

Farm to School: An Introduction For K-12 School Food Service Directors In Jefferson, Lewis & St. Lawrence Counties

Adapted from “Farm to School in the Northeast: Making the Connection for Healthy Kids and Healthy Farms: A Toolkit for Extension Educators and other Community Leaders” available at http://farmtoschool.cce.cornell.edu/files/all/fts_toolkit_oct07_full.pdf /.

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(Visit *Healthy Schools NY* under *Programs* in the *Main Menu*)



What Is Farm to School?

Farm to School refers to programs which encourage and support the promotion and use of foods produced by local farmers in school cafeteria settings. Farm to School also includes educational efforts to increase understanding of food, nutrition, agriculture and health, whether in the classroom or cafeteria. This programming is part of a larger Farm to Cafeteria movement including schools, colleges, hospitals, businesses and other institutions.

Farm to School efforts may include:

- Use of local food in cafeteria meals, whether in main or side dishes
- Salad bars containing local foods, either exclusively or in part
- Local food taste tests
- Harvest events, such as Farm to You Fest
- School gardening projects
- Farmer visits to schools
- Staff and/or student visits to farms
- Nutrition and/or food system education in the classroom and/or cafeteria

Farm to School programs may be small or large, depending on the needs and interests of the school. It may work well to start with a harvest event or by purchasing only one local product or from just one local grower. Take one step at a time for a successful Farm to School program!

Information and resources for Farm to School programs in New York State are available from:

- Cornell Farm to School Program: <http://farmtoschool.cce.cornell.edu/>
- New York School Nutrition Association (NYSNA): <http://www.nyssfsa.org/>
- NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets Farm to School Program: <http://www.agriculture.ny.gov/f2s/index.html>
- NYSED Child Nutrition Program: <http://portal.nysed.gov/portal/page/pref/CNKC>

National Farm to School web-based resources include:

- National Farm to School Network: <http://www.farmtoschool.org/>
- USDA Farm to School: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/f2s/default.htm>

Legality of Farm to School

Buying food locally, including farm to school efforts, is legal and encouraged in New York State. Schools are required to obtain competitive bids on products before purchasing.

The following are guidelines for schools wanting to purchase directly from a farmer or grower within the small purchase threshold (\$150,000.00)*. The school should:

- Place a notice in the local paper or school newsletter that states, at a minimum, the intent to purchase locally and directly from farmers/growers whose products are grown or produced upon land taxed by the local district without competitive bidding.

This notice may include delivery specifications and payments schedules. A sample notice is available on page 61 of the Farm to School Toolkit, at http://farmtoschool.cce.cornell.edu/files/all/fts_toolkit_oct07_full.pdf.

- Determine the wholesale price in effect on the date of purchase for the product, since the price paid to the farmer cannot exceed the wholesale price.
- Divide the purchase among all such growers or producers when more than one eligible producer or grower proposes to sell similar products of equivalent quality that exceed \$1,000 in total value at the same price.

*Further information about the small purchase threshold can be found at:
<http://portal.nysed.gov/portal/page/pref/CNKC/NeedToKnow/FederalSmallPurchaseThresholdAdjustment.htm>

Geographic Preference

Geographic preference may now be applied when procuring many local foods! The below links to questions and answers on this topic at NYSED's Child Nutrition Knowledge Center website:

<http://portal.nysed.gov/portal/page/pref/CNKC/IntDocs/9BCA0847322C5B79E04400151735DB24>.

Partners in the Farm to School Effort

While food service directors play a vital role in establishing a farm to school program, other school staff and community members may be important in instituting a successful program.

Farm to School partners may include:

- Local farmers
- Local food processors
- Food service delivery companies
- School administrators
- Teachers and other school staff
- Parents
- Students
- Community members
- Health, food, agriculture and community focused agencies
 - Healthy Schools NY, Health Initiative: (315) 261.4760 Ext. 226; sarah@gethealthyslc.org

Farm to School in Practice

From South Jefferson Central School Food Service Director Cindy Harnas: “We have increased our purchasing of local foods by seventy percent over the past six years. We served much more local produce during our summer feeding program this year and this fall everything on the salad bar and for vegetables in the serving line is purchased from six local farmers.”

Harnas also says that South Jefferson students are accepting the local foods and willing to try new items such as the sweet peppers and lemon cucumbers, and her staff is excited to work with the local farmers who are also “our neighbors.”

(Adapted from information provided by the North Country Regional Foods Initiative, 2007)

Farm to School Toolkit

The Farm to School Toolkit, officially titled “Farm to School in the Northeast: Making the Connection for Healthy Kids and Healthy Farms: A Toolkit for Extension Educators and other Community Leaders”, is a detailed resource for founding and maintaining Farm to School programs. This toolkit can be accessed at no cost at http://farmtoschool.cce.cornell.edu/files/all/fts_toolkit_oct07_full.pdf

Five Possible Next Steps

1. **Create** a local foods wish list, including product item, quantity, and cost. You may refer to this when talking with growers and producers. (A sample needs assessment is available on page 102 of the Farm to School Toolkit, at http://farmtoschool.cce.cornell.edu/files/all/fts_toolkit_oct07_full.pdf.)
2. **Review** your county’s local food guide to find area farms, or **visit** a local farmers’ market to meet growers and producers and to sample local foods:
 - Jefferson: <http://www.ccejefferson.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/2012-Local-Food-Guide.pdf>
 - Lewis: http://www.adirondackstughill.com/buy_local.php
 - St. Lawrence: <http://gardenshare.org/content/local-food-guide>
3. **Contact** the wellness committee, PTO or other school group to find out how they might support your local purchasing efforts. These organizations may be able to assist with taste testing, publicity and more!
4. **Celebrate** New York State’s Farm to You Fest or National Farm to School Month, both held every October.
5. **Get in touch** with other food service directors in your area to learn about their experiences with or interest in purchasing local foods. You may be able to combine your efforts!

Use the space below to jot down YOUR next steps on the Farm to School path.