods in their programs.

We also recommend giving governmental bodies purchasing agricultural products for school food programs greater emphasis and incentives to purchase in-state products rather than out-of-state products. In Colorado, for example, House Bill 1307 (2005) allows governmental bodies purchasing agricultural products to purchase Colorado products before out-of-state products as long as the quality is equal, the Colorado producer is able to meet requested quantity, and the price is either lower than the lowest out of state bid, or “reasonably exceeds” the lowest bid.

Additionally, we recommend legislators implement policies that provide a tax credit for in-state producers selling to schools, establish a minimum percent of commodity funds that must be used to purchase local and regional food, or give direction to state procurement policy that mandates a minimum percent of local food purchases. In Rhode Island, Section 44-30-27 of the state tax code authorizes a Farm to School income tax credit that gives a five percent income tax credit to an individual or entity for the purchase of state-grown produce. The credit is also given for provision of food and services to a local education agency.

Furthermore, we recommend legislation that encourages new-school construction projects to consider kitchen facilities capable of producing fresh school meals made with local and regional foods and opportunities for hands-on learning in the planning process.

Finally, we also recommend enacting legislation that requires each local school district or division participating in the national school lunch program to report by January 1 of each year to the state Department of Education or state Department of Agriculture the types and amounts of in-state farm products purchased. One example of a state that requires such a reporting procedure is Maryland (House Bill 751, 2011). Enacting this type of legislation allows states to evaluate how much local Farm to School programs are contributing to the state agricultural economy.

## **CREATE A FARM TO SCHOOL ADVISORY BOARD, TASK FORCE, OR COUNCIL**

We recommend that local and state lawmakers enact legislation that brings together diverse individuals and organizations from

agriculture, public health, education and community development to form a Farm to School network, advisory board, task force, or council. By establishing legislation that creates partnerships around Farm to School, existing resources can be leveraged toward a common goal, such as buying more food for school lunches, creating a school garden, or taking school food service directors on farm visits to learn more about potential options for local food procurement.

Additionally, the focus of the work may include assessing or implementing Farm to School programs and making recommendations for future actions needed to create or improve them. These work groups have also explored ways Farm-to-School-related activities may be incorporated into existing school or state positions. Such councils have also explored external funding sources to support and strengthen Farm to School programs. In a few states, such as in Missouri and North Carolina, rather than creating a separate Farm to School workgroup or task force, Farm to School has been written into legislation that creates a state food policy council.

## **DESIGNATE AN OFFICIAL FARM TO SCHOOL DAY OR WEEK WITHIN THE NATIONAL FARM TO SCHOOL MONTH**

We recommend that local and state lawmakers enact legislation establishing a designated Farm to School day or week within the National Farm to School Month, which takes place each October. Establishing an official state Farm to School day or week gives farmers, schools, state agencies and communities an extra incentive to develop and promote local Farm to School programs. It also allows for those individuals involved with Farm to School to share in celebrating local, healthy food and better child health and nutrition. This directive can come from a variety of decision makers including the state legislature, governor, and secretary or commissioner of agriculture or education.

## **ESTABLISH A STATE-BASED FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAM IN A STATE AGENCY OR DEPARTMENT**

We recommend that local and state lawmakers enact legislation that establishes an official Farm to School program in a state department of agriculture, education, public health or cooperative extension service. Introducing and passing this legislation usually directs state agencies such as the department of agriculture or department of education to delegate resources to support Farm to School program development, marketing and evaluation. Through this type of legislation state agencies are often tasked with connecting farms, distributors and schools that are looking to buy, sell or distribute local and regional foods. For instance in Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Farm to School Program Act (2006) formally established the Oklahoma Farm to School Program and designated the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry as the lead agency.<sup>xxix</sup>

## **DEVELOP AND ADMINISTER A FARM TO SCHOOL GRANT PROGRAM**

We recommend that local and state lawmakers enact legislation creating a Farm to School grant program to fund Farm to School pilot projects, needed infrastructure, school gardens, experiential education programs, or the purchasing of more local and regional healthy foods. All valuable programs need a small amount of seed money to help them grow. Specific funding for these types of programs and projects allow for a small amount of money to be directly applied to supporting Farm to School programs. These funds allow schools and communities to strengthen the connection between the food grown and consumed in the region. They are often used to purchase needed school food equipment such as salad bars, stovetops, ovens, and extra pots, pans, and utensils. They can

also be used to compensate for school staff members' time when preparing local food or planting and maintaining a school garden.

## **CONSIDER YOUR CONTEXT WHEN DEVISING LEGISLATION**

When exploring which types of legislation to introduce, it's important to understand where your state or locality is within the process of developing Farm to School programs. Recommendations one through four may be best suited for states or localities that are in the process of developing Farm to School programs. Recommendation five may be better suited for states or localities that have already researched best Farm to School practices, developed programs, and are looking to further strengthen Farm to School. Although we recommend legislation as the best way to institutionalize Farm to School, we understand it may not be appropriate in every instance.

### *CASE STUDY:*

#### **WASHINGTON STATE**

The 2008 Local Farms–Healthy Kids Act was introduced in the Washington State Legislature by Representative Eric Pettigrew. Supporters included agricultural, environmental, education and child-welfare advocates. This legislation was designed to connect schools with community-based farms and provide the necessary information and technical assistance to both schools and farmers by establishing a Farm to School program in the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA). It also created the Washington Grown Fruits and Vegetables Program, and adapted government purchasing policies to help direct state dollars toward local farms and food sellers.

