Farm to School

Virginia Department of Education
Office of School Nutrition Programs

Virginia Farm to School TOOLKIT

Resources for school and child nutrition program professionals, educators, farmers, and other farm to school stakeholders

Virginia Farm to School Toolkit: Resources for school and child nutrition program professionals, educators, farmers, and other farm to school stakeholders

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This *Toolkit* is an effort to coordinate agreement on implementing farm to school practices in compliance with federal, state, and local laws and policies. The *Toolkit* was prepared with the best information and resources available at the time of writing; however, the law is always changing, and this document cannot provide a guarantee of reliability or accuracy. Each school division should perform independent analyses, consult with available sources—including division attorneys—and develop division policies for implementing farm to school practices within the division.

Contents

About the Toolkit Sponsors

The Virginia Department of Education, Office of School Nutrition Programs (VDOE-SNP) administers multiple federal child nutrition programs and works to ensure that all Virginia children have equitable access to good, healthy food. To help achieve this mission, the VDOE-SNP founded the Virginia Farm to School Network and the Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team with funding through USDA Farm to School Grants.

The Virginia Farm to School Network provides opportunities for regional stakeholders to convene, learn from each other, build partnerships, share resources, and set region-specific goals. The Virginia Farm to School Network has met annually in each region since its inception in 2018, with the exception of 2020–2022 due to COVID-19 safety concerns. Network meetings will take place again in early 2023.

The Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team is an action-oriented collaboration including farm to school stakeholders in the Virginia Farm to School Network and throughout Virginia's eight Superintendent's Regions. The mission of the Leadership Team is to incentivize and thus increase Virginia grown and regional food procurement in federal child nutrition programs by developing nutrition- and agriculture-related educational resources and opportunities for students, by providing training for school personnel and farmers in food safety and purchasing, and by providing distribution resources to stakeholders and end-users. Feedback from stakeholders via surveys, network meetings, and leadership team meetings guided the content available in this *Toolkit*.

The VDOE-SNP wishes to acknowledge Virginia Tech/Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) for its partnership in developing the Virginia Farm to School Network, the Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team, and the *Virginia Farm to School Toolkit*.

Introduction

This *Toolkit* is intended to guide school division administrators, school nutrition professionals, educators, school garden coordinators, and others toward using farm to school practices as a means to increase equitable access to fresh, healthy, Virginia grown food while providing hands-on learning opportunities in a variety of educational settings. Exemplary Virginia-based programs are highlighted throughout with descriptions of each program, including details of how each program was developed, the impact of each program, and tips for replicating the programs.

Serving nutritious, appealing food to Virginia children is the primary goal for school and child nutrition programs across the Commonwealth. Good nutrition is foundational for health, wellbeing, focus, and academic achievement; it is also challenging work. With tight budgets and the need to serve many meals in a short time, all school divisions and community-sponsored child nutrition programs face challenges. Each division has unique barriers and opportunities based on meal service models, kitchen facilities, dining spaces, staffing levels, and access to local products.

Across Virginia, schools and community sponsors of federal child nutrition programs express a growing enthusiasm for farm to school programs to provide nutritious food, support local farms, and educate students about healthy eating, agriculture, and the environment. Many school divisions are creating seasonal menus, hosting farm to school events, establishing school gardens, providing nutrition education and teaching about career opportunities while offering hands-on experiences growing, preparing, and learning about food. Food literacy becomes a springboard for project-based learning in personal wellness, nutrition education, cultural appreciation, food system equity, environmental education, and place-based education. Farm to school programs create integrated learning opportunities in cafeterias, classrooms, and school gardens while stimulating local economies.

Farm to school programs benefit students, farmers, school nutrition programs, the local economy, and the environment. Serving locally grown food in schools and child nutrition programs has the following benefits:

- it provides fresh and nutritious food to school-aged children and youth, encourages lifelong eating habits, and helps children thrive because good nutrition is linked to learning readiness, academic achievement, and decreased discipline and emotional problems;
- it creates markets for local farms to improve their economic viability;
- it presents valuable opportunities for students and youth to be involved with academic projects around personal wellness, food, nutrition, and the environment;
- it reduces packaging, refrigeration, storage, and transportation, requiring less energy and resulting in less waste;
- it promotes awareness of how food choices affect health, communities, and the environment; and
- it provides marketing opportunities to improve the perception and quality of school meals.

While enthusiasm for farm to school projects has grown, rules for purchasing locally grown foods can seem daunting. School nutrition professionals are aware of a range of policies and procedures at the division, local, state, and federal levels that affect food purchasing for school and child nutrition programs. This *Toolkit* will provide relevant USDA materials and provide methods and templates for procuring local foods within federal and state guidelines.

As students return to school post-COVID, outdoor learning gardens will be increasingly valuable for mitigating risks, maintaining distancing guidelines, and providing spaces for trauma-informed education, nutrition education, and hands-on learning opportunities aligned with the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL). To create vibrant outdoor learning spaces tied to the nutrition program and the curriculum, schools and divisions are forming teams to incorporate farm to school practices into wellness policies so the practices are institutionalized within the school culture for lasting impact. This *Toolkit* will provide resources to assist with forming a vibrant and active team, incorporating farm to school efforts into wellness policies, funding the team's vision, and integrating SOLs into garden-based and cafeteria-based education.

In this *Toolkit*, you will find information and resources covering the following topics:

- starting your farm to school team;
- funding projects through creative applicant pooling and strategic approaches to local organizations;
- evaluating farm to school program impact and using data to drive operational decisions;
- telling the division's farm to school story;
- procuring local foods by navigating procurement guidelines and regulations;
- procuring safe foods, assessing risks, and documenting practices;
- distributing local food in Virginia;
- connecting school nutrition programs with school gardens and career and technical education (CTE) programs; and
- providing nutrition education through integrated education opportunities through COVID-19 school closures and in afterschool settings.

How to Use This Toolkit

The *Virginia Farm to School Toolkit* is separated into chapters, each designed to stand alone for ease of use. Each chapter will contain the following sections:

- content related to the subject matter,
- resources for more information and applicable templates, and
- spotlights of specific farm to school practices occurring in Virginia with suggested tips for replication.

While all chapters of the *Toolkit* represent the possibilities of robust farm to school programming, a school, division, or community sponsor may choose to focus on one aspect of farm to school in a pilot phase, start small, and build upon success. Additionally, the programs featured in spotlights throughout this *Toolkit* represent exemplary farm to school programming across the Commonwealth.

For more information about the programs featured, please contact the VDOE-SNP farm to school specialist.

What Is Farm to School/Farm to Child Nutrition?

The VDOE-SNP acknowledges the National Farm to School Network's (NFSN's) definition:

> 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 settings.
>
> Students gain access to healthy, local foods as well as education opportunities such as school gardens, cooking lessons, and farm field trips. 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 components:
>
> - **Procurement:** Local foods are purchased, promoted, and served in the cafeteria or as a snack or taste test;
> - **School gardens:** Students engage in hands-on learning through gardening; and
> - **Education:** Students participate in education activities related to agriculture, food, health, or nutrition. (n.d.)

Farm to child nutrition encompasses Farm to School, Farm to Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), Farm to Preschool, Farm to Early Care Education (ECE), Farm to Summer, and Farm to Afterschool Programs.

Toolkit Team and Process

The VDOE-SNP partnered with VCE, the Farm to School Leadership Team, and Virginia Farm to School Network members to create this *Toolkit*. The project was made possible by a USDA Farm to School Grant. Subject-matter experts from VCE, community organizations, and schools were invited to contribute spotlights of their respective programs so other schools, divisions, and community sponsors could learn about and replicate projects. The toolkit development team used feedback from the 2018 Virginia Farm to School survey to expand education and resource development in identified areas of need.

This *Toolkit* represents the work of farm to school practitioners across the Commonwealth, Virginia Farm to School Network Leads, and state agency experts. It is designed to benefit Virginia's children, youth, farmers, and communities. The VDOE-SNP acknowledges the work of other state agencies nationwide in assisting with the development of this resource, including the Washington State Department of Agriculture. This resource also uses material from the NFSN and the USDA Community Food Systems Division as well as other resources throughout. The VDOE-SNP thanks Amber Vallotton, VCE Farm to School Program Team Coordinator and VCE liaison on the VDOE-SNP's USDA Farm to School Grant, for her assistance in developing this *Toolkit*.
The VDOE-SNP hopes readers will find the *Toolkit* a useful tool for implementing farm to school practices in school divisions and programs across the Commonwealth.

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Chapter

1

Growing a Farm to School Team

Introduction

Building a solid team should be the first action when starting farm to school activities. This step is vital to program sustainability and success. Developing a farm to school team is an opportunity to bring farm to school allies together, identify program goals, and pool resources in expertise and funding. When planning and growing a team, the USDA Farm to School Planning Toolkit encourages educators, administrators, and school nutrition professionals to take the following steps:

- define the roles of and learn more about committed team members and advisers,
- seek additional members to strengthen the team,
- establish facilitator(s) and create a structure for meetings and decision-making processes,
- agree on a meeting schedule, and
- explore existing resources that will help form an effective group (USDA Toolkit, 2022).

