



# THE BENEFITS OF FARM TO SCHOOL

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### NOURISHING KIDS AND COMMUNITIES

The National Farm to School Network sprouted from the desire to support community-based food systems, strengthen family farms, and improve student health. Funded in part by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Network coordinates, promotes and expands the Farm to School movement at the state, regional and national levels. The Network is a project of the Tides Center.

## 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.<sup>1-2</sup> 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.<sup>3-7</sup> 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.<sup>1,8-23</sup>
- Increase in knowledge and awareness about gardening, agriculture, healthy eating, local foods and seasonality (in early care and K-12 settings).<sup>12-14,20,24-28</sup>
- Demonstrated willingness to try out new foods and healthier options (in early care and K-12 settings).<sup>8,14-16,24,26,28</sup>
- 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.<sup>13,29-31</sup>



## 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.<sup>8-10,14,16-17,19,32-36</sup>

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.<sup>9-10,14-15,17-19,36</sup>
- 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.<sup>9-10,15,17-19,35-37</sup>
- 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.<sup>8,16,38</sup>

## Benefits for Farmers

- Average 5% increase in income from Farm to School sales for individual farmers.<sup>8-10,14,16-17,32,34,36</sup>
- 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.<sup>35-36</sup>

## Community and Economy

- Increased community awareness and interest about purchasing local foods, and foods served in school cafeterias.<sup>8,16</sup>
- Increased economic activity. Each dollar invested into Farm to School stimulates an additional \$2.16 of local economic activity.<sup>39</sup>
- Strengthened connections within the state's food economy.<sup>39</sup>
- Improved household food security.<sup>39</sup>
- Creation and maintenance of jobs; for every job created by school districts purchasing local foods, additional economic activity would create another 1.67 jobs.<sup>39</sup>

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.<sup>8,12-16,32,40</sup>

## 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.<sup>8,13-14,16,20,25,27-28</sup>
- Increased knowledge in early care parents of farmers' markets in the area.<sup>28</sup>
- Increase in early care children asking their families to make healthier purchases.<sup>28</sup>

# 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

The National Farm to School Network collects and compiles information and data on Farm to School programs and benefits. If you have information to share, please send it to [info@farmtoschool.org](mailto:info@farmtoschool.org)

\*Refer to text for citations

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