Overview

About this toolkit

Welcome to the Wisconsin Farm to School: Toolkit for School Nutrition Programs. Farm to school encourages healthy lifestyles in children and helps support local economies. Whether you are just starting off or looking to expand your program, this toolkit will provide you with resources to aid in your success.

This toolkit is an interactive resource. You can access all of the tools by clicking on them, and you may then print them if desired. The body of the toolkit may also be printed as one document (minus tools) if a hard copy is a useful reference. You may use the entire toolkit or select certain sections or tools, in an à la carte fashion.

Please note there is a separate Wisconsin Farm to School: Toolkit for Producers at www.cias.wisc.edu/toolkits.

Wisconsin producers have varying capacities and needs for both production and sales. Understanding their needs and being able to clearly communicate your own are keys to a successful program.

What is Wisconsin Farm to School?

Wisconsin Farm to School encourages healthy lifestyles in children and supports local economies. In Wisconsin, farm to school programs connect schools with locally and regionally grown and produced products. Comprehensive farm to school programs combine local or regional procurement efforts, nutrition and agricultural education, and student engagement activities such as school gardening in order to provide students with the broadest benefits.

Farm to school programs provide a variety of benefits to students, school nutrition programs, teachers, parents, farmers and communities. These are outlined in the benefits of farm to school tool. Student impacts include strengthened knowledge about and attitudes toward agriculture, food, nutrition and the environment. Farm

On average, farm to school programs—during implementation—have been shown to increase school lunch participation by nine percent. For some school nutrition directors, farm to school has become the backbone of their programs’ popularity and an ongoing financial success.*

“Farm to school is an opportunity handed to us on a silver platter. Wisconsin is a fertile and productive state, and farm to school is a win-win. We are feeding our kids better, helping the Wisconsin economy and building better communities.”

—Kymm Mutch, former Nutrition Director, Milwaukee Public Schools

to school can also boost student participation in school meal programs, increase consumption of fruits and vegetables and increase market opportunities for farmers, ranchers, food processors and food manufacturers.

Benefits of farm to school

Wisconsin Farm to School goals:

- Promote children’s health by providing fresh, minimally processed foods in schools and supporting the development of healthy eating habits
- Strengthen children’s and communities’ knowledge about and attitudes toward agriculture, food, nutrition and the environment
- Strengthen local economies by expanding markets for Wisconsin’s agricultural producers and food entrepreneurs

Wisconsin Farm to School values:

- An individual’s lifelong well-being depends on healthy eating habits
- All children should have access to fresh, minimally processed food as part of a nutritionally balanced school meal program
- Wisconsin farms that serve local markets make essential contributions to a diverse food system
- Schools and nutrition professionals are important partners in supporting community well-being, local economies and environmental stewardship through their food and nutrition education programs and purchasing practices
Schools are typically motivated to buy food from local farmers in order to:

• Support local farms and economies
• Access a wider variety of foods
• Encourage students’ healthy eating habits through agriculture and nutrition education
• Receive fresh, high-quality product
• Increase meal participation by offering food “with a farmer’s face on it”
• Take advantage of opportunities to partner with producers for promotional and educational activities
• Increase students’ knowledge of how and where their food is produced by learning about the farms that provide it

Farm to school is happening all over Wisconsin. Visit this interactive Wisconsin Farm to School baseline map to find out what farm to school related activities are happening, as reported by schools across the state.
The Benefits of Farm to School

What is Farm to School?
Farm to school enriches the connection communities have with fresh, healthy food and local food producers by changing food purchasing and education practices at schools and early care and education sites. Farm to school empowers children and their families to make informed food choices while strengthening the local economy and contributing to vibrant communities. Farm to school implementation differs by location but always includes one or more of the following three core elements:

- **Procurement**: Local foods are purchased, promoted and served in the cafeteria, as a snack or in classroom taste-tests.
- **Education**: Students participate in education activities related to agriculture, food, health and nutrition.
- **School gardens**: Students engage in hands-on, experiential learning through gardening.

Why Farm to School?

**KIDS WIN**
Farm to school provides all kids access to nutritious, high-quality, local food so they are ready to learn and grow. Farm to school activities enhance classroom education through hands-on learning related to food, health, agriculture and nutrition.

**FARMERS WIN**
Farm to school can serve as a significant financial opportunity for farmers, fishers, ranchers, food processors and food manufacturers by opening doors to an institutional market worth billions of dollars.

**COMMUNITIES WIN**
Farm to school benefits everyone from students, teachers and administrators to parents and farmers, providing opportunities to build family and community engagement. Buying from local producers and processors creates new jobs and strengthens the local economy.