This chapter addresses how to grow a farm to school team, how VCE plays an important partnering role, and how several school divisions and Cooperative Extension programs grew their farm to school teams. Chapter spotlights include Loudoun County, Harrisonburg City, and Staunton City partnerships to inspire school and child nutrition programs to initiate divisionwide teams across the Commonwealth.

Buy-In: A Key to Success

First, identify individuals and organizations already invested in farm to school efforts. Without initial energy and buy-in, it will be difficult to get a farm to school program off the ground. Are any teachers already incorporating lessons on gardening, agriculture, or nutrition into their curriculum? Do any schools in the division already have a school garden? Is there a person within the school system (e.g., administrator or food service director) who must provide permission or buy-in to begin a farm to school program? Are any food service staff passionate about fruits and vegetables or cooking from scratch? Invite anyone interested in the program to explore the possibilities by joining the farm to school team. Consider using the following talking points for initial conversations with potential team members:

- There are many benefits of farm to school programs ranging from healthier youth to supporting Virginia farmers. Use the Benefits of Farm to School Fact Sheet to spark conversation with potential team members and encourage buy-in.
- Farm to School activities are being implemented in school divisions, summer feeding programs, afterschool programs, and early care sites across the state and across the nation. Explore Virginia-specific Farm to School Census data to determine what Virginia school divisions are doing.

Take time during the planning stage to explore the local school wellness policy, which can often be found on the school board's website as an official board document. When farm to school priorities are written into the wellness policy, it shows commitment to the program. It also allows external stakeholders to align farm to school program efforts with stated school priorities. A wellness policy that strongly supports farm to school programming can include farm to school activities in nutrition services, school curricula, and extracurricular activities. Learn more about incorporating farm to school priorities into local school wellness policies later in this chapter.

To ensure the program is sustainable, it is important to have a variety of stakeholders represented on the team. It may be preferable to begin a small farm to school team made up of a few dedicated members and grow over time.

Team-Building Considerations

Questions to Consider

Who is involved in farm to school efforts? When was the farm to school team established? What are the roles of each team member? The USDA Farm to School Planning Toolkit includes specific questions to consider when building a farm to school team.

Needed Members and Advisers

Achieving buy-in and commitment from key team members requires the organizer to know who the critical members are and to develop a recruitment strategy, including clear information about the project and clear expectations for the roles that members will play. At a minimum, teams should include strong collaborative relationships between one school partner, one community partner, any community sponsors of federal child nutrition programs such

as the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) or the CACFP, and one VCE educator.

Virginia Farm to School Network

The Virginia Farm to School Network has leaders in each of the eight Superintendent's Regions who can connect interested parties with others in the region. Connecting with network members in the same Superintendent's Region may provide insights, vendor leads, and ideas that reflect the culture of the region. Virginia Farm to School Network Regional Leads maintain regional network lists, organize meetings in conjunction with the VDOE-SNP, and solicit feedback from regional network members to create and implement regional goals. During the 2022–2023 school year, the Virginia Farm to School Network will host regional meetings to connect vendors and buyers. Plans are underway to develop statewide communities of practice in the areas of farm to school procurement and school gardens so local and division-wide teams can learn and share on a regional and statewide basis.

Possible Recruits for Local Farm to School Teams (USDA Toolkit, 2022)

- school nutrition service professionals (administrative staff, cafeteria managers, and cafeteria staff)
- Teachers
- Students
- School administrators (school principal or assistant principal)
- School board members
- Parents and grandparents
- Food producers (including farmers, ranchers, and fishermen)
- School nurses
- Guidance counselors
- School custodial staff
- VCE agents as locally available: Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR), 4-H, ServSafe, Produce Safety, Community Viability (CV), or Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS)
- Virginia Master Gardeners
- Virginia Farm Bureau representatives
- Local parks and recreation representatives
- YMCA
- Community sponsors of federal child nutrition programs
- Nonprofit organization representatives
- Researchers
- Local chefs
- State agency farm to school specialist
- Virginia Farm to School Network
- NFSN state lead
- Health care professionals
- Local health foundation representatives
- Parent Teacher Association/Organization (PTA/PTO) representatives
- Members of the local media
- School or division communications director
- School or division curriculum director
- School or division volunteer coordinator
- Other schools or divisions with farm to school programs

Details and Logistics (USDA Toolkit, 2022)

1. Establish a structure for the team. It may be a subcommittee of the wellness committee or a food policy committee within a school or division.
2. Designate the team lead(s) and establish clear responsibilities for team leads.
3. Determine how team members are onboarded. Are they appointed, elected, invited, or nominated?
4. Determine the length of time team members agree to serve. Are they permanent, or will they serve for a specific time? How often will the team meet?
5. Determine the function of the team. Will members have decision-making power? If not, by what means will team members' recommendations be realized?
6. Determine a name for the team. Examples include Farm to School Coordinating Committee, Farm to School Organizing Committee, School Nutrition Action Committee, and Farm to School Steering Committee. If the team will address issues broader than the term "farm to school" encompasses, its name should reflect that.
7. If the team has not worked together before, plan time to build relationships, understanding, and trust among members. This is especially important between nutrition services staff, administrators, and educators.

Consider a Formal Needs Assessment

A formal needs assessment, including an assessment of the school food environment; student knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to eating fruits and vegetables; and school capacity to implement farm to school programs, can help the team develop a targeted program. Consider the following components in a formal needs assessment:

- collect secondary data, including demographic information, health outcomes, poverty rates, etc.;
- hold a school leadership focus group to assess school board, superintendent, and principal attitudes toward farm to school programs;
- collect data from school nutrition production records comparing product acceptability before and after farm to school promotions (e.g., tastings, farmer visits, school garden activities);
- interview and/or survey the food service director to assess school capacity for procurement, preparation, and serving locally sourced fresh fruits and vegetables;
- review data on school meal participation rates and student fruit and vegetable consumption;
- convene a food service staff focus group to assess staff attitudes toward changing food preparation, working with local products, offering taste tests to students, etc.;
- survey producers to assess their attitudes and interest in participating in a farm to school program;
- survey teachers to assess their attitudes about integrating farm to school programs into the curriculum and to identify any farm to school activities already underway;
- implement the WellSAT school policy review and nutrition services questionnaire to assess school wellness policies and their implementation;
- evaluate the school cafeteria environment; and
- conduct a student survey to assess student behavior, knowledge, and attitudes about eating fruits and vegetables, trying new fruits and vegetables, and agriculture.
- **Tip:** Collecting data before program implementation will help when conducting future program evaluations. Refer to chapter 2 for more information on measuring program impact.

The Role of Cooperative Extension in a Farm to School Team

VCE is positioned as a key state government partner to deliver research-based programming aimed at the three primary elements of farm to school: procurement, school gardens, and educational activities in agriculture, food, health, and nutrition. VCE provides education and learning activities to individuals throughout the Commonwealth, including farmers and other residents of rural communities as well as to those living in urban areas. VCE aggregates knowledge through research and education and delivers it directly to communities to create positive changes.

A 2020 survey of VCE agents and specialists revealed interlinked farm to school elements within emerging VCE programming, such as ANR, FCS, 4-H, and CV disciplines. For more information, please see *How Cooperative Extension Professionals Can Support Farm to School Programs* (Food and Nutrition Service 2017).

The role of an Extension educator (or agent) is a supportive and collaborative role. Extension educators cannot implement an entire farm to school program. Instead, Extension educators can provide resources, guidance, training, educational programs, and technical assistance to schools and others involved. Extension agents can pull teams together by drawing from previous activities and relationships within the school division and with community partners.

The table below provides considerations for Extensions' farm to school engagement, ranging from small to robust programs working with inexperienced to seasoned Extension educators. It is crucial to know the values of the community and reflect them when prioritizing farm to school programming. Successful and sustainable farm to school programs must be grassroots efforts within a school culture and local community. The farm to school team should share goals, identify roles, and prioritize activities based on the available resources, impact, and feasibility.

VCE Farm to School Partnerships	New Extension Educator *(work with mentor or experienced agent)*	Somewhat Experienced Extension Educator *(work with another agent)*	Seasoned Extension Educator *(work with key school personnel)*
School division with minimal farm to school programming (e.g., uncoordinated activities conducted sporadically in classrooms)	• Conduct an informal needs assessment • Conduct curriculum* series using Master Volunteers (Master Gardeners or Master Food Volunteers) • Participate in a "train-the-trainer" farm to school-related workshop with an experienced agent • Collaborate with an experienced agent to increase farm to school promotion • Write press releases or articles about farm to school-related initiatives for the local media	• Conduct a formal or informal needs assessment • Conduct curriculum* series and/or farm to school-related workshops (e.g., how to build a farm to school team, how to sell to schools, etc.) using Master Volunteers • Incorporate interdisciplinary work with other agents • Collaborate with Extension internal and external partners** to increase awareness of the benefits of farm to school initiatives	• Conduct a formal needs assessment • Conduct farm to school workshops (e.g., what is farm to school, how to create a farm to school team, how to sell to schools and institutions, food safety, etc.) • Coordinate learning experiences by working with Master Volunteers and train school staff to conduct curriculum* series • Collaborate with Extension internal and external partners** to increase awareness of agricultural-related issues and possibilities (e.g., obesity, farmers' needs, etc.)
School division with at least one farm to school program component (e.g., school garden)	Involve training and other community engagement to: • Help create and/or support key farm to school volunteers/contact persons within school farm to school staff • Write grants (e.g., equipment) • Assist with farm to school inclusion in the school wellness policy (e.g., working with local school culture, including administration, faculty, and PTA/PTO or related parent group) • Write press releases or articles about farm to school-related initiatives for the local media	Involve training and other community engagement to: • Help create job descriptions and support for paid farm to school roles (e.g., school garden coordinator) with the farm to school team • Write grants (e.g., equipment, farm to school roles, etc.) • Help include farm to school language in the school wellness policy with school board support	Involve training and other community engagement to: • Help create job descriptions and support for paid farm to school roles (e.g., school division farm to school coordinator) with appropriate school personnel • Seek funding (grants, businesses, crowdfunding, local government) for equipment, FCS roles, procurement opportunities, etc. • Assist with farm to school inclusion in the school wellness policy with school board support

VCE Farm to School Partnerships	New Extension Educator *(work with mentor or experienced agent)*	Somewhat Experienced Extension Educator *(work with another agent)*	Seasoned Extension Educator *(work with key school personnel)*
School division with robust farm to school programming (i.e., procurement, school garden, and education)	• Collaborate with the farm to school team to bring education, innovation, and other community engagement where gaps exist; expand potential; and enhance sustainability • Support ongoing development of the farm to school team and its internal/external education and marketing needs through fellow agents and specialists (e.g., school in-service, regional education, state conferences, other trainings, and community events) • Support funding streams (e.g., continued funding in the school budget) • Help facilitate and support farm to school-related concerns and discussions with stakeholders (e.g., community food insecurity) through school, community, and faculty meetings • Write press releases or articles about farm to school-related initiatives for the local media	• Collaborate with the farm to school team to bring education, innovation, and other community engagement where gaps exist, expand potential, and enhance sustainability • Support ongoing development of farm to school team and its internal/ external education and marketing needs through fellow agents and specialists (e.g., school in-service, regional education, state conference and other training; community events; and agritourism) • Support funding streams (e.g., through school budget, regional school divisions' collaboration, and local tourism budgets) • Help facilitate and support farm to school-related concerns and discussions with stakeholders (e.g., community's food insecurity) through school-based and local public meetings	• Collaborate with farm to school team to bring education, innovation, and other community engagement where gaps exist, expand potential, and enhance sustainability • Support the ongoing development of the farm to school team and its internal/external education and marketing needs through fellow agents and specialists (e.g., school in-service, regional education, state conference and other training; community events; agritourism; and legislated enhancement of farm to school day, week, or month) • Support funding streams (e.g., through school budget, regional school divisions' collaboration, local tourism budget, innovation supported by major USDA grant, and legislation through General Assembly or US Farm Bill) • Help facilitate and support farm to school-related concerns/discussions with stakeholders (e.g., community's food insecurity) through school-based and local public meetings, editorials, state legislation support, etc.

*Free USDA curricula include *Grow It, Try It, Like It!*, *The Great Garden Detective Adventure*, *Dig In!*, and *Plant It, Grow It, Eat It! Healthy Habits Take Root*.

** VCE Internal partner examples: VSU's Small Farm Outreach Program, Family and Nutrition Program, Virginia Market Marker.
External partner examples: Agriculture in the Classroom, Farm Bureau, local garden club, Virginia Apple Growers Association, Virginia Beef Council.

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Chapter 1: Virginia Farm to School Spotlights

Spotlight: Fostering Agriculture and Food Literacy, Loudoun County Cooperative Extension

Introduction

In Loudoun County, VCE office (unit) staff work to support farm to school objectives in Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS). VCE subject-matter experts in areas such as local food and farming, food safety, agriculture education, nutrition education, community viability, and program development work together to provide strategic support to LCPS and the surrounding community. In Loudoun County, the VCE unit must quickly adapt to evolving needs influenced by the county's large, growing, and diverse population by providing support for school gardens, identifying local product availability, and helping growers be market-ready for institutional sales.

The Challenge

Representatives from Loudoun County's agriculture-based communities expressed the need for county government and public schools to increase food literacy and agricultural awareness among Loudoun's growing suburban population. In addition, LCPS teachers and principals were interested in operating school gardens to produce vegetables for student consumption. However, there were no agricultural experts on LCPS teaching or administrative teams.

The Solution

While LCPS could not offer agricultural experts, Loudoun County Extension agents, staff, and volunteers were well-suited to assist community stakeholders and increase LCPS's focus on agriculture and food literacy. The Loudoun County VCE unit referenced the National Association of Agriculture Educators' (NAAE) definition of agriculture education to identify common threads of service and expertise within the unit. The NAAE indicates that agriculture education teaches public school students about agriculture, food, and natural resources. These topics match the Agriculture and Natural Resources and 4-H Youth Development focus areas. The fact that LCPS teachers and principals were interested in operating school gardens to produce vegetables for student consumption made it appropriate to include the unit's Family and Consumer Sciences team and Loudoun County Master Gardeners. The two teams worked together to develop a handbook for teachers, administrators, volunteers, and students on planning, building, and maintaining school gardens. For access to the handbook and other resources, request access to the VCE Loudoun County Google Drive.

The Impact

Deliberate coordination within the Loudoun County VCE unit to support farm to school initiatives resulted in greater impact and less duplication of efforts within the team. It enabled Loudoun's VCE unit to expand unit programming into densely populated eastern Loudoun County while still serving VCE's traditional base in rural, western Loudoun County. The handbook, *Building and Maintaining a School Garden Handbook, Loudoun County*, is a tangible product of the team's collaboration. The handbook is relevant to schools in LCPS and beyond that want to start a school garden.

Tips for Replication

- Consider Extension members' talents, expertise, and community connections when approaching a unit project.
- Set aside weekly or biweekly time to meet as a unit to discuss shared projects.
- Bring external advisers or subject-matter experts into the team for resource development.
- Work closely with the school division to understand the goals and objectives.
- Be prepared for changes as new leaders enter the division and adjust project goals accordingly.

Resources

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From this form, schools can request education resources, including access to VCE School Garden Handbook resources.

Authors

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Spotlight: Farm to School Through the Wellness Subcommittee, Harrisonburg City Schools

Introduction

Harrisonburg City Public Schools (HCPS) incorporates farm to school practices into the Local School Wellness Policy (Wellness Policy) via a Wellness Subcommittee of its School Health Advisory Board (SHAB). The Wellness Subcommittee advocated for farm to school language in the Wellness Policy because policies and practices greatly influence students, providing context for teacher-student interactions around instruction as well as the overall school environment (Danielson, 2002).

School policies, such as discipline, attendance, and grading, create an understanding for all students, teachers, and administrators as to the culture and practices within the school. In this same way, the Wellness Policy outlines regulations and goals to improve the school's health environment, promote student wellness, and prevent childhood obesity. Many childhood health leaders, including the USDA, the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, and the VDOE-SNP, recommend that farm to school language be included in the Wellness Policy. Using wellness policies as a means for supporting and incorporating farm to school practices in the school culture promotes local foods, healthy eating, and student education in a number of subjects, including core academics, health and wellness, nutrition, and agriculture.

The Challenge

While farm to school activities are important for childhood health and learning, these initiatives and programs are not traditionally included in school policies and may not be prioritized by administrators and teachers. Farm to school programs can promote a healthy school environment and provide hands-on learning opportunities that foster improved student health and engagement with the curriculum.

The Solution

To maintain consistency through staff turnover and to link farm to school activities to school curriculum and culture, the Wellness Subcommittee of the HCPS SHAB drafted farm to school language for the Wellness Policy.

SHABs or School Health Advisory Committees (SHACs) may meet quarterly or semi-annually to discuss current issues, recommendations, and trends in school wellness and student health. Within the SHAB or SHAC, farm to school programs may be an agenda item for the full committee, along with items such as vaping education, Family 5K fundraisers, or Stop the Bleed training. Alternately, some schools may decide that their farm to school program requires its own subcommittee because of the specificity and comprehensiveness of the program. By initiating a subcommittee through the SHAB or SHAC, stakeholders can discuss specific farm to school agenda items that are efficient and goal-oriented to make the most of the scheduled time.

In most schools and divisions, the Wellness Policy is approved by the School Board or other governing board and is listed within the school board documents on the school or division website. Including farm to school language in the Wellness Policy informs school board members of the value of these initiatives and ensures these health practices become part of the divisionwide culture.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to the school wellness environment. Wellness Policy language should reflect the practices being implemented in the school or division. However, sample language exists that provides a foundation for building a Wellness Policy with farm to school language unique to the objectives and resources within each school/division. School and division staff should advocate being involved in the review, update, and implementation of the Wellness Policy and they should stress the importance of including farm to school language in the Wellness Policy.

HCPS used template language in the first iteration of the division's Wellness Policy. The language used in the 2017–2021 HCPS Wellness Policy included:

> Environmentally friendly practices such as the use of locally grown and seasonal foods, the

use of non-disposable tableware, and reducing food and beverage packaging are considered and implemented where appropriate. School garden projects, composting, and cooking clubs are considered and implemented as appropriate.

