FARM *to* SCHOOL
Field Guide
For Parents & Community Members

A publication of the Community Alliance with Family Farmers' Farm to School Initiative
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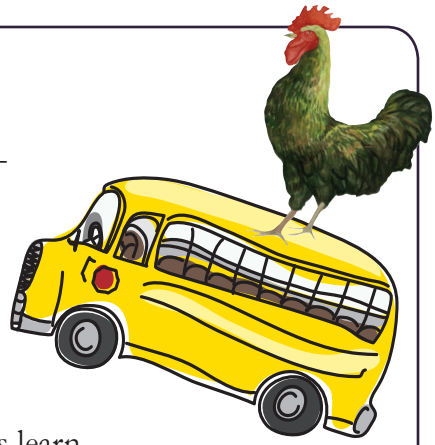
What is FARM *to* SCHOOL?



Farm to School Programs connect farms with school cafeterias and classrooms. These programs can include everything from farm field trips to nutrition education in the school garden to farm-fresh salad bars. The programs come in all shapes and sizes, but they fall into two main categories: **Farm to School Education programs** and **Farm to School Produce Distribution programs.**

A comprehensive Farm to School program puts both elements together: Fresh, locally-grown produce appears on the school menu, while students learn about local agriculture. Farm to School programs are sprouting up across the country!

How Can Parents Participate in the FARM *to* SCHOOL movement?

Parents have two roles to play in making farm to school happen:

1) Support and encourage food and farming instruction.

Whether they are in the classroom, school garden or out at a local farm, Farm to School lessons can teach to state standards while engaging students with agriculture and fresh foods. As a parent, you can encourage teachers and administrators to identify these opportunities, or take an active role in identifying and volunteering to help to implement them.

2) Advocate for fresh foods in the cafeteria and at school.

You can get involved in making changes in your school district's lunch program. Across the country, districts are connecting with local farms to serve fresh produce. District-level Wellness Committees provide an opportunity for parents to participate in discussions about school food.

Check out these websites for more information about Farm to School:

Community Alliance with Family Farmers—www.caff.org
National Farm to School—www.farmtoschool.org
California Farm to School—www.cafarmtoschool.org

Since 2001, CAFF's **Farm to School Initiative** has developed and coordinated on-the-ground programs connecting schools and school children to their local farming communities, while also creating resources, workshops and materials that help further the Farm to School movement in California. CAFF runs Farm to School programs in Monterey, Humboldt, Santa Cruz and Santa Clara counties, and connects local farmers to school cafeterias in the Sacramento Valley, Ventura and Bay areas.

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CAFF
Community Alliance with Family Farmers

Step One: Planting the Program

Figuring out what you need to get started

The single biggest piece of advice we can give you is to build a Farm to School team. Farm to School programs have the potential to grow and effect changes that involve a lot of people, from students to teachers to custodians to parents. To create a sustainable project, you'll need to invite participation (and help!) from a diverse group of school staff and community members.

Some schools have formed School Nutrition Action Councils (SNACs) as one way to bring teachers, parents and staff together to talk about Farm to School at their site. SNACs have taken on projects ranging from serving healthy meals at school events, to planning farm-focused school assemblies, to coordinating parent garden workdays. And, SNAC efforts can help implement the federally mandated School Wellness Policy (every district has one!).

While you may not be able to recruit all of these team members right off the bat, an ideal Farm to School Team includes: parents, community members, school food service staff, teachers, school board members and administrators, and students. You'll also want to pull in farmers as well as community organizations and agencies, when their advice and help is needed.

TIPS FOR BRINGING FARM TO SCHOOL EDUCATION INTO THE CLASSROOM:

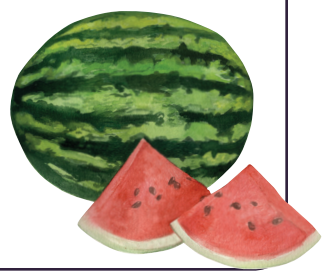
1) Understand the pressures that schools and teachers face. With the testing and performance standards enforced by the No Child Left Behind Act, class time is often highly regulated. As a parent it is important to recognize that teachers and administrators working under this system have to follow very strict guidelines, regulating lesson time down to the minute. To successfully incorporate food education into the school day, build an alliance with school faculty and staff and find out the best place and time to conduct these lessons. Oftentimes, lunchtime or afterschool are ideal, since there are fewer pressures on those slots of time.

