

Minnesota Department of Health
Statewide Health Improvement Program



Farm to School

**Guide to Implementation
and Evaluation**

Fiscal Years 2012 and 2013

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Farm to School

Implement Farm to School policies and environmental change practices including school gardens, orchards and harvest bars.

Description and Scope

Students who eat well learn better. Farm to School strategies aim to increase the number of fruits and vegetables children eat during the school day. Farm to School encompasses changes within the classroom, curriculum and community giving children increased access to minimally processed, local food.

Some operationalized strategies of Farm to School include:

- cafeteria menu changes with local sourcing
- harvest bar implementation
- school gardens and/or orchards
- on-site greenhouses or hoop houses
- incorporation into FACS or FFA curriculum

Outcomes

Standardized outcomes for required strategies are still under development. Strategies will be measured primarily on policy, systems and environmental change outcomes and health behavior change outcomes and then linked through literature projections to health care cost savings.

Evaluation measures		
<p>Policy, Systems, Environmental changes</p> <p>Existing tools or MDH database</p>	<p>Health risks and behavior change</p> <p>Existing tools or medical records</p>	<p>Cost savings</p> <p>Actual savings or literature projections</p>

Requirements

- School Health Council (SHC) convenes and conducts a needs assessment.
- SHC selects strategy components based on the needs assessment as well as including: Local Public Health (LPH) and/or tribal support, administrative support, teacher/student/parent buy-in, and feasibility within their specific setting and time frame.
- SHIP schools must select one strategy from physical activity environment and healthy food environment.
- SHIP focuses on policy, systems, and environmental changes that are sustainable.

Target Populations (disparate/high priority groups are **bolded** below)

- **Students attending schools that serve a high percentage of free/reduced lunch for the geographic area**
- **School districts with student populations less than 1000**
- Students attending school within the CHB or tribal geographic boundaries
- Faculty and staff employed by/at the school

Addressing Disparate Populations

Charter and smaller, rural school districts may have fewer resources to support Farm to School strategies and improvements in their overall school menu. These schools often have less staff specializing in the menu planning aspect of the food service operation and, consequently, fewer resources to make changes within their operation. Additionally, schools located in areas with limited access to healthy, fresh foods due to geographic isolation have students at risk for poor diets and obesity. Furthermore, poverty in MN is higher in rural areas (12.4% based on 2009 model estimate from EARS) but may be more dispersed as compared with the population dense urban areas (10.3%). SHIP grantees must look closely within their communities for health risk disparities including food access, income and obesity and chronic disease rates and prioritize strategy initiatives in these communities first.

Settings

- Town-, city-, county-, or region-wide district and/or tribal K-12 schools
- Licensed child care facilities

Recommended Partners

- School partners. Examples include:
 - School Health Councils (SHCs)/School Wellness Committees
 - Administrators
 - Tribal Government members
 - Policy makers (Superintendent, school board members)
 - Teachers (including family and consumer science teacher, PE instructors, agriculture educators)
 - Nurses
 - Cooks and other food service staff
 - Support staff
 - Students
- Parents and guardians
- Community partners (including local organizations and businesses)
- Local food growers/farmers
- MN Department of Health
- Members of Statewide Farm to School Leadership Team

Financial Guidance

MDH will provide financial guidance for this strategy at a later date.

Planning and Assessment for *Farm to School*

1. **Assemble your School Health Council (SHC) and conduct a needs assessment.** See School Setting Overview Guide for more information. Choose school partners, parents, guardians, and tribal and/or community members that best serve your situation and goals. See list of recommended partners on page 4.
2. **Connect with MDH** on specific strategy selection so that networking can begin on relevant topics.
3. To better understand the constraints of the food service operation, **become familiar with the food service regulations and standards.** (See: http://www.ruddspark.org/get_started.aspx). Be mindful that the slightest change in a school food service operation can have significant positive or negative impacts on compliance, vendor contracts, food preparation, equipment labor hours and financial solvency. In addition, begin to understand the access points for local foods in your area. A place to start is the MN Grown Wholesale database at <http://www3.mda.state.mn.us/whlsale/>

