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

“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

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
In Wisconsin, farm to school is shown to: …

- Improve attitudes toward fruits and vegetables in 3rd-5th grade students
- Increase exposure to fruits and vegetables
- Raise knowledge scores on agriculture and nutrition concepts
- Boost the proportion of students who put a fruit or vegetable on their lunch tray
- Increase fruit consumption (self-reported) in a single school year among students with the lowest intake


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.
Farm to School Benefits

Farm to School connects schools (K-12) and early care education settings (often sub-categorized as Farm to Preschool) with local food producers with the objectives of serving local, healthy food in school cafeterias; improving student nutrition; providing agriculture, health and nutrition education opportunities; and supporting local and regional farmers.

Schools and early care centers with Farm to School programs participate in activities such as purchasing locally and regionally grown food; featuring farm-fresh foods on their menus; incorporating nutrition and agriculture-based curriculum; and providing students experiential learning opportunities through farm visits, school gardens, taste-tests, composting and more.

The number of Farm to School programs in the United States has rapidly increased in number, from fewer than ten in 1997 to an estimated 12,500 programs in 2012. The positive impacts of Farm to School programs on various sectors have also been documented over the years.

Farm to School programs provide a variety of benefits to students, parents, schools, communities and farmers. A brief summary of these include strengthening children’s and community members’ knowledge about and attitudes toward agriculture, food, nutrition, and the environment; increasing student participation in school meal programs; increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables; increasing market opportunities for farmers, fishers, ranchers, food processors and food manufacturers; and supporting economic development across numerous sectors. Examples of these benefits are outlined on the next page.

HEALTH: Kids Win
All kids deserve access to nutritious, high quality food. One-third of U.S. children are obese or overweight, and only 2% of children get the recommended serving of fruits and vegetables each day. Schools with a Farm to School program have seen increases in children’s participation in the school meals program and consumption of fruits and vegetables.

AGRICULTURE: Farmers Win
Farm to School supports farming families by increasing market opportunities for farmers, fishers, ranchers, food processors and food manufacturers. Farm to School programs can open up the expansive school food market to local farmers.

ECONOMY: Communities Win
Farm to School strengthens the community. Farm to School programs create opportunities for developing meaningful community relationships between schools, parents and local farmers. Money spent on local food in schools stays within the local economy.
Student Health and Achievement

Improvements in student behaviors increase incrementally with more years of Farm to School programming in K-12, indicating that these programs may have gradual, yet sustained positive impact on student health behaviors.\(^1\,^2\) Children in the 0-5 years age group are increasingly spending most of their waking day at early care settings. These sites are where many children are consuming most of their daily calories, and they serve as the primary learning environment during this critically important time when healthy food preferences are developed.\(^1\,^2\) Specific benefits include:

- Improvement in K-12 eating behaviors, including choosing healthier options in cafeteria; consuming more fruits and vegetables through Farm to School meals (+0.99 to +1.3 servings / day) and at home; consuming less of unhealthy foods and sodas; reducing screen time; and increasing physical activity.\(^1\,^2,^18\)

- Increase in knowledge and awareness about gardening, agriculture, healthy eating, local foods and seasonality (in early care and K-12 settings).\(^12,^14,^20,^24,^28\)

- Demonstrated willingness to try out new foods and healthier options (in early care and K-12 settings).\(^8,^14,^24,^26,^28\)

- Enhanced overall academic achievement in K-12; provides children with understanding of agriculture and the environment; improves life skills, self-esteem, social skills and behavior.\(^13,^29-^31\)

Food Service Costs, Revenue, Interest

Purchases from local sources increase as the Farm to School program matures, with potential local sourcing of up to 50% of all produce purchases in season.\(^8-^10,^14,^16-^17,^19,^32-^36\) Other benefits in K-12 settings include:

- Increase in student meal participation from of 3% to 16% (average +9%) due to Farm to School programming, generating increased revenue through school meal programs.\(^5-^10,^14-^15,^17-^19,^36\)

- Improvements in food service operations, such as increased cafeteria offerings of fruits and vegetables; development of new seasonal recipes, and changes in cafeteria waste management policies.\(^8-^10,^15,^17-^19,^35-^37\)

- Improved food service staff motivation and morale; increased knowledge and interest in local food preparation, seasonal recipes, and interacting with teachers to strengthen classroom-cafeteria connections.\(^8,^16,^38\)

Benefits for Farmers

- Average 5% increase in income from Farm to School sales for individual farmers.\(^8-^10,^14,^16-^17,^32,^34,^36\)

- Increased market diversification, positive relationships with school district, parents and community; 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.\(^15-^36\)

Community and Economy

- Increased community awareness and interest about purchasing local foods, and foods served in school cafeterias.\(^8,^16\)

- Increased economic activity. Each dollar invested into Farm to School stimulates an additional $2.16 of local economic activity.\(^39\)

- Strengthened connections within the state’s food economy.\(^39\)

- Improved household food security.\(^39\)

- Creation and maintenance of jobs; for every job created by school districts purchasing local foods, additional economic activity would create another 1.67 jobs.\(^39\)

The National Farm to School Network has compiled abundant resources on this topic and others and contact information for people in your state and region who are working on Farm to School programs. Find more information and join our network: [www.farmtoschool.org](http://www.farmtoschool.org)
Teachers
• Positive changes in teachers’ diets and lifestyles; positive attitudes about integrating farm to school related information in curriculum.8,12-16,32,40

Parents
• Increased ability and interest in incorporating healthier foods in family diets and guiding children in early care and K-12 age groups to make healthier choices, positive changes in shopping patterns reflecting healthy and local foods.8,13-14,16,20,25.27-28
• Increased knowledge in early care parents of farmers’ markets in the area.28
• Increase in early care children asking their families to make healthier purchases.28

Summary of Farm to School Benefits*

| Students |  
| --- | --- |
| Fruit and vegetable consumption | Increased +0.99 to +1.3 servings/day |
| Physical activity | Reduced screen time and increased physical activity |
| Food-system awareness | Increased knowledge regarding: gardening, agriculture, healthy food, local food, seasonality |
| Food choices | Willingness to try new and healthy food; choosing healthier options in the cafeteria and at home |
| Academic achievement | Overall improvement (K-12) |
| Behavior | Improved life skills, self-esteem and social skills |

| Schools |  
| --- | --- |
| Meal participation | Increased from of 3% to 16% (average +9%) |
| Local Sourcing | Up to 50% of all produce purchases in season |
| Improved cafeteria operations | Increased offerings of fruits and vegetables, new seasonal recipes, new waste management policies |
| Food service staff | Improved morale, increased knowledge |
| Teachers | Positive diet and lifestyle changes |

| Farmers |  
| --- | --- |
| Income | Average 5% increase |
| Markets | Increased diversification and new opportunities |

| Community |  
| --- | --- |
| Economy | $2.16 economic activity generated for every $1 spent |
| Job creation | Each new Farm to School job contributes to the creation of additional 1.67 jobs |
| Households | Increased food security and positive diet changes |

*Refer to text for citations
References:

1. LaRowe TL, et al. Wisconsin Farm to School: One year evaluation report. University of Wisconsin-Madison; Wisconsin Prevention of Obesity and Diabetes; Department of Family and Nutritional Sciences; Wisconsin Department of Health Services.
17. Riverside Farm to School Demonstration Project, Final Grant Report December 1, 2004 to November 30, 2006, submitted by Center for Food & Justice, UEPi, Occidental College to The California Endowment.
32. Haase M et al, Center for Food & Justice, Fresh from the Farm and Into the Classroom, 2004.