

Office of Statewide Health Improvement Initiatives/Physical Activity and Nutrition Program



from school to



Eating to Learn Learning to Eat

Office of Statewide Health Improvement Initiatives
Minnesota Department of Health
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What is Farm to School?

Farm to School means kids eat more fresh, local foods and learn about where their food comes from, all while supporting local farmers. By connecting farms and schools, children, schools and farmers all benefit.

Students eat better

a

Farm to School programs have been shown to increase the number of fruits and vegetables kids eat by one daily serving. And, they carry these habits home. Many schools see an increase in school meal participation when farm-fresh food is served through Farm to School programs.



“The positive benefits nutritionally, along with the educational benefits of talking about where their food is coming from, have been exciting.”

*- Elizabeth Dohnansky,
Director of Food & Nutritional Service,
Cloquet Public Schools*

The Benefits

Schools support the local economy

b

Farm to School can increase market opportunities for farmers, food processors and food manufacturers in Minnesota. For every Farm to School dollar spent on food, one to three dollars circulates within the local economy.

Students learn about their food

c

As a result of Farm to School, staff, students and parents get to know their local farmers. Children better understand the cycle of food such as how and who grows it and how it impacts their bodies, health and the community. Experiences like school gardens, farm tours, cooking classes, taste testing and composting programs all play a role in motivating children towards healthier eating habits that will last a lifetime.

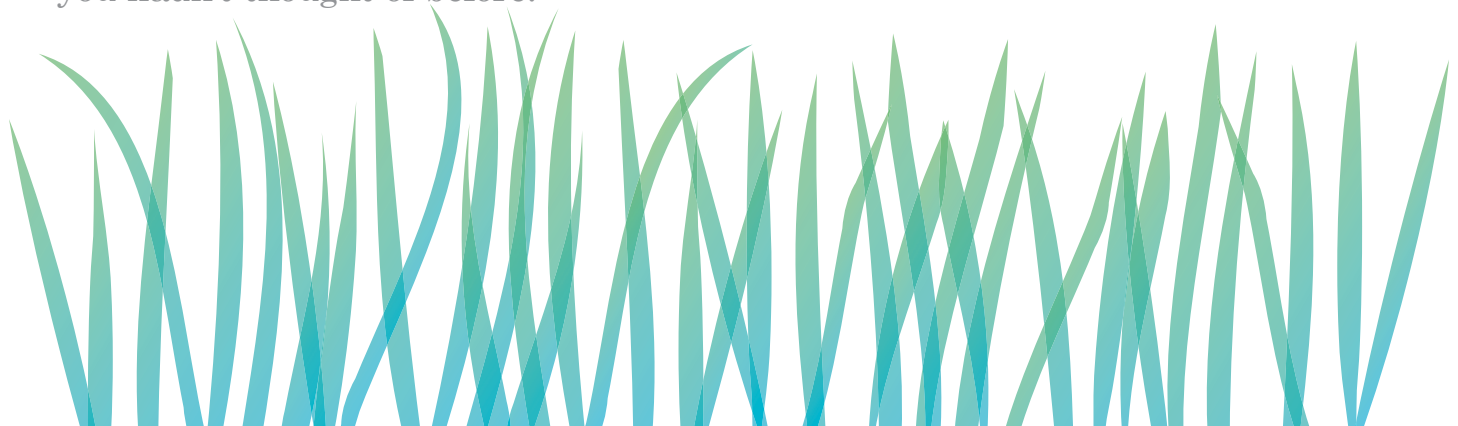
How do I get Started?



