

WSDA Farm-to-School Program

A 2012 School Policy Brief



Connecting Farmers, Schools & Health

Farm-to-School is targeted at providing children with a nutritious diet; at the same time it improves the local economy by encouraging farmers to sell their fresh produce to schools. More than 30 million children nationwide eat school meals five days a week, 180 days a year. When schools can improve the health of children, develop new marketing opportunities for farmers, and support the local economy, everyone benefits.

2011 WSDA Farm-to-School Survey Results

The WSDA Farm-to-School team fielded an online survey in April 2011. The survey, conducted among Washington State School Food Service Directors, sought to identify trends in local Farm-to-School programs, identify capacity gaps and technical needs, and learn about program successes and challenges. The survey data will be used to:

- ✓ Identify Core Areas of Program Focus
- ✓ Develop New Offerings
- ✓ Resources
- ✓ Spotlight Regional Success Stories as Educational Tools

Highlights of findings from the study and recommendations for schools follow below:

Benefits of Farm-to-School

While initiation of a Farm-to-School program at your school may first appear like a daunting task, do not fear! Many schools and districts around the country including Washington State have already implemented and ran a successful program with many added benefits! Some of these include:

- ✓ Enhancing learning and education in the classroom, which can be incorporated outside of school
- ✓ Supporting the local economy
- ✓ Increasing community relations
- ✓ Higher food quality in schools

All school districts that responded said they would purchase locally again!

Education in Schools

The Farm-to-School program is more than just incorporating locally grown food into student lunches and snacks. It is about increasing the education and awareness of healthy eating, sustainability, and the local environment, which the students can integrate into their own lives. Many schools already offer various types of collaborative education programs and others are of great interests that have been shown to be very successful in other state's programs.

- ✓ Currently, the majority of schools responded that they provide education on WA food and agriculture, planting school gardens, and participate in Taste WA day
- ✓ The least implemented programs but of the most interest are: nutrition education, culinary arts, and horticulture education
- ✓ In addition, programs that have shown to work well in other states include: school gardens, nutrition education, inviting farmers to schools, and hosting a farmer's market



Community Involvement

A great way to boost the success of the Farm-to-School program is by getting involved in the community. This tactic can help marketing Farm-to-School in schools, collaborative efforts with other districts and farmers as well gain support and guidance from other helpful resources.

Some ways to get involved are:

- ✓ Befriend Your Farmers
- ✓ Food Co-ops with other districts
- ✓ Marketing in Schools
- ✓ Involve parents
- ✓ Local leadership resources: University of Washington, WA Partners in Action, Food Corps, Within Reach, WA Sustainable Food and Farming Network...



Tools for Schools!

In order to run a successful program, schools found that one of their biggest concerns was the limited capacity for kitchen space and processing. Luckily, 60% of individual school site kitchens have the capacity for processing fresh fruits and vegetables, while only 44% of districts with central kitchens currently processed fruits and vegetables. Therefore, the capacity is there to process incoming fruits and vegetables from a Farm-to-School program.

Additionally, other recommendations we found useful were:

- ✓ Training of staff which included teachers, foodservice personnel and school staff in order to carry out nutrition education, food processing, and implementation of school programs.
- ✓ Regular Evaluation of Farm to School in order to assess its growth and make any necessary changes
- ✓ For those with limited kitchen processing capacity work with a larger school district that has central kitchens with the capacity to process incoming fruits and vegetables.

There are many reasons to start a Farm-to-School program and with the help of your community and local resources it can become a very successful and educational part of your school. A thriving Farm-to-School program can help build healthy habits that last a lifetime, expand opportunities for local growers, and create an environment for all kinds of good things to grow!

Prepared by students from
the **University of Washington**
Graduate Program in
Nutritional Sciences
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