Benefits of Farm to School

- Economic Development
- Public Health
- Education
- Environment
- Community Engagement
Economic Development

Job Creation and Economic Activity

• Creation and maintenance of jobs in the community and in the state; for every job created by school districts purchasing local foods, additional economic activity creates another 1.67 jobs.\textsuperscript{40-55}
• Increase in economic activity in the community and in the state.\textsuperscript{40,49,50,55}
• Each dollar invested in farm to school stimulates an additional $0.60–$2.16 of local economic activity, in one case resulting in $1.4 million overall contribution to the state.\textsuperscript{40}
• Strengthen connections within the state’s food economy.\textsuperscript{40}
• Increase in student meal participation from 3 percent to 16 percent (average +9 percent), generating increased revenue for schools through meal programs.\textsuperscript{8-9,20-21,23-25,36,41,49,58}
• Decrease in school meal program costs.\textsuperscript{41,48}

Farmer and Producer Income

• Increase in local procurement as farm to school programming matures, with documented local sourcing reaching up to 50 percent of all produce purchases in season.\textsuperscript{7-9,20,22-23,25,36-37,39}
• Average 5 percent increase in income from farm to school sales and establishment of a long-term revenue stream for individual farmers.\textsuperscript{7,9,20,22-23,36,39,55}
• Increase in market diversification and economic growth opportunities for farmers; positive relationships for farmers with school districts, parents and community members; farmers contracted to plant crops for schools; opportunities to explore processing and preservation methods for institutional markets; establishment of grower collaboratives or cooperatives to supply institutional markets.\textsuperscript{36-37,68}

Public Health

Farm to school is a community-based strategy that includes a focus on creating a healthy school food environment.\textsuperscript{1} Farm to school activities support development of healthy eating habits for children while improving family food security by boosting the quality of school meal programs.\textsuperscript{7-5}

Student Nutrition Behaviors

• Improvement in early childhood and K-12 student health behaviors, including choosing healthier options at school meals, consuming more fruits and vegetables through farm to school meals and at home (+0.99 to +1.3 servings/day), consuming less unhealthy foods and sodas, reducing screen time and increasing physical activity.\textsuperscript{8-31,43-46,49-51,53,57,60-64,87,88}
• Increase in fruit and vegetable consumption among those with the lowest previous intake.\textsuperscript{31}
• When schools offer school gardens, 44.2 percent of students eat more fruits and vegetables; when schools serve local food, 33.1 percent of students eat more fruits and vegetables.\textsuperscript{46}
• Demonstrated willingness to try new foods and healthier options (in early childhood and K-12 settings).\textsuperscript{7,20-22,30-33,45,47}

Knowledge, Attitudes and Access

• Tripled amount of fruit and vegetable consumption when students participate in hands-on, food-based activities.\textsuperscript{47}
• Minimized diet-related diseases in childhood such as obesity and diabetes through the promotion of eating fresh fruits and vegetables, specifically for high-risk, low-income students.\textsuperscript{50,59,61}

• Improvement in nutrition habits, environmental awareness and health-related knowledge.\textsuperscript{57,61}
• Increase in willingness to try and consumption of fruits and vegetables at an older age due to gardening at a young age.\textsuperscript{60}
• Increase in access to fruits and vegetables; increase in planning and preparing meals at home.\textsuperscript{57,61-64}
• Increase in ability and interest in incorporating healthier foods into family diets and guiding children in early childhood and K-12 to make healthier choices; positive changes in shopping patterns reflecting healthy and local foods.\textsuperscript{7,20,22,27,33,68}
• Increase among young children in asking their families to make healthier purchases.\textsuperscript{33}
• Improvement in household food security.\textsuperscript{46}
• Improvement in food service operations to support healthy outcomes, such as increased cafeteria offerings of fruits and vegetables; development of new seasonal recipes; changes in cafeteria waste management policies.\textsuperscript{8-8,21,23-25,36,37}
Education

Student Engagement and Academic Achievement
- Increase in knowledge and awareness about gardening, agriculture, healthy eating, local foods, nutrition, growing cycles, seasonality and other STEM concepts (in early childhood and K-12 settings). 1,20-22,26,31-33,42,44,48,49,61,68
- Enhanced overall academic achievement in K-12 settings, including grades and test scores; increase in opportunities for physical activity and social and emotional growth; increase in school engagement. 53,61,63,57
- Provides children with an understanding of agriculture and the environment; provides children with opportunities for social and emotional growth; improves life skills, self-esteem, social skills and behavior. 34-35,48,50,53,57,63
- Increased opportunity for innovative teaching platforms for core subjects, such as science, math and language arts in early childhood and K-12 settings. 68
- Greater opportunity for necessary experiential and hands-on learning. 50,69
- Encourages low-income students and students of color to engage in food and environmental issues in their communities. 31