By deciding to include farm to school language in the Wellness Policy, HCPS took the first step in linking farm to school programs with the overall school wellness environment. The next step is to strengthen the language by describing the farm to school practices with concrete plans or strategies for implementation. The assessment tool used to rate the comprehensiveness and strength of policy language (WellSAT3.0) would score the language used in the 2017–2021 HCPS Wellness Policy as low due to vagueness and difficulty to measure. To improve the language, words and phrases such as "considered" and "where appropriate" should be updated with words such as "require," "shall," and "must." According to the HCPS executive director of school nutrition, the division plans to improve the strength and comprehensiveness of the farm to school language. The results of the required three-year assessment of the Wellness Policy, known as the Triennial Assessment, will factor into updating the language in the policy. The results of the Triennial Assessment will shape additional farm to school practices, measures of success, and language, and the Wellness Subcommittee will revise the policy appropriately.

Template language is a good place to start as a foundation for writing school-specific language in a Wellness Policy. The goal is to improve the Wellness Policy to reflect and cultivate a healthy school environment.

The Impact

Incorporating farm to school practices in the Wellness Policy informs Harrisonburg's citizens and school community that the school board values serving local food and integrating nutrition education into Harrisonburg's school curricula and culture. As staff and administrators frequently change within a division, developing written policy maintains consistency around the School Board's signed policy. Subcommittee input on policy design represents multiple perspectives that shift policy into practices implemented in schools.

According to the HCPS executive director of school nutrition, it is important to verbalize policy initiatives and health objectives that highlight, model, and advocate for healthy practices in schools.

The Wellness Policy is a tool for improving the health environment of schools. Therefore, it must be continuously updated and improved for students' benefit. The impact is improving the culture of wellness to reflect the science surrounding nutrition and health education. Research from the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (2017) demonstrates that serving farm to school produce, providing hands-on learning opportunities in school gardens, and tying curricula to the cafeteria and the classroom enhances educational opportunities for students, benefits local economies, and improves children's health, nutrition, and academic performance.

Tips for Replication

- Build a team (e.g., SHAB or SHAC) and gain buy-in if farm to school language is not yet present in the division's Wellness Policy. Identify allies and stakeholders with a vision for farm to school, such as local VCE agents, nonprofit representatives such as the American Heart Association or No Kid Hungry, local dietitians, and community members. Start by meeting with the SHAB/SHAC or farm to school committee to brainstorm, collaborate, and plan for farm to school activities to be implemented in the division by using the USDA Farm to Child Nutrition Programs Planning Guide (Food and Nutrition 2022). Ensure all stakeholders understand the benefits of Farm to School practices (NFSN 2020). The committee should continue to meet regularly to provide resources to teachers, advocate to the community, and stay informed about innovative ways to improve student wellness through farm to school programs.
- Childhood health organizations provide a wealth of resources for sample Wellness Policy language. Use template language from a professional source, such as the National Farm to School Network or the Alliance for a Healthier Generation. Edit the template language for specificity and comprehensiveness to reflect the division's practices and aspirations. Assess the policy language using the WellSAT 3.0 assessment tool and consider areas to make the language stronger or more comprehensive.

- Advocate for board approval of the policy and find ways to promote the policy to the division community using the USDA Local School Wellness Policy Outreach Toolkit (Food and Nutrition Service 2022).

Resources

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Spotlight: Staunton City Schools Summer Meals at Augusta Health Farmers Market

Introduction

Strategic partnerships can increase access to fresh, healthy foods for those who may need it the most. In 2016, the Staunton-Augusta Health Department Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program reached out to Project GROWS, a local nonprofit educational farm, to establish a pop-up farmers market in Staunton, Virginia, to better reach families participating in the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP). An extension of the federal WIC program, the FMNP provides families with vouchers to use for the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables at farmers markets. Wraparound services at the market have included a partnership with Staunton City Schools as well as nutrition education, recipe flyers, and food demonstrations and sampling. Together, this collaborative partnership has broadened key food access resources to families and youth in the community while providing market opportunities to several local food producers in the region, including Allegheny Mountain Institute, Kegley Farms, Project GROWS, and more. This innovative model has paved the way for further collaborations between other farmers markets and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) operators.

The Challenge

Families can face many barriers to accessing healthy fresh food, including proximity to grocery stores and farmers markets, reliable transportation, and high food costs, particularly for fruits and vegetables.

The Solution

After surveying participants and reviewing redemption data, the Staunton-Augusta Health Department's WIC program proposed the concept of a pop-up farmers market as a means to address several of the barriers faced by WIC clients participating in the WIC FMNP. With hours of operation and transportation barriers in mind, the health department and Project GROWS launched the Staunton-Augusta Health Department Farmers Market in 2016, a weekly market held at the health department during clinic hours in which mothers are already on-site for scheduled WIC appointments.

In the summer of 2019, Staunton City Schools brought their SFSP to the market, ensuring that children and youth visiting the farmers market with their families had access to free, nutritious meals featuring local produce. In 2020, Project GROWS added a Virginia Fresh Match program at the market that doubles Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP-EBT) benefits, making healthy food even more affordable and accessible to families.

Other partners have included VCE's Family Nutrition Program, which worked with Project GROWS to provide nutrition education, recipes, and cooking demonstrations for market customers, as well as the Virginia Program for Aging Services, which promoted the market to seniors who also receive FMNP vouchers. In addition, the market has welcomed student volunteers from several local colleges and universities.

The Impact

The collaborative partnership between the Staunton-Augusta Health Department, Project GROWS, and the SCS SFSP provided an accessible space for families to shop for affordable local produce and for children to receive fresh, nutrient-dense meals while learning about the origins of their food. Within the first year of the farmers market, the redemption of WIC FMNP vouchers doubled as compared to the previous year, which tripled redemption rates across the Commonwealth. In 2021, 70 percent of WIC FMNP vouchers in the Central Health District were redeemed at the Staunton-Augusta Health Department Farmers Market.

Since 2019, these partners have expanded regional food access programs, establishing summer feeding sites at additional farmers markets and expanding the outreach of the WIC FMNP.

Tips for Replication

- Reach out to local growers, food hubs, nonprofit agricultural programs, farmers market managers, and the local health department to create interest around the concept of an on-site market.

- Assess the feasibility of hosting a farmers market one day a week at the health department on a day with high volume.
- Promote within the health department and the community using social media, posters, and signage.
- Talk with your school division about hosting a summer feeding event at your local farmers market.
- Recruit volunteers to assist with cooking demonstrations and fun activities.
- Feature the Virginia Harvest of the Month crops and read the featured Harvest of the Month books to elementary-aged students.

Resources

Benson, M., & Niewolny, K. (2018, September 6). *Virginia farm to school resource guide: Helping connect Virginia foods to Virginia schools.* Virginia Cooperative Extension. https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/AEE/AEE-77/AEE-77.html

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Chapter

2

Funding and Evaluating Farm to School Initiatives

Introduction

Financial resources and community support are critical to establishing, growing, and sustaining farm to school programs. As schools, summer programs, child care centers, and afterschool programs determine how to fund farm to school programs and events, farm to school teams should consider how program success is evaluated. This chapter discusses various methods to obtain funding and support for farm to school initiatives and addresses the importance of building evaluation into the process.

Considering and Identifying Funding Options

Although some farm to school program support can be donations such as tools, equipment, volunteers, or smaller seed funds, many projects require additional resources. Starting small is important to gain experience, foster relationships, ensure success, and build visibility and credibility with farm to school stakeholders. Once the farm to school team has established a working relationship and a desire to grow farm to school programming, a main question that arises is how to access additional funding sources.

There are many funding options to pursue. It is important to determine project priorities and feasibility as a team before developing a funding plan. Ask the following questions of the farm to school team:

- What is the scope of the farm to school project? Is work relative to one local school or division, or is it broader, reaching the regional or state level?
- What are the project's overall goals and objectives?
- What resources (e.g., money, materials, people, expertise, and time) are needed to accomplish the project?
- Who are the potential project partners? Does the farm to school team have buy-in and commitment from each partner? Has the team identified roles for each person and organization, including a project lead?
- What is the timeline to accomplish the project goals?
- What funding is needed to get started, and what will be needed to keep it going in the years to come? Many funders like to fund start-up projects, but it is important to plan for project sustainability.

Once the farm to school team has answered these important questions, the next step is to research and find possible sources of funding from local, regional, state, federal, business, or nonprofit organizations. Each funding source has specific objectives and criteria that must be met to apply for funding. Regardless of the complexity of the funding request, demonstrating strong partnerships, teamwork, expertise, and a solid work plan with realistic objectives and measurable outcomes is vital to proposal and program success.

Using School Nutrition Funds for School Garden and Farm to School Expenses

School nutrition program funds may be used for school garden and farm to school expenses. The USDA provides federal guidance in several memos. Please review the USDA guidance for using school nutrition program funds and the spotlight on healthy food fundraisers below.