The Local Farms–Healthy Kids Act passed with only one dissenting vote and was signed into law by the Governor in March of 2008. The policy initially allocated funding for two and a half employees and the Washington Grown Fruit and Vegetables Program, however funding for one employee was eliminated before the program was initiated. Additionally, the fruit and vegetable program was cut by half after one year, and eliminated the following year.

In spite of these cuts, the WSDA Farm to School Program conducted statewide outreach to increase awareness of, and participation in, Farm to School and sought funding for additional projects. The WSDA team presented on Farm to School topics at more than 50 events, reaching an estimated 1,500 people. The WSDA Farm to School Program worked directly with more than 100 school districts and 50 farms to support successful Farm to School sales relationships.

Furthermore, the WSDA Farm to School team has worked with local groups in the state to support regional Farm to Cafeteria conferences and to respond to geographically specific needs. The team developed an innovative training model using mobile tours to provide an opportunity for farms and schools to see each other in action and learn about the realities of on-farm and school kitchen operations, including hands-on cooking training using local produce. These events use a peer-to-peer training model that empowers the farmers and food service staff to share their experience and expertise with one another. Mobile tours have been conducted in five locations around the state, with more planned for the future.

In 2009, WSDA partnered for the first time with the Washington School Nutrition Association on Taste Washington Day, an annual celebration of Washington grown foods served in school meals. The WSDA has been awarded over \$700,000 in externally funded grants to enhance the WSDA Farm to School Program, and has assisted numerous organizations in garnering an additional \$659,000 in grants to support related efforts throughout the state. State funding for the WSDA Farm to School Program was eliminated in 2011, although the team will continue working on grant-funded Farm to School projects during the next couple of years. These projects include critical training on regulatory requirements for bidding and contracting, food safety education and assistance for farms and schools, and continued development of a web-based resource toolkit for Farm to School. ([www.wafarmtoschool.org](http://www.wafarmtoschool.org)).

## FARM TO SCHOOL RESOURCES

Statistics and other informational fact sheets may be helpful when trying to develop Farm to School legislation. Below are website links to a few resources, agencies and organizations that house this type of information.

### **CDC National Center for Health Statistics**

<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs>

### **Community Food Security Coalition**

<http://www.foodsecurity.org>

### **ERS Food Environment Atlas**

<http://www.ers.usda.gov/foodatlas>

### **Food Research and Action Center**

<http://frac.org>

### **National Agricultural Law Center**

<http://www.nationalaglawcenter.org>

### **National Farm to School Network**

<http://www.farmentoschool.org>

### **National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition**

<http://sustainableagriculture.net>

### **School Food Focus**

<http://www.schoolfoodfocus.org>

### **The Food Trust**

<http://www.thefoodtrust.org>

### **U.S. Census Bureau**

<http://www.census.gov>

### **USDA Farm to School**

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/f2s>

### **USDA–NASS–Census of Agriculture**

<http://www.agcensus.usda.gov>

### **USDA National Agricultural Library–Farm to School**

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/srb1102.shtml>

### **USDA National School Lunch Program**

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/lunch>

## FARM TO SCHOOL PUBLICATIONS

Below are a few publications and resources that may be helpful when exploring Farm to School legislation.

### **Bearing Fruit: Farm to School Program Evaluation Resources & Recommendations**

*Anupama Joshi & Andrea Misako Azuma*

<http://www.farmentoschool.org/publications.php?pt=eval>

### **Delivering More: Scaling Up Farm to School Programs**

*Kristen Markley, Marion Kalb, & Loren Gustafson*

[http://foodsecurity.org/pub/Delivering\\_More-Scaling\\_up\\_Farm\\_to\\_School.pdf](http://foodsecurity.org/pub/Delivering_More-Scaling_up_Farm_to_School.pdf)

### **Farm to School Policy: A State-by-State Listing**

*National Farm to School Network*

[http://www.farmentoschool.org/files/publications\\_177.pdf](http://www.farmentoschool.org/files/publications_177.pdf)

### **Healthy Farms, Healthy Kids: Evaluating the Barriers and Opportunities for Farm-to-School Programs**

*Andrea Misako Azuma & Andrew Fisher*

<http://foodsecurity.org/pub/HealthyFarmsHealthyKids.pdf>

### **Nourishing the Nation One Tray at a Time**

*Community Food Security Coalition, National Farm to School Network, & School Food Focus*

[http://www.farmentoschool.org/files/publications\\_192.pdf](http://www.farmentoschool.org/files/publications_192.pdf)

### **What Can the USDA Do?**

*Community Food Security Coalition, National Farm to School Network & School Food Focus*

<http://onetray.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/usdacando.pdf>

## MORE INFORMATION

For more information about Farm to School policy, contact the Community Food Security Coalition or the National Farm to School Network.

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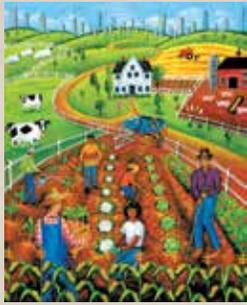
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