Educator and Parent Engagement
- Positive changes in teachers’ diets and lifestyles; positive attitudes about integrating farm to school related information in curriculum; intention to implement farm to school activities in the classroom. 7,20-22,30,52,66
- Increase in knowledge among parents of young children about farmers’ markets. 33
- Increase in parent acceptance of farm to school programs as their children demonstrate healthier behaviors such as increased fruit and vegetable consumption. 24
- Increased parent engagement in early childhood educational opportunities. 68
- Improvements in food service staff motivation and morale; increase in knowledge and interest in local food preparation and seasonal recipes; increase in interactions with teachers to strengthen classroom and cafeteria connections. 1,22,38

Environment

Food Waste
- Reduced food waste of local food, both on the production side as well as plate waste; decrease in overall food waste due to farm to school activities. 41,56,58

Sustainability
- Reduced transportation-related environmental impacts, such as emissions of air pollutants. 50,71
- Support of environmentally sound, sustainable and socially just approaches to food production, processing, packaging, transportation and marketing. 68

Community Engagement
- Increase in community awareness about and interest in purchasing local foods and foods served in school cafeterias. 1,22
- Improved acceptance of healthier school meals among the community. 58
- Increase in opportunities to combat racial and economic inequities in the school food system. 70
- Increase in support from parents and community for healthier school meals. 41,58
# Summary of Farm to School Benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Reach</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit and vegetable consumption</td>
<td>Increased +0.99 to +1.3 servings per day</td>
<td>Public Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical activity</td>
<td>Reduced screen time and increased physical activity</td>
<td>Public Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Minimized diet-related diseases such as childhood obesity and diabetes</td>
<td>Public Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food system awareness</td>
<td>Increased knowledge about gardening, agriculture, healthy food, local food, seasonality</td>
<td>Public Health Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food choices</td>
<td>Willingness to try new and healthy food; choosing healthier options in the cafeteria and at home</td>
<td>Public Health Education Community Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic achievement</td>
<td>Overall improvement in both grades and test scores (K-12)</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>Improved life skills, self-esteem, social skills and other types personal growth</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Schools</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meal participation</td>
<td>Average increase of 9% (range 3% to 16%)</td>
<td>Economic Development Public Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meal cost</td>
<td>Lowers school meal program costs</td>
<td>Economic Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local food sourcing</td>
<td>Reaching up to 50% of all produce purchases in season</td>
<td>Economic Development Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cafeteria options</td>
<td>Increased offerings of fruits and vegetables; new seasonal recipes; new waste management policies</td>
<td>Public Health Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food service staff</td>
<td>Improved morale; increased knowledge of local food</td>
<td>Education Community Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educators</td>
<td>Positive diet and lifestyle changes; greater intent to integrate farm to school activities in the classroom</td>
<td>Public Health Education Community Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning opportunities</td>
<td>Greater opportunity for hands-on, active and experiential learning opportunities</td>
<td>Public Health Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Farmers and Producers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>Average increase of 5%</td>
<td>Economic Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Markets</td>
<td>Increased diversification and new opportunities</td>
<td>Economic Development Community Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Families and Community Members</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local economy</td>
<td>$0.60-$2.16 economic activity generated for every $1 spent</td>
<td>Economic Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job creation</td>
<td>Each new farm to school job contributes to the creation of additional 1.67 jobs</td>
<td>Economic Development Community Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-income students and students of color</td>
<td>Decreases health risks; encourages community engagement in environmental issues</td>
<td>Public Health Community Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and families</td>
<td>Increased food security and positive diet changes; increased student participation in meals at home</td>
<td>Public Health Community Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food waste and transportation</td>
<td>Decreased food waste; decreased air pollution</td>
<td>Environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
42. Mercier S. Food and Agriculture Education in the United States. AGree. 2015.
45. County Health Rankings. Farm to school programs. 2015. Available at http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/policies/farm-school-programs
58. USDA Office of Communications. New USDA Data Show Growing Farm to School Efforts Help to Reduce Plate Waste, Increase Student Participation in Healthier School Meals Program. 2015. Available at http://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAOC/bulletins/12076ef
61. County Health Rankings. School fruit & vegetable gardens. 2015. Available at http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/policies/school-fruit-vegetable-gardens
69. Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Early Care and Education State Indicator Report. 2016.

**Photo Credits**

Page 1: Emily Hart Roth

Page 2: Urban and Environmental Policy Institute, Occidental College

Page 3: (L) Emily Hart Roth; (R) National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition