

Farm to School Policy and Practice

Farm to School programs connect schools with local farms. The programs provide children with nutritious meals in cafeterias, and nutrition and agriculture education in the classroom and on farms while supporting local farmers. The USDA Farm Bill (2007), and many State and School District Policies include Farm to School mandates.

Background

Farm to School benefits hundreds of thousands of children and provides a steady source of income for farmers

- Approximately 2,000 Farm to School programs in 38 states
- Nearly 8,400 K-12 schools are involved in farm to school
- As of 4/08, seventeen states have various legislation for farm to school (CA, CO, CT, DE, IA, KY, MD, MA, MT, NM, NY, OK, OR, PA, VT, VA, WA).

Policies are focused primarily on procurement of local food

- Despite legislation, there are numerous challenges for purchasing departments
 - Difficult to budget or secure cost effective transportation or distribution channels. Storage or preparation facilities may not be adequate
 - The growing season varies in each state and budgets are tight
 - Schools must adhere to the USDA National School Lunch Program rules

National Farm to School Program (NFSP) was created in 2007 to support states and schools, share best practices, and promote farm to school programs

- Established through W.K. Kellogg Foundation grants and a collaborative of the Center for Food Justice, a division of Occidental College, the Community Food Security Coalition and USDA Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems
- “Best practices” include having adequate resources and cooperation and relationship-building efforts between schools, farmers, Depts. of Education and Agriculture, parents, students, teachers, food prep personnel and scheduled programs that are well-promoted and integrate nutrition advice and policy mandates at the state, local and/or district or school levels.

US Department of Agriculture Appropriations Act (2008) and Farm Bill (2007) The USDA as directed by the *2008 Agriculture Appropriations Act* is to work with school meal program administrators to identify opportunities for growth in local food procurement and provide Congress with a report on these efforts.

Farm Bill: Proposals in the Senate and House versions of the not yet passed Farm Bill include clarification language to allow schools to use geographic preference in the bidding and procurement of locally grown foods; new fresh fruit and vegetable programs for state-selected elementary schools in all 50 states (up from 17); and, expansion of the USDA Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program for after-school activities.

New York State and Recent State Legislation Outside New York

New York: 2002 legislation charges the Depts. of Education and of Agriculture and Markets with working together to purchase local farm products by schools and universities, and established a NY Harvest for NY Kids Week. Visit

<http://www.ncsl.org/programs/health/publichealth/foodaccess/f2sny.htm> for a history including information on the NYS School Food Association - NY Farms! Farm to School Task Force, a

statewide coalition of school food service directors, farmers, health professionals, and others interested in increasing use of local foods in schools. Pride of New York http://www.prideofny.com/farm_to_school.html has resources on NY Harvest for NY Kids Week and other tools to help promote NY farm food.

Connecticut: House Bill 5847 (2006) *encourages* schools to buy local fruits and vegetables, establishes a farm to school program and staffing. In partnership with the Dept. of Education, fruits and vegetables are promoted in over 70 schools. “CT-Grown for CTKids Week” and additional nutritional education activities are required.

Kentucky: House Bill 669 (2006) amends KRS 45A645 and *requires* state agencies, including schools, to purchase KY-grown agriculture products (versus “encourages” language in KRS 45A645). KY utilizes the Dept. of Defense’s distribution system (DoD Fresh program). Farm to school is a statewide priority and includes nutrition education.

New Mexico: In 2007, the state legislature appropriated \$85,000 to Valley Cluster School in Albuquerque to procure local produce. Senate Bill 207 (pending), requests \$1.44 million to add two servings of fruits and vegetables per week for 212,000 children.

Oregon: House Bill 3601 (March 2008) requires the Dept. of Education to establish Farm to School and School Gardens pilots (\$95,000). A staff person (via HB 3307 - 2007) was approved to be the coordinator. Nutrition standards policy (HB 2650) will be phased-in in 2008. The following have *not* yet passed: HB 3476 proposes \$0.07 per meal for local produce, HB 3307 a Farm to School program and HB 3185 proposed awarding mini-grants for school gardens and other agriculture-based education (2007).

Pennsylvania: House Bill 1209 (2006), Healthy Farms and Healthy Schools, combines nutrition and agriculture education, parent and teacher involvement, and a connection between students and farmers. Grants have been awarded for procurement of local produce and education. The bill is based on the success of the “Kindergarten Initiative” <http://www.thefoodtrust.org/php/programs/kindergarten.initiative.php>

Washington Senate Bill 6483, Local Farms, Healthy Kids (March 2008). This brand new legislation is the most comprehensive local food policy in the nation as it benefits farmers, school children, and lower income people. SB 6483 eliminates low-cost bidding requirements for school purchases of local food *and* allows schools to adopt price preferences for local purchases, includes staffing for the Departments of Agriculture and Health to coordinate with the public schools. Funds for marketing, nutrition and environmental education and promotion of school gardens and gardening education are included. A snack program of locally-grown fruit and vegetables was added. \$1.49 million is appropriated to implement the new Farm to School and Farm to Food Banks programs. Since 2002, Olympia School District has provided leadership –they have cut costs and promoted less wasteful eating habits to compensate for the higher cost of local food while still meeting the requirements to receive federal funding.

Sources/Resources

National Farm to School Network (www.farmtoschool.org) - includes detailed information on programs and state by state policies plus additional resources

Community Food Security Coalition (www.foodsecurity.org) - has Farm To School Procurement Information Package of helpful tools for starting a program, case studies, articles and funding sources for Farm to School