If your target work may include additional environmental changes such as school gardens or salad bars, be sure to investigate planning strategies such as the Creating and Growing Edible Schoolyards Manual or the Salad Bars to Schools information found at www.health.state.mn.us/fts

4. **Assemble a team of key stakeholders.** Choose diverse partners that best serve your situation. Engage your team in a discussion of Farm to School and the opportunities for this strategy within your school. You may need to begin your discussions individually but eventually you will want all partners to meet together. Begin with sustainability in mind.
 - A. Refer to the Farm to School Primer to understand the basic steps to getting started. To access online visit: <http://www.extension.umn.edu/farm-to-school/getting-started/docs/MDE-primer.pdf> and/or the “Farm to School: So Fresh, So Easy” on-line training video <http://www.extension.umn.edu/farm-to-school/online-trainings>
 - B. Determine your goals based on the three C’s of Farm to School: Cafeteria, Curriculum and Community. Be sure to create goals that include all three elements. If you are just beginning, keep these goals simple to ensure some early wins. This will energize your team to continue.
 - C. Tribal grantees may need to engage their tribal governments throughout the planning and implementation of this strategy, or parts of this strategy, depending upon your particular environment.
5. **Develop an action plan** designed to implement Farm to School strategy components. Prioritize the plan based on feasibility, cost, resources, and sustainability.

- A. See Farm to School Annual Planning Tool for assistance. To access online visit:
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/chp/cdr/nutrition/docsandpdf/FarmtoSchoolannualplanningtool.pdf>
 - B. Be sure to include plans to assess and potentially change policies related to Farm to School.
- 6. Evaluation.** Conduct evaluation using standardized MDH tools (to be provided at a later date).

Potential Milestones for Planning and Assessment

- Needs assessment completed.
- Goals identified.
- Action plan written.
- Evaluation conducted.

Implementing *Farm to School*

1. **Determine the roles of the various partners** involved in the plan's implementation. Provide needed support to partners, such as assisting with gathering the information and resources they need to complete their tasks.
2. **Ensure ongoing communication** between partners during the implementation phase. Also, be aware of appropriate communication methods. Ask partners the best time and worst time to reach them, as well as their preferred method of communication and then try to be respectful of their needs. For example, it is probably best to avoid especially busy times, such as during deliveries, when calling food service staff.
3. **Be sure to deliver on your commitments** made in the plan.
4. Meet with your team of school partners and community members responsible for school wellness, food and nutrition, and administration to **review the initial action plan and the progress being made on Farm to School**.
 - A. Continue to gather additional input from key stakeholders.
 - B. Review progress, setbacks, obstacles and unforeseen opportunities.
 - C. Finalize action plan so next steps are clearly identified. Action plans should clearly identify goals, steps, responsible party, timeline, budget, resources, and outcome measures, including plans for sustainability.
5. **Work with school staff, teachers, and other community partners to attend trainings** and other opportunities based on the needs that are identified and the prioritized action plan.
 - A. Refer to the SHIP calendar for technical assistance (TA) that MDH might be able to provide on selected strategy components.
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/healthreform/ship/calendar/index.html>
 - B. Educate school staff, students, parents, and the community on Farm to School strategy components.
 - C. Generate excitement over selected SHIP strategy components.
6. **Network with other SHIP grantees**
7. **Plan your educational outreach and promotion activities.** Get the word out about your program! Engage students and community partners in the promotion of selected Farm to School practices.
 - A. There are many great ideas and resources you can use. To access online visit:
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/fts> or www.mn-farmtoschool.umn.edu

- 8. Present action plan and progress** to school administration, school board, and other community elected officials, key decision makers, and community groups.
- 9. Hold follow-up meeting** with school and community stakeholders to review action plan and priorities and identify barriers and next steps.

Potential Milestones for Implementing *Farm to School*

- Action plan finalized.
- Roles of partners clearly communicated.
- Regular, on-going communication with partners is provided.
- Trainings/workshops/other support provided.
- Farm to School initiatives promoted to all school partners, included community partners.