USDA Guidance, Supporting Farm to School Efforts Using School Nutrition Funds

School nutrition funds may be used to support farm to school efforts; however, school nutrition programs must follow USDA guidelines on using those funds. The following three sections are excerpts from three USDA memos:

- USDA Memo SP 32-2009, School Garden Q&A
- USDA Memo SP 06-2015, Farm to School and School Garden Expenses
- USDA Policy Memo SP 60-2016 Indirect Cost Guidance

SFAs should reach out to their VDOE-SNP regional specialist or to the VDOE-SNP farm to school specialist for more information.

Guidance From USDA Memo SP 32-2009: School Garden Q&A

1. **Q: Can the school food service use funds from the nonprofit school food service account to purchase seeds for a school garden?**

   A: Yes, with the understanding that the garden is used within the program's context, i.e., selling the food or providing food in the classroom as part of an educational lesson.

2. **Q: Can the school food service use funds from the nonprofit school food service account to purchase items for the school garden such as fertilizer, watering cans, rakes, etc.?**

   A: Yes, as long as the items are used for the purpose of starting and maintaining the garden.

3. **Q: Can a school sell food grown in their school garden that was funded using the nonprofit school food service account?**

   A: Yes, as long as the revenue from the sale of the food accrues back to the nonprofit school food service account. Schools can serve the produce as part of a reimbursable meal or sell it a la carte, to parents, to PTA members, at a roadside stand, etc.

4. **Q: Are there health/safety issues involved with school gardens?**

   A: Yes. School food authorities (SFAs) need to familiarize themselves with the federal, state, and local requirements regarding health and sanitation issues.

5. **Q: Can the school food service purchase produce from another school organization that is maintaining and managing the garden, such as Future Farmers of America (FFA)?**

   A: Yes, the school food service may purchase produce from a garden run by a school organization such as FFA, which is an agricultural education program for students.

6. **Q: Can funds received through the Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Program (FFVP) be used to purchase seeds/tools/equipment for a school garden?**

   A: No. FFVP funds may not be used for the purchase of any materials for school gardens.

7. **Q: What if there is excess produce from the garden left over at the end of the school year?**

   A: The school should first see if the excess food can be used to benefit another program, such as the SFSP. If that is not possible, they could try selling the food (as always, the profit must accrue back to the nonprofit school food service account) or donate it in accordance with state and local health and safety regulations.

Guidance From USDA Memo SP 06-2015: Farm to School and School Garden Expenses

Recently, we [USDA] have received several questions about the use of funds from the nonprofit school food service account to cover expenditures related to farm to school activities and school gardens. The questions and answers below address specific scenarios that SFAs may be dealing with when considering the allowability of such costs. Please see SP 32-2009, School Garden Q&As for additional information about school garden expenses.

The USDA Food and Nutrition Service's (FNS) goal is to ensure that program funds are used to operate and/or improve school food service and that schools maintain a financially sound nonprofit food service account. They also encourage innovative ways of meeting the goals of the school meals programs. Nutrition, food, agriculture education, and school garden activities may offer viable opportunities for supporting the programs.

School gardening and other farm to school educational activities can improve school food service operations in a variety of ways. Below is a list of the positive impacts associated with school gardens:

- improving student attitudes towards fruits and vegetables
- increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables
- improving job satisfaction and staff retention
- providing quality fresh product at competitive prices or no cost
- increasing school meal participation (Food and Nutrition Service 2017).

Recent research supports the above statements. Please see the USDA Fact Sheet Research Shows Farm to School Works *for a full synopsis.*

1. **Q: How should SFAs determine if costs associated with nutrition, food, and agriculture education; school gardening; or other farm to school activities are allowable?**

   A1: School nutrition directors must comply with federal regulations related to resource management, procurement, and cost principles regarding allowable costs when spending funds from the nonprofit school food service account. The primary purpose of the nonprofit school food service account is to operate or improve a school meals program that serves nutritious meals meeting the meal pattern requirements. When evaluating expenses (including program food, supplies, labor, equipment, services, educational activities indirect costs, etc.), SFAs must ensure the funds are supporting the operation and/or improvement of the school meals program and that all expenses are allowable (i.e., necessary, reasonable, and allocable) in accordance with Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidance under the "Cost Principles for State, Local, and Indian Tribal Governments."

   SFAs may want to use the following questions to assess if costs associated with school gardens or farm to school activities are allowable expenses from the nonprofit school food service account:

   1. Are the farm to school activities or school garden development (including nutrition education, taste tests, aiding in the procurement process, offering marketing support, purchasing garden supplies and equipment) supporting the operation or improvement of the school meals program and are the expenses reasonable?
   2. Is the SFAs' food service program currently providing meals in compliance with National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program meal patterns and in compliance with resource management (i.e., compliance with the net cash resources in 7 CFR Part 210.14(b) and the availability and priority for use of excess net cash resources per 7 CFR Part 210.19(a)(1))?
   3. In cases where only a portion of the school garden coordinator's, or farm to school coordinator's, time is spent directly supporting the school food service operation, does the nonprofit school food service account only cover the portion of the coordinator's salary that is deemed necessary, reasonable, and allocable for the operation of the school meal programs?

   Once an SFA has completed this assessment, it may determine that funding a staff position or activities related to nutrition education, school gardening, or farm to school will support the operation and improvement of the program, and that the associated costs are necessary, reasonable, and allocable in accordance with the OMB Guidance under the "Cost Principles for State, Local and Indian Tribal Governments." Continual assessment of these costs is essential to ensure that the nonprofit

school food service account can support these activities without placing the SFA at risk for failing to meet the key mission of serving nutritious meals to students meeting the meal pattern requirements.

Note that staff positions strictly supporting horticulture classes, Future Farmers of America clubs, or other school associations cannot be funded by the nonprofit food service account.

2. **Q2: Can a SFA use nonprofit school food service funds to buy supplies or equipment for the school garden or school farm?**

   A2: As noted in SP-32-2009, *School Garden Q&As*, if the garden is used within the context of the school meals program and serves the purpose of operating and improving the school meals program, supplies and equipment for the school garden may be purchased with funds from the nonprofit school food service account. Many costs associated with the school garden or farm to school efforts are for infrastructure which may last for several school years. Depending on the cost, hoop houses and high or low tunnels may be considered a supply or equipment.

   Classifying moveable structures (e.g., hoop houses, high and low tunnels) as a supply or equipment is dependent upon the acquisition cost. 2 CFR Part 225 Appendix B Section 15 defines equipment as an article of nonexpendable, tangible personal property having a useful life of more than one year and an acquisition cost which equals or exceeds the lesser of the capitalization level established by the governmental unit for financial statement purposes, or $5,000. Therefore, items with an acquisition cost less than the capitalization threshold established by the governmental unit or the federal threshold, $5,000, are considered supplies. Supplies, such as seeds, fertilizer, water cans, rakes, etc., may be considered allowable with the understanding that the products grown in the school garden or school farm are used within the context of the program.

   As with any cost, the SFA should evaluate the expense using the previously listed assessment questions. However, equipment costs (as defined above) require prior written approval of its awarding agency before incurring the cost, unless the equipment has been identified on the state agency list approved by FNS, per SP 31-2014, *State Agency Prior Approval Process for School Food Authority (SFA) Equipment Purchases*, dated March 28, 2014.

3. **Q3: Can an SFA use nonprofit school food service funds to build structures for the school garden or school farm?**

   A: Per 7 CFR Part 210.14(a), "revenues received by the nonprofit school food service are to be used only for the operation and/or improvement of such food service, except that, **such revenue must not be used to purchase land or buildings unless otherwise approved by FNS, or to construct buildings."**

   Further, FNS existing policy has been and continues to be to not approve the cost of building purchases because program funds are made available to help support the costs of nutritional benefits for children in school settings. The goal of the nonprofit school food service account is to ensure that an SFA maintains the necessary funding to operate the school meals programs, not used to cover major expenses that should be borne by the school district's/division's general funds (i.e., capital infrastructure costs).

4. **Q4: Can an SFA enter into an intergovernmental (or interdepartmental) agreement to purchase products from the school garden or school farm?**

   A4: Yes, SFAs may enter into an intergovernmental (also referred to as an interdepartmental) agreement with the school garden or school farm to purchase products from the garden. The entity operating the school garden must be the local education agency (LEA) or another governmental entity. As noted in 7 CFR 3016.36 (b)(5), "to foster greater economy and efficiency, grantees and subgrantees are encouraged to enter into state and local intergovernmental agreements for procurement or use of common goods and services," and in this case the school garden and products from the garden can be considered a common good. A price analysis must be conducted to ensure that products purchased from the school garden are purchased at reasonable prices.

5. **Q5: What are an SFA's options for using products grown in a school garden in the school meals programs?**

   A5: SFAs have three options for using school garden products in school meals. Note that the USDA does not impose specific food safety requirements; however, many state and local health departments have school garden food safety guidance and requirements.