2) Weave Farm to School into existing lessons. Tie food and farming topics to curriculum standards: cooking lessons make great math lessons, gardens are great places to learn new vocabulary, and nutrition lessons are key to teaching the new California state health standards.

3) Bring a local farmer into the classroom for a visit. Farmer visits connect kids with the people who grow their food, and give them a personal connection with local agriculture. Search for a local farmer near you at www.buylocalca.org or at www.localharvest.org.

4) Don't reinvent the wheel! There are many fun, engaging, standards-based agricultural education resources. We have listed a few good websites here that are good places to start your search for lessons and resources:

California School Garden Network—www.csgn.org (Check out their "curriculum" page!)
National Farm to School Network—www. farmtoschool.org
California Farm to School Program—www. cafarmtoschool.org
Harvest of the Month—www. harvestofthemonth.com
California Foundation for Ag in the Classroom—www.cfaitc.org
UC Cooperative Extension—cemonterey.ucdavis.edu
Life Lab Science Program—www.lifelab.org
The Food Project—www. thefoodproject.org



5) Reach out to your school staff! Farm field trips, school gardens, and cooking projects are often more effective if you have a team of classes participating. If you're taking a trip on a school bus, for example, you'll probably want to fill it with two classes. If you're maintaining a school garden, multiple teachers and groups of parents can share the responsibility. A positive and active team of parents and teachers can really change the school food environment.

6) Make sure you let your administrators know the good, innovative work you're doing. Administrative support for garden projects and farm field trips can really help maintain Farm to School programs!

TIPS FOR BRINGING FRESH, LOCAL FOOD INTO THE SCHOOL MENU:

1) Meet with your food service director! The director of the Child Nutrition Services program makes decisions about what ends up in the lunchroom. A meeting with them can provide insight into your school lunch program. Successful Farm to School programs work hand in hand with food services to bring fresh, local produce to schools! Bring our field guide specifically made for Food Service Directors to your meeting. You can find it at www.caff.org.

2) Your district has a School Wellness Policy—use it! All schools receiving federal money for school lunch have a policy supporting nutrition education, physical activity, and healthy school meals. You can get a copy of this policy and get involved in the School Wellness Policy Committee to become an informed advocate for a healthy school. The policy may be posted on your district's website; if not, call the district office to get a copy.

3) Bring your farm education program to the cafeteria. Students who have learned about local foods and can recognize them are much more likely to eat them in the cafeteria. Think about labeling the locally grown foods in the cafeteria.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN TALKING WITH YOUR FOOD SERVICE DIRECTOR:

• Your director may be very busy getting school meals together, but directors rarely hear from the students and teachers they serve. This is an opportunity—make sure that you come to the meeting prepared with suggestions, comments and a positive attitude.

• Your food service director is working hard to produce meals that meet many sets of requirements. School food is very regulated— learn about the restrictions and challenges to putting school lunch on the table.

• Once you've informed yourself about the challenges of school lunch, work with your director to start a small project incorporating local produce on the menu. Some districts have started with one local item per month (hand-held fruits are easy to put on the menu) or switching sourcing of an item to a local farm (e.g. Washington apples are traded for locally-grown apples).

• Start small! The best Farm to School programs begin with small changes and build into district-wide successes.

• After you've built a relationship with your food service director, you may want to share some resources that offer advice for food services when buying and serving local produce.

See page six for more resources.

Step Two: Getting Started with Your Farm to School Program

Once you've got a Farm to School program planted, here are some suggestions to help your program take off:

1) Continue communicating with your food service director. Whether this is through participation in the Wellness Committee or other meetings, make sure you're in regular touch with food services. It can also be helpful to act as a liasion between food services and the parent community: communicating your successes is key building on them!

2) Offer to volunteer to support changes. Parent volunteer efforts are critical in the classroom as well the cafeteria. In the cafeteria, parents can make changes a lot easier by volunteering to help bring local food to the cafeteria. For example, parents have acted as salad bar monitors for the first month of a new salad bar program, guiding students through the salad bar until they learned how the new bar worked. Parent donations have also provided food service with the necessary equipment to provide fresh, local foods. Another powerful way to support positive food service changes is to organize parents to eat lunch with their kids. This is a good way to get parents engaged with school food issues and to encourage students to taste new cafeteria offerings.

3) Some parts of Farm to School education are free, but some elements require money. Here are some great places to start researching funding opportunities:

California School Garden Network—www.csgn.org
Network for a Healthy California—www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/CPNS
National Garden Association Youth Garden Grants—www.assoc.garden.org/grants
Your Local PTA/PTO— parent groups are often willing to sponsor Farm to School type programs.