- 1. Assemble a team**
- 2. Determine your goals**
- 3. Identify menu items you would like to source locally**
- 4. Begin sourcing**
- 5. Get other staff on board**
- 6. Plan your educational outreach and promotion activities**
- 7. Determine your evaluation plan**

Assemble a team

This work is easily accomplished with the right group of people. Choose team members that best serve your situation and goals. You may wish to involve your school's wellness committee or perhaps you have volunteers who work in the lunchroom. Don't forget the family and consumer science teacher, physical education teacher, school nurse, or agriculture educator who would have an interest in this topic and can help bring information to students in the classroom. Students who are involved can spread the word to other students. Perhaps you have a local farmer or student farmer who would be able to provide great insight. All these people have the potential to help you find solutions to obstacles in ways you hadn't thought of before.



Determine your goals

Farm to School has three components, often referred to as the three C's: **C**afeteria, **C**urriculum and **C**ommunity. Be sure to create goals that include all three elements. If you are just starting, keep those goals simple.

Identify menu items you would like to source locally

You do not need to do this on your own. Take advantage of the ideas and work others have already done. Check out the Minnesota Farm to School toolkit at www.mn-farmentoschool.umn.edu for simple menu ideas.

Begin sourcing



There is generally no wrong way to do this.

Typically, there are five models for you to choose from depending on your needs. They are:

- Purchase locally from a distributor
- Locate and purchase directly from a farmer
- Purchase at a farmers market
- Use a “forager.” This is someone who works with the farmer and food service staff to make sure everyone’s needs are met
- Enter into a “growing contract” with a farmer



Get other staff on board

School staff may need more information or skills to make Farm to School successful. Perhaps a training on knife skills for kitchen staff is necessary or a list of educational resources given to teachers would be useful. This is especially important to ensure that students are provided the opportunity to learn more about the food they are eating, where it comes from and how to improve their choices. By educating and involving others, you can create excitement about the choices now being offered in the cafeteria.

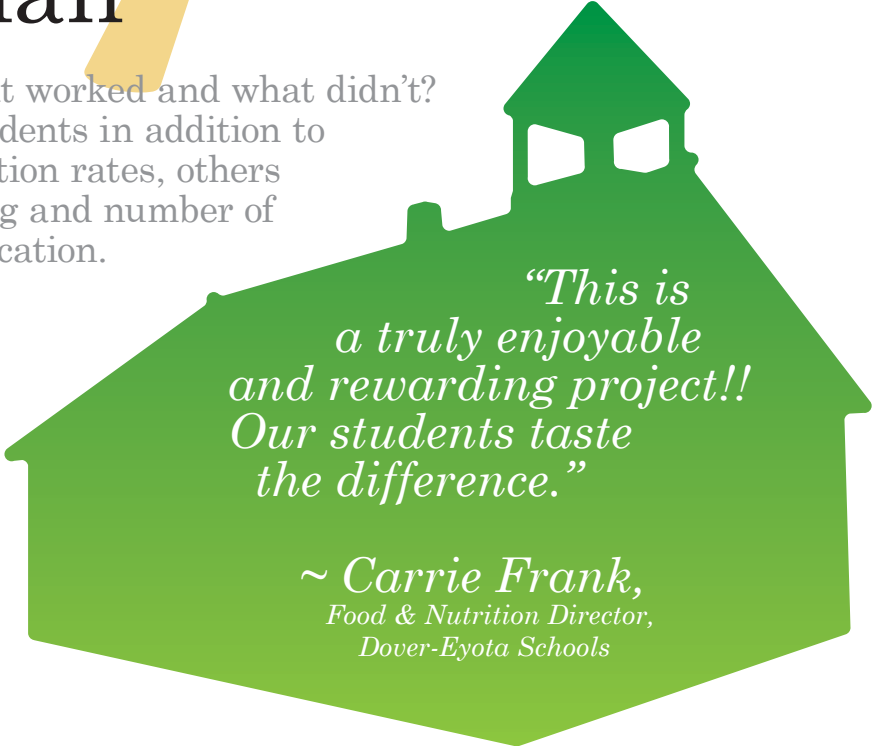
Plan your educational outreach and promotion activities

Farm to School programs have demonstrated that students are willing to try new foods and choose healthier options. But, you have to get the word out. For strategies you can use, look at the resources at www.health.state.mn.us/fts. There are all kinds of ideas and resources for education and promotion.