   1. Donation – In this case the products grown or raised in the school garden are donated to the cafeteria and may be used in meal preparation and/or for taste testing purposes. Procurement regulations do not apply when products are donated. Schools should ensure the product meets their general food safety requirements. Sometimes, SFAs purchase the inputs for the garden, as allowed under SP 32-2009, *School Garden Q&As*, and then the produce is donated to the cafeteria at harvest.
   2. Intergovernmental Agreement – With this option, the SFA enters into an agreement with the public entity (usually a school or district/division) that operates the garden. The agreement may outline the price for the produce, relative timelines and expectations of both parties. This option is most relevant when the school garden is operated by the school or district/division itself, a department within the district/division or by another state or local government agency that wishes to sell produce such as a local department of recreation or a state department of agriculture.
   3. Purchase – SFAs can conduct a procurement for garden produce. In many cases, the purchase may fall below the most restrictive applicable small purchase threshold, so the SFA may request a quote from the school garden operator and other entities. Geographic preference may be used. Due to the low transportation cost of the garden products, it is likely the price for garden products will be competitive with other suppliers. This option is most relevant when the school garden is operated by a non-governmental entity (e.g., nonprofit organization) that wishes to sell to the school meals programs.

Guidance From USDA Memo SP 60-2016: Indirect Cost Guidance

The USDA provides guidance for allowable and unallowable costs related to building structures in *Indirect Costs: Guidance for State Agencies and School Food Authorities*, USDA Policy Memo SP 60-2016, September 30, 2016. The following sections are excerpts from the guidance:

General Criteria for Allowable Costs

Allowable costs must meet the following criteria:

- Necessary;
- Reasonable;
- Allocable;
- Consistent with policies and procedures that apply uniformly to both federally financed and other activities of the non-federal entity;
- Consistently treated as direct or indirect;
- Determined in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP);
- Not included as a cost or matching contribution of any other grant (except where allowed by federal regulations);
- Adequately documented.

(Food and Nutrition Service 2016, p. 13)

Renovating a School Kitchen

2 CFR 200.452, *Maintenance and repair costs*, identifies costs of normal repairs and alterations as allowable so long as they: (1) keep property in an efficient operating condition; (2) do not add to the permanent value of the property or appreciably prolong its intended life; and (3) are not otherwise included in rental or other agreements. Based on these principles, FNS has allowed limited renovations within the inside perimeter of a kitchen/cafeteria space with the **required prior state agency approval (2 CFR 200.407 or FNS approval (7 CFR 210.14(a)).** For example, renovating a kitchen by cutting away a portion of the wall to allow room for a walk‐in refrigerator and related electrical wiring would be an allowable expense if the renovation is necessary to accommodate increased participation of students in the school meals programs. However, it would be an unallowable expense if renovation of the kitchen was purely an aesthetic matter. Finally, the SFA cannot charge normal maintenance costs directly to the nonprofit school food service account if such costs are included in the school division's indirect cost pool.
(Food and Nutrition Service 2016, p. 16)

Building a School Kitchen

[School meals programs (SMPs)] regulations at 7 CFR 210.14(a) and 220.7(e) require that revenues received by the nonprofit school food service are to be used only for the operation or improvement of such food service, except that, such revenue shall not be used to purchase land or buildings unless otherwise approved by the FNS, or to construct buildings. **Historically, FNS has not approved the cost of building purchases because program funds are made available to help support the costs of nutritional benefits for children in school settings and not to construct school related facilities.** The goal is to ensure that an SFA maintains the necessary funding to operate the program as required by the SMPs' authorizing legislation and regulations, and that the [nonprofit school food service account (NSFSA)] is not used to cover major expenses that should be borne by the school division's general funds (i.e., capital infrastructure costs).

The costs of building a kitchen are analogous to the costs of constructing school buildings, which historically have been borne by the school division with general or capital improvement funds. Similarly, such capital infrastructure costs should be borne by the school division just as the school building and its contents should be.

(Food and Nutrition Service 2016, p. 16–17)

Farm to School Grant Opportunities

USDA Farm to School Grant Program

The USDA annually awards competitive grants that support planning, developing, and implementing farm to school programs. The USDA's Farm to School Grants are an important way to help local, state, and regional, organizations as they initiate, expand, and institutionalize farm to school efforts.

Virginia Agriculture in the Classroom Grant Program

Virginia Agriculture in the Classroom provides educators an opportunity to receive grant funding for a variety of creative projects to increase student understanding of the source of food and fiber inside or outside the traditional classroom. Educators are encouraged to apply for grants to support projects that may occur at school or during home learning time. Grant projects may address topics such as learning gardens and/or STEM integration or provide unique agriculture experiences for students.

Garden to Go Mini Grant Program

These mini-grants provide funds for projects aimed at supporting policy, systems, or environmental change work that increases access to healthy foods or physical activity for limited-resource communities in Virginia at appropriate partner sites (e.g., school gardens) that serve the SNAP-Ed audience. Interested individuals must work with their VCE SNAP-Ed agent and/or program assistant to apply when they become available each spring.

Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth Grants and Funding

These three-year grants fund educational, experiential food-, health-, nutrition-, and gardening-related experiences for youth in schools.

Specialty Crop Competitive Grant Program

The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) accepts grant proposals each spring for the development of specialty crop projects that will support and enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops in Virginia. Specialty crops are defined as fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and horticulture and nursery crops, including floriculture. Virginia's portion of the USDA's Specialty Crop Block Grant in 2021 was estimated to be approximately $500,000.

FeedVA Funding Opportunities

The FeedVA website hosts an up-to-date listing of funding opportunities related to hunger relief initiatives. Farm to school teams can search current grant initiatives and sign up for email updates.

Local Health Foundations, Farm Bureaus, and Garden Club Chapters

Organizations such as the local chapters of the Virginia Farm Bureau and local garden clubs often support farm to school programs that benefit farmers and spark interest in the agricultural and horticultural sciences. Health foundations associated with local healthcare providers commonly support community wellness programs. Please see the spotlight on Fauquier FRESH in this chapter for an example of this support. Consider including representatives from local organizations in the grant development team as sources of funding, volunteers, tools, supplies, and expertise.
Please also see the resource entitled USDA Grants and Loans That Support Farm to School Activities.

Volunteers as Funding Sources

Many Master Gardener groups operate as associations and may allot some of their association budget to various VCE project teams. Volunteer time, including time from Master Gardeners and Master Food Volunteers, can provide in-kind matches for grants. The national value of volunteer hours is updated annually by a national organization called Independent Sector.

Additionally, some volunteers may work for employers that have employee match programs. A school division or nonprofit organization can receive money from a volunteer's employer based on the number of hours that person volunteers. Some volunteers may also be able to provide funding toward in-class programming. Although this may not apply to all local situations, it is worth considering all possibilities. If volunteers are integrated into program operations, farm to school teams should consider the time required to coordinate volunteers.

Program Funding Tips

Before pursuing funding streams and drafting a proposal, remember the following tips:

- Determine which funding avenue makes the most sense given a specific project. Is the project idea a good fit for the particular funding source?
- When forming a grant project team, make sure each member of the team has the necessary expertise, time, and commitment to meet the project goals and objectives.
- Federally funded grant programs can require a lot of time to prepare and often require a wide range of partners or specific institutions. Farm to school teams should consider whether the project can meet funder expectations. Start planning larger grants among partners at least three to six months ahead of the grant announcement by reviewing project summaries of past grantees and then defining the project.
- The steps to successfully obtaining funding can be time-consuming and require a dedicated team effort to develop a well-written proposal. If farm to school team members are less experienced grant writers, reach out to school administrators, division grant writers, VCE specialists and agents, local health departments, and others who have successfully obtained grant funding and are willing to provide input.
- Read the requests for applications (RFAs) or requests for proposals (RFPs) thoroughly. There are guidelines, requirements, and deadlines specific to each grant, and it is important to follow the directions carefully. Be conscious of guidelines such as formatting, space limitations, budget items, letters of support, biographies, and logic models. Not following instructions exactly can result in automatic disqualification.
- When preparing grant proposals, farm to school teams should ensure they have measurable deliverables that are realistic and can be completed within the grant timeframe. Farm to school teams should consider how they are measuring grant success and ensure they have processes in place for any necessary data collection.
- Allow plenty of time to prepare the proposal, especially if the proposal requires school, division, or agency approval. In other words, do not wait until a few days before the due date to begin preparing! It is a good idea to alert school administrators or agency grants personnel at the start of the process so they can provide input on grant submission protocols.

Grant writing is an art and takes practice. By assembling a strong project team, a compelling narrative, a robust plan of work, and effective evaluation metrics, the team has a greater chance of success. Even if the project is not funded after submitting what felt like a winning proposal, remember that many grants are highly competitive. Always aim to make proposals stand out from others to attract reviewers' attention and interest. Doing so will increase the odds of receiving funding.

Managing and Evaluating Projects

Integrally tied to the funding preparation process is considering who will be responsible for the overall management of funds and, if applicable, required reporting. While the oversight of funds falls to the primary applicant/entity, it is important to discuss how the monies will be spent among the project team, what specific requirements need to be met if working across different partner groups, what activities will be conducted within a specific timeline, and who will conduct them. Even with smaller projects, a point person is important to monitor activity completion and any required report submissions. The farm to school team should decide on a point person to manage funds before receipt so the team is ready to hit the ground running.