Sustaining Long-Term *Farm to School* Changes

1. **Continue to provide learning opportunities** for school staff and community partners on Farm to School and food systems development.
2. **Actively promote adopted practices to students, staff, parents and community.** Identify and recruit champions for Farm to School. It is critical that the enthusiasm, knowledge and drive for the work rest in multiple individuals and not rely on one or two active parties.
3. **Conduct an evaluation of Farm to School activities,** gather feedback from students, staff and parents. Communicate these findings with partners.
4. **Identify purchasing and curriculum policies and practices that, if changed, would provide long-term support of Farm to School.** Educate partners on these policies and practices. Gather support and work to institutionalize these changes.
5. **Update the action plan.** Develop future plans and funding proposals to further advance Farm to School initiatives. This could include future workshops on related topics, expansion of current food sourcing model and/or aligning with community food-focused events.

Potential Milestones for Sustaining Long-Term *Farm to School* Changes

- Local food sourcing practices implemented by school staff and community partners and recognized by students, parents and the community.
- Evaluation conducted.
- Future action plan completed.
- Policies and written practices changed to support Farm to School.

Resources

Planning and Assessment

- **Farm to School Self-Assessment.**
http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/chp/cdrr/nutrition/docsandpdf/self_assessment.pdf
- **Legal Issues Impacting Farm to School and School Garden Programs in MN.**
<http://www.publichealthlawcenter.org/sites/default/files/resources/ship-f2s-school%20garden%20legal%20issues-2011.pdf>
- **Serving Locally Grown Produce in Food Facilities.** MDH, MDA, U of MN factsheet with basic statute information.
http://www.health.state.mn.us/healthreform/ship/techassistance/locally_grownfactsheet.pdf
- **On-farm food safety information for K-12 food service personnel.**
<http://safety.cfans.umn.edu/documents/F2s%20OnFarm%20FoodSafety%20Qs.pdf>

Program/Support

- **Local Technical Assistance.** Identify people in your area that are available to provide support and assistance.
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/chp/cdrr/nutrition/docsandpdf/ThisTeamisReadytoHelp.pdf>
- **Minnesota Farm to School Programs.** Learn what other schools in Minnesota are doing to bring fresh, local produce to their students.
<http://www.farmtoschool.org/mn/programs.htm>
- **National Farm to School Network.** Learn about Farm to School programs across the nation. <http://www.farmtoschool.org/index.php>
- **Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) Calendar**
Refer to the SHIP calendar for technical assistance from MDH on selected strategies.
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/healthreform/ship/calendar/index.html>

Action Plan

- **Resource list.** Find a list of resources from getting started to Wellness Policies. <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/chp/cdrr/nutrition/FTS/resources.html>
- **MN Farm to School.** For the most updated MN resource with information covering food service, farmers, parents, teachers and school gardens. <http://www.extension.umn.edu/farm-to-school/>

Review the online trainings and the resource lists for a wealth of information. <http://www.extension.umn.edu/farm-to-school/online-trainings/>

- **Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools.** These MN website offers, templates, best practices and a variety of resources that can be used in any school to obtain, implement or enhance school salad bars. <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/chp/cdrr/nutrition/FTS/saladbars.html>

Evaluation

This section is currently under development. MDH will be providing standardized tools for the evaluation of required strategies at a later date.

Sustaining Long Term Farm to School Changes

- **Delivering More: Scaling Up Farm to School Programs** https://www.foodsecurity.org/pub/Delivering_More-Scaling_up_Farm_to_School.pdf
- **Public Health Law Center Sample School Wellness Policy: Farm to School** <http://www.publichealthlawcenter.org/sites/default/files/resources/ship-fs2-schoolwellnesssamplepolicylanguage-2011FarmtoSchool.pdf>
- **Michigan Farm to School Wellness Policy.** http://www.mifarmtoschool.msu.edu/assets/farmToSchool/docs/STEP2_Sample_FTSLanguage_WellnessPrograms.pdf
- **Model Farm to School Wellness Policy.** <http://www.foodsecurity.org/F2Cwellness.html>