Other ways to support educational programs include parent work days in the school garden, PTA sponsorship of Harvest of the Month produce boxes, parent coordination of farm field trips (often in conjunction with educational farms or community farm to school programs), and many other creative projects. Throwing lunchtime or garden celebrations that highlight changes and recognize people for their hard work can be key to keeping up momentum in your Farm to School team.

Sound like a lot to organize? Don't be overwhelmed! The strongest Farm to School programs start small and grow like pumpkin plants, extending vines in many directions and producing fruit that slowly ripens! If you're inspired to plant the seeds of a Farm to School program, start with a manageable project and have fun.

Step Three: Reaping the Rewards

Recording and celebrating your successes!

1) Record successes. Take photos of students on the farm or in the garden and share them with your school administrators and board. Ask your students before and after the program about their knowledge of local foods and farming. Survey students to see if they eat more fruits and vegetables in the cafeteria or at home. Healthy minds need healthy foods: track changes in your students' scholastic performance and behavior as they learn to enjoy fruits and vegetables.

2) Share your ideas, resources and results. Present your Farm to School work with your School Wellness Committee, PTA, School Board, and even the local media. Don't be shy- everyone enjoys seeing photos of students eating and learning about healthy fresh foods!

3) Stay in touch with local and regional efforts to promote Farm to School Programs. Together we can spread the Farm to School Movement across the coast, state and country! Visit www.caff.org and www.cafarmtoschool.org to stay connected.

OTHER GREAT FARM TO SCHOOL RESOURCES

CAFF has created many guides and publications. You can find these resources and more at www.caff.org:

- Companion Farm to School Field Guides for:
  - Food Service Directors
  - Teachers
  - School Boards and Administration
- Food Service Guide to Handling Harvest of the Month Produce
- Tips for Institutional Buyers

Other Resources:

- Glynwood Center's "A Guide To Serving Local Food on Your Menu" - www.glynwood.org
- Rethinking School Lunch Guide - www.centerforecoliteracy.org

Books of Interest:

- "LUNCH LESSONS: Changing the Way We Feed Our Children" By Ann Cooper and Lisa M. Holmes

What's in SEASON in California?

	WINTER	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL
Apples				■
Asparagus		■		
Avocados		■		
Broccoli	■			
Cabbages	■			
Carrots		■		
Dried Fruit		■		
Green Beans			■	
Kiwifruit				■
Mandarins	■			
Melon			■	
Oranges	■			
Peaches			■	
Pears				■
Peas		■		
Peppers			■	
Persimmons				■
Potatoes			■	
Salad Greens			■	
Spinach		■		
Strawberries		■		
Sweet Potatoes	■			
Tomatoes				■
Winter Squash				■
Zucchini			■	

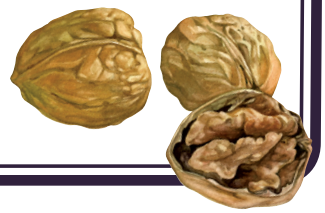
These fruits and vegetables correspond to the California Harvest of the Month Program. More regional specific seasonality information can be found by downloading your Local Food Guide at www.buylocalca.org.

SPOTLIGHT ON HARVEST OF THE MONTH:

One simple way to introduce food and farming lessons to kids is through a Harvest of the Month program. Harvest of the Month is a statewide program offering free educational resources to teachers, parents and food service staff that highlights California fruits and vegetables. Visit www.harvestofthemonth.com for more information. CAFF offers its own Harvest of the Month Tasting Kits that feature a fresh, locally grown fruit or vegetable each month—and includes more suggestions for easy classroom activities, recipes, and farm profiles. Contact **harvestofthemonth@caff.org** for more information.

FARM *to* SCHOOL CONTACTS:

Who you need to get on your team
and how to contact them.....



District Food Service Director

Name: Contact:

District Wellness Policy Coordinator

Name: Contact:

School Garden Coordinators

Names: Contact:

Champion Teachers

Names/Grades: Contact:

PTA/PTO Allies

Name: Contact:

Other Fired Up Parents and Community Members

Name: Contact:

Community Alliance with Family Farmers advocates for California family farmers and sustainable agriculture. CAFF's **Farm to School Initiative** and the **Buy Fresh Buy Local Campaign** connect communities with local food and farming. CAFF is located across California, with offices in Berkeley, Davis, Watsonville, Ventura, Humboldt and Sunnyvale. For more information about CAFF's programs, please visit www.caff.org.

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