



Frequently Asked Questions

What is Farm to School?

At a time when childhood obesity and nutrition-related disease is rapidly rising and the number of small family farms in the US are decreasing, Farm to School programs are emerging as thoughtful, holistic solutions.

Their objectives include:

- serving healthy meals in school cafeterias
- improving student nutrition
- supporting small, local farmers

Who is involved in Farm to School programs? Comprehensive Farm to School programs strive to involve all of the stakeholders participating in school food web. They include food service professionals, farmers, chefs, distributors, teachers, administrators, nutritionists, students, parents, and community members.

What are some of the opportunities of having a Farm to School program?

- Increased student nutrition. Evaluations of Farm to School programs have shown to increase students' consumption and knowledge of local and nutritious foods.
- Supporting local farmers. With more than 30 million children eating the federally supporting school lunch every day, farmers have a great opportunity in selling food to community schools.
- Supporting local economy. While most food travels over 1,500 miles before it reaches a plate, schools can choose to spend some of their dollars on fresh, local produce.

What are some of the challenges to having a Farm to School Program?

- Distribution. Often, new distribution avenues must be explored, as finding a distributor that will provide local produce is sometimes more difficult.
- Lack of convenience. Many schools rely on frozen, pre-cooked food, and no longer possess kitchen equipment or expertise to prepare fresh foods.
- Lack of time. Schools on a budget often have a limited staff of food service professionals to prepare fresh food. Likewise, teachers in the classroom are often faced with strict state curriculum guidelines that must be addressed daily.

How can I start a Farm to School program?

- Host a forum for discussion. Invite all key stakeholders to a community meeting to discuss the possibility of a Farm to School program.
- Research a variety of programs. There are many different types of Farm to School programs, and there are several useful reports and evaluations.

- Draft a policy. Having a written policy approved by the school board can be instrumental in sustaining and growing a program. See <http://www.foodsecurity.org> for examples.
- Understand school food service contracts. Schools and districts may choose to rewrite these contracts before they go to bid to mandate local food purchases.
- Adopt a fully integrated nutrition curriculum that connects experiential learning at the farm and in the garden to healthy choices in the lunchroom, and all core curriculum.
- Take a field trip to a farm. Exposing students to a local, working farm is a great way to introduce their local food system. Have the farmer talk about food production and life cycles, and engage students in hands-on farm activities.

Research that supports edible school gardens

Increased Consumption of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

- This study reports that the **adolescents who participated in the garden-based nutrition intervention increased their servings of fruits and vegetables** more than students in the two other groups. Although further research is needed, the **results of this study seem to indicate the efficacy of using garden-based nutrition education to increase adolescents' consumption of fruits and vegetables.** (McAleese, J. D. & L. L. Ranklin. (2007). Garden-based nutrition education affects fruit and vegetable consumption in sixth-grade adolescents. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 107:662-665.)
- Hiemendinger and Van Duyn report that **consumption of fruits and vegetables, as a habit in childhood, is an important predictor of higher fruit and vegetable consumption as adults and can help to prevent or delay chronic disease conditions.** (Heimendinger, J. & M. Van Duyn. (1995). Dietary behavior change: the challenge of recasting the role of fruit and vegetables in the American diet. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 61:1397S-1401S. and Crockett, S.J., & L. Sims. (1995). Environmental Influences on Children's Eating. *Journal of Nutrition Education*. 27: 235-249.)

Higher Learning Achievements

- Third, fourth, and fifth grade students that participated in school gardening activities **scored significantly higher on science achievement tests** compared to students that did not experience any garden-based learning activities. (Klemmer, C.D., Waliczek, T.M. & Zajicek, J.M. (2005). Growing Minds: The Effect of a School Gardening Program on the Science Achievement of Elementary Students. *HortTechnology*. 15(3): 448-452.)
- The purpose of this study was to **develop three cognitive test instruments for assessing science achievement gain of third, fourth, and fifth grade students**

using a garden curriculum. The development of the test instruments occurred in three phases: 1) an initial set of test instruments which served as a prototype for length, scope, and format; 2) an adapted set of test instruments which were piloted; and 3) a final set of test instruments which were used for the assessment of the school gardening curriculum. (Klemmer, C.D., Waliczek, T.M., and Zajicek, J.M. (2005). Development of a Science Achievement Evaluation Instrument for a School Garden. HortTechnology. 15(3), pages 433-438.)

Increased Life Skills

- Students in a one-year school gardening program increased their **overall life skills** by 1.5 points compared to a group of students that did not participate in the school gardening program. The gardening program positively influenced two constructs: **"working with groups" and "self-understanding."** (Robinson, C.W. & Zajicek, J.M. (2005). HortTechnology. 15(3): 453-457.)

Parent Involvement

- **Parents who are highly involved at school are more likely to be involved in educational activities with their children at home.** (National Center for Educational Statistics, (1997). Father's Involvement in Their Children's Schools. Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C.)