Determine your evaluation plan

How are you going to know what worked and what didn't? Some schools have surveyed students in addition to monitoring their meal participation rates, others have monitored price per serving and number of children receiving nutrition education.

Set realistic expectations, work toward achieving them and determine what is working and what's not. Be sure to share your positive results with others, especially staff and parents.



*“This is
a truly enjoyable
and rewarding project!!
Our students taste
the difference.”*

*~ Carrie Frank,
Food & Nutrition Director,
Dover-Eyota Schools*

Frequently Asked

Does buying local foods cost more?

Sometimes, but not always. In a recent survey, 53 percent of the Minnesota School Nutrition Association (MSNA) School Nutrition Directors who responded reported cost as a barrier to Farm to School. Yet the majority of them indicated they plan to expand their Farm to School program in the next year. Many have found creative ways to overcome the cost barrier, including using the Department of Defense (DoD) Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program or selling local foods on the à la carte line for a higher price. It is also important to note that nearly one-half of those surveyed did not consider cost to be a significant barrier. Furthermore, some schools have seen an increase in their school meal participation rate when they instituted a Farm to School program, thus increasing their revenue.



Questions

Does buying local foods take more time?

It can, but not necessarily. It's more about doing things differently.

Brenda Braulick, Food Service Director from Sartell-St Stephens Public Schools probably sums it up the best: "I knew that providing Farm to School for our students would require a commitment in terms of logistics, and this would be a learning experience for them as well as for us. Even though there has been a time commitment on my and my staff's part, I feel it is worth the effort to provide these wholesome local foods to our students." There are many ways to purchase local foods. Some schools work directly with a farmer who delivers the food, some hire or use a volunteer who identifies a farmer the school can purchase foods from, whereas

others utilize a distributor that a farmer has sold their product to. Each school has different needs. Determine what will work best for your situation to get you started.



Do kids like to eat these foods?

Yes! Evaluation of Farm to School programs show that kids on average eat one more serving of fruits and vegetables each day when they have a Farm to School program at their school. Not every child will eat winter squash, but many food service directors have been surprised that many children like it. Furthermore, taste testing has been shown to be critical to increasing acceptance. Many children may be unfamiliar with

even the most basic of foods such as cucumbers, whole potatoes and corn on the cob.

Can we legally receive produce from a farmers market or directly from a grower to serve to students?

Yes. Produce growers are an “approved source” if the food is grown on a farm or garden that is occupied or cultivated by the grower, and has not been prepared or stored in a private home. Sometimes local sanitarians have concerns

about purchasing local foods. For that reason, the Minnesota Department of Health, Minnesota Department of Agriculture and University of Minnesota Extension have reviewed the state and federal laws associated with these questions. These agencies worked together to create several fact sheets to answer food safety questions that often come up. Those fact sheets can be accessed at www.health.state.mn.us/fts.

Is it worth the effort?

Most food service directors that are doing Farm to School indicate they plan to continue their work. According to Lyn Halvorson, Winona Public Schools Food Service Director, “Our program has received some really outstanding PR. This in turn makes our parents very happy. Staff are really on board in their support of this program. This has been an opportunity to be recognized in our schools as a nutrition education resource. We are giving

kids an opportunity to try products that they may not have an opportunity to eat at home.”

Where can I get more information?

- The Minnesota Department of Health offers information, resources and technical assistance, www.health.state.mn.us/fts
- University of Minnesota Farm to School Toolkit for Foodservice, www.mn-farmtoschool.umn.edu, highlights Minnesota school

nutrition programs.

- National Farm to School clearinghouse offers information for all fifty states, www.farmtoschool.org





*“Farm to School is
easier than you think!
There is a wealth of
resources at your fingertips
to help get you started
and be successful.”*

*~ Kathy Burrill,
Chisago-Lakes Food Service Director*