Most grant RFAs and RFPs ask how the grantee plans to evaluate the success of the program being funded. In general, evaluation is about asking the right questions (McNamara 2022). Evaluation data can provide important information about attitudes, skills, and behavior and can also supply evidence about a program's effectiveness, its strengths and weaknesses, and insights for making changes to improve programming processes. It helps grantors know whether stated objectives have been met and whether their funds were used appropriately. Evaluation can also show how individual programs align with and support broader farm to school goals of the region, state, and nation.

Program Evaluation

Evaluation measures are either quantitative or qualitative. Using both kinds of measures can provide a good blend of data.

Quantitative evaluations tell a story with numbers (numerical data) and focus on the "what" and "how many." Examples of quantitative evaluations include the following:

- the number of staff trainings for fresh food and speed scratch food preparation,
- the number of servings before and after promoting specific food items; production records are useful tools for this type of evaluation,
- the number of like/dislike votes for a new recipe or food sample,
- the dollar value of local foods purchased compared from year to year, and
- the number of classes using the school garden.

Qualitative evaluations tell a story with words (narrative data) and focus on the "why" and "how." Examples of qualitative evaluations include the following:

- focus groups,
- observations,
- interviews, and
- case studies.

Although developing an evaluation plan may seem like a challenging process, many tools and resources exist about general evaluation basics and the evaluation of farm to school programs. For more guidance, explore the resources listed at the end of this chapter.

Tracking Local Food Purchases

Tracking local food use within a school or child nutrition program is one important method for evaluating the success of a farm to school program. This metric helps child nutrition program sponsors and school nutrition programs evaluate year-to-year changes in the dollar amount of local foods purchased and the diversity of sources.

The VDOE-SNP collects data of unprocessed or lightly processed local food from all school divisions, summer food programs, and afterschool programs. The objective of this data collection is to understand the impact of federally funded child nutrition programs on Virginia's economy and agriculture industry. The VDOE-SNP provides a local food tracking tool that can be found on the VDOE-SNP Farm to School website.

Conclusion

Funding farm to school projects is easier when farm to school teams collaborate with internal and external partners to develop comprehensive projects that are achievable and measurable and that have built-in methods of evaluation from the start. Having baseline data, such as local food purchase totals, helps project teams know whether they have met their goals and helps design and revise approaches so goals may be achieved. School nutrition program funds can be used to support educational programs such as school gardens, but it is important to follow USDA guidelines for the use of federal child nutrition program funds.

Remember, for all farm to school projects, start small, celebrate success, and promote the good work to raise the profile of the school or child nutrition program.

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Chapter 2: Virginia Farm to School Spotlights

Spotlight: Supporting and Growing Farm to School Efforts Through Fauquier FRESH

Introduction

The Fauquier Reaches for Excellence in School Health (FRESH) program in Fauquier County Public Schools (FCPS) is an example of a public-private partnership for community health. Grant funding from the Piedmont Action to Health (PATH) Foundation provides the means to implement the FRESH program in both school and community settings in Fauquier County. The PATH Foundation is a community health foundation associated with the local health care system and funds similar programs in Culpeper County and Rappahannock County schools.

The mission of FRESH is to inspire and promote healthy choices in area schools and communities. The FRESH program facilitates increased scratch and speed scratch cooking in school kitchens using locally procured produce when possible. The program creates continued opportunities for exposure to fresh fruit and vegetables through school-based agriculture education via the *What's FRESH* Harvest of the Month program and through community-based nutrition education.

The Challenge

A common sentiment among school nutrition programs in smaller school divisions is that limited personnel and financial resources are available to execute desired wellness initiatives; this is no different in FCPS. An FCPS assessment identified the need to fund and staff frequent farm to school activities, recipe development featuring fresh produce, staff culinary trainings to promote increased speed scratch and scratch cooking, the procurement of locally available produce, and student tastings.

The Solution

The FRESH program works in collaboration with school nutrition to contribute needed resources to childhood wellness initiatives, including a chef who trains staff, develops recipes, and educates students. A major focus of the FRESH program is to support the school nutrition program and to collaborate with community partners on childhood wellness initiatives. Emphasizing the rich agricultural history of Fauquier County and the surrounding area excites students, families, and staff about healthy, regionally sourced food choices.

Through generous funding from the PATH Foundation, local partners formed a Childhood Wellness Coalition to develop a robust FCPS farm to school program. Mutually beneficial partnerships within the local agriculture and food scene included the Warrenton Farmers Market, VCE Master Gardener program, Fauquier FISH Food Pantry, the Weekend Power Pack program, and the Fauquier Education Farm. The partnership with VCE provided a network of Master Gardener volunteers who acted as an extended workforce for the student tasting program. This program included farm to school education and marketing for produce-forward menu items. The Fauquier Education Farm (also a grantee of the PATH Foundation) provided local produce to use within FRESH Community Cooking Classes and other nutrition education opportunities geared toward families in the community. Fauquier FISH, a local food pantry, provided meal kits and kitchen tools

for the FRESH chef to bring to childcare centers serving disadvantaged populations to provide cooking and nutrition lessons to students during summer break. FRESH acted as a conduit to distribute Power of Produce (PoP) Bucks to families, encouraging them to shop at the Warrenton Farmers Market for fresh produce. The collaboration with the Town of Warrenton allowed for a venue for FRESH local fruit and vegetable tastings at the market. These partnerships led to community excitement around choosing, cooking, and eating local produce. In addition, the partnerships further aligned the groups with PATH's mission of promoting community health and vitality.

Simultaneously, FRESH and FCPS developed a plan for preparing school nutrition staff to process an increased amount of fresh produce. The team purchased new ovens and steamers, thanks to a need identified through a kitchen equipment audit, and purchased small wares conducive to efficient produce preparation. Additionally, the team developed a training schedule. Trainings included knife skills and safety as well as new menu item preparation for meals that featured the *What's FRESH* produce selection. FRESH Chef Natalie Ortiz said, "I received as much of an education, if not more, from our school nutrition staff on the daily challenges they face as they learned from me about culinary skills." Lastly, the team created a lead cook position in the school nutrition program to implement a trickle-down training model. The PATH Foundation initially provided funding for the salary increase associated with this new role. FCPS absorbed this cost after two years.

Each year, FRESH allocated a portion of the program budget to training and familiarizing school nutrition staff with processing produce from its fresh, whole form. To reinforce the positive impact that the Farm to School Program had on the health of the school system as a whole, FRESH held a half-day, hands-on farm to school training at the organic production farm at Airlie Conference Center. Airlie Center generously donated training space, and nutrition staff were treated to a lunch featuring Airlie-grown products. A fifth grader at Cedar Lee Middle School spoke about how the Farm to School and FRESH Community Cooking Classes encouraged her to try new fruit and vegetables. She discovered that pickled beets are one of her favorite foods!

One of the most impactful projects born from this public-private partnership was the Harvest of the Month student tasting initiative that started with monthly *What's FRESH* flyers and expanded into a suite of multimedia farm to school resources. A series of music videos with songs written by an FCPS staff member were produced by Allegro Community School for the Arts, another PATH-funded organization. Other resources in the suite included family-scale recipes, cooking videos, and video and print materials for communications to staff and families. The team also used grant funds to purchase branded marketing materials such as tablecloths, signage, and vehicle wraps used both at schools and in the community.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, several changes occurred, including transitions in the top two school nutrition positions at FCPS. During this time, FRESH and the new school nutrition program leadership planned, developed, and tested new menu items. Thanks to the flexibility in grant funding from the PATH Foundation, FRESH was able to adapt its nutrition initiatives to continue to provide nutrition education and access to locally sourced produce via Tasting-To-Go kits distributed alongside free school nutrition meals at key locations within the county.

In 2022, FRESH and FCPS School Nutrition partnered to update the kitchen at Southeastern Alternative School (SAS). Before 2022, the kitchen at SAS was used primarily for heating and serving food, with the main portion of meal production taking place at a neighboring school. Starting in early 2023, SAS will have meals produced on-site, and FRESH will share the kitchen space to explore light processing of produce to be distributed to all FCPS kitchens.

The Impact

- Over 350 hours of nutrition education provided to the community
- Over 175 tastings per school per year focused on, but not limited to, the elementary school level (FCPS has 11 elementary schools) with an average student participation rate of 73 percent
- Over 1,000 hours of in-person culinary training for FCPS during a five-year period
- Over 1,250 hours of farm to school education via the VCE Master Gardener program during a five-year period
- Average of 15 community events each year

Tips for Replication

- Identify the vision for program partnerships.
  - Clearly define goals and objectives.
  - Determine strategies for measuring success.
- Become acquainted with nonprofits and local government departments whose goals and objectives align.
  - Discuss possible collaboration.
  - Outline current and future initiatives.
  - Assign roles and responsibilities for each agency/organization.
- Identify funding needs.
  - Draft possible partner contributions.
  - Create a timeline.
  - Identify funding and staffing needs.
  - Define type of cost: start-up or operational.
  - Determine grant type: planning or programming.
- Seek funding opportunities that align with the program goals and objectives.
  - Determine a fiscal agent and grant manager.
  - Solicit letters of support from partners identifying each contribution.
  - Seek technical assistance if necessary.
  - Submit the application.

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Spotlight: Healthy Food Fundraisers, St. Andrew Preschool

Introduction

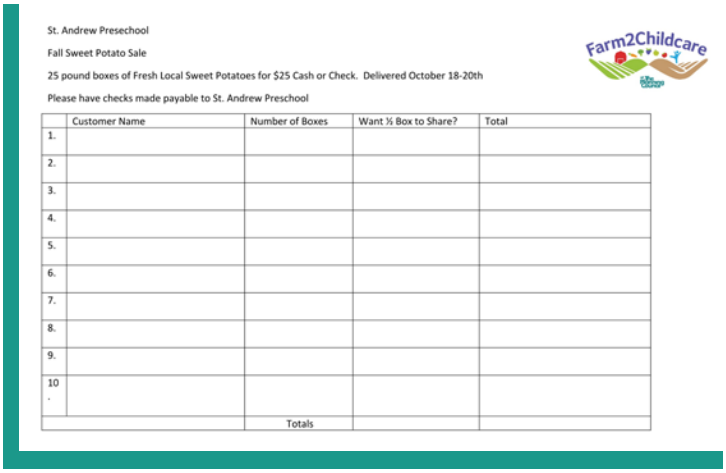
Using farm fresh foods for school-sponsored fundraisers models healthy choices, educates families, and promotes an environment and culture of positive health choices. The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA) directed the USDA to establish nutrition standards for all foods and beverages sold to students on the school campus during the school day, including foods sold through school fundraisers. Fundraisers provide an opportunity for schools to serve healthy foods, model positive choices, and raise money for the school.

The Challenge

School-sponsored fundraisers that promote and sell unhealthy food choices, such as doughnuts, cupcakes, cookies, and lollipops, model poor food choices. Students learn health habits through school and are influenced by the food choices available on the school campus during the school day. To increase the number of fresh fruits and vegetables consumed by students, planners should consider the foods sold in school fundraisers.

The Solution

Farm fresh and local foods provide a fundraising solution that encourages positive choices, provides revenue for schools and local farms, and encourages and strengthens community partnerships. Saint Andrew Preschool in Suffolk, Virginia, realized that promoting poor nutritional choices in school fundraisers through the sale of items such as doughnuts and cupcakes was doing more harm than good in the community. Instead of selling sweets, preschool administrators decided to prioritize the health of their students by reaching out to a local farmer for help. After collaborating with the farmer, the school decided to try selling strawberries and sweet potatoes as a fundraiser for the school. The bulk amount ordered by the school allowed the farmer to give a discounted rate, and even with a small markup by the school, the produce was less expensive than local grocery store or farmers market prices. The school



St. Andrew Presechool

Fall Sweet Potato Sale

25 pound boxes of Fresh Local Sweet Potatoes for $25 Cash or Check. Delivered October 18-20th

Please have checks made payable to St. Andrew Preschool

	Customer Name	Number of Boxes	Want ½ Box to Share?	Total
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				
		Totals		

used an order form to collect orders and payment and inform the farmer of the quantity of produce needed in advance. Parents then collected their produce on a specified day during student pick-up from school. The school provided recipe cards to go along with the produce and used USDA *Grow it, Try it, Like It* resources to build excitement around the fundraiser. Since the nutritional quality of produce met the regulations under the Smart Snacks Rule, the school was able to market the fundraiser using social media and signage.

Action for Healthy Kids and the Alliance for a Healthier Generation provided additional resources on healthy food and physical activity fundraisers. Additional alternatives to unhealthy food fundraisers include hosting a fun run or jump rope contest and selling cookbooks with healthy recipes or seeds for growing plants in a garden.

The Impact

Through this fundraising program, the school earned approximately $300 to improve the school environment with relatively low effort by selling strawberries and sweet potatoes. Families were able to easily access local, fresh produce and obtain recipe cards while supporting the school. The grower built a partnership with the school, earned income, and benefitted from the schoolwide promotion of his farm. Lastly, the farm food fundraiser modeled healthy choices for students and demonstrated that celebrations and fundraisers do not always go hand-in-hand with sugary foods and beverages; rather, they can also support healthy bodies and minds.

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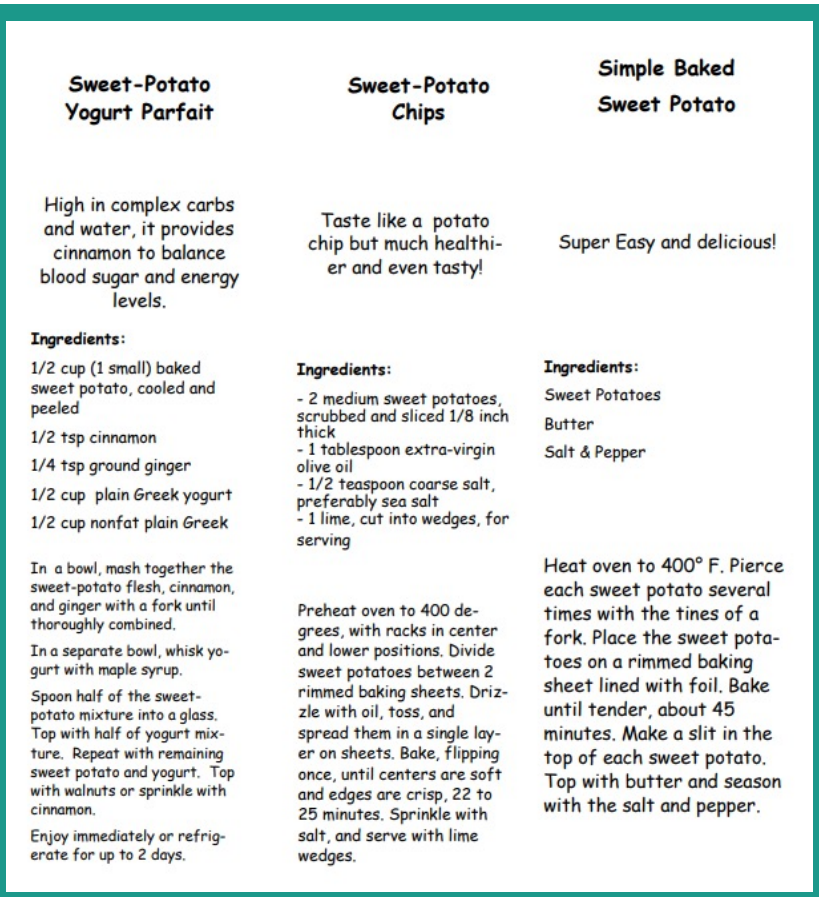

Sweet-Potato Yogurt Parfait

High in complex carbs and water, it provides cinnamon to balance blood sugar and energy levels.

Ingredients:

1/2 cup (1 small) baked sweet potato, cooled and peeled
1/2 tsp cinnamon
1/4 tsp ground ginger
1/2 cup plain Greek yogurt
1/2 cup nonfat plain Greek

In a bowl, mash together the sweet-potato flesh, cinnamon, and ginger with a fork until thoroughly combined.

In a separate bowl, whisk yogurt with maple syrup.

Spoon half of the sweet-potato mixture into a glass. Top with half of yogurt mixture. Repeat with remaining sweet potato and yogurt. Top with walnuts or sprinkle with cinnamon.

Enjoy immediately or refrigerate for up to 2 days.

Sweet-Potato Chips

Taste like a potato chip but much healthier and even tasty!

Ingredients:

- 2 medium sweet potatoes, scrubbed and sliced 1/8 inch thick
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/2 teaspoon coarse salt, preferably sea salt
- 1 lime, cut into wedges, for serving

Preheat oven to 400 degrees, with racks in center and lower positions. Divide sweet potatoes between 2 rimmed baking sheets. Drizzle with oil, toss, and spread them in a single layer on sheets. Bake, flipping once, until centers are soft and edges are crisp, 22 to 25 minutes. Sprinkle with salt, and serve with lime wedges.

Simple Baked Sweet Potato

Super Easy and delicious!

Ingredients:

Sweet Potatoes
Butter
Salt & Pepper

Heat oven to 400° F. Pierce each sweet potato several times with the tines of a fork. Place the sweet potatoes on a rimmed baking sheet lined with foil. Bake until tender, about 45 minutes. Make a slit in the top of each sweet potato. Top with butter and season with the salt and pepper.

SEND YOUR RECIPE CARDS HOME!

Spotlight: Evaluation Measures Used in Petersburg Healthy Options Partnerships

Introduction

Program evaluation is a key component of the Petersburg Healthy Options Partnerships (PHOPs) program and has been used to create data-driven project design and implementation during a five-year grant period. PHOPs is a five-year initiative funded by a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention High Obesity Program Grant awarded to Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) and the Virginia Tech Center for Public Health Practice and Research. Through the grant, several community and regional organizations have combined efforts to 1) improve the food system in the city to increase access to healthier foods, 2) improve and connect routes to everyday destinations with an emphasis on walking, and 3) support improvements to nutrition standards within programs serving residents.

Since 2018, PHOPs has collaborated with various organizations to increase healthy options in Petersburg. These partners include VCE, Virginia State University, Petersburg Public Library, Healthy Living and Learning Center, Virginia State University's Harding Street Urban Agricultural Center, Petersburg Wellness Consortium, Petersburg City Public Schools (PCPS), River Street Market, and other school and urban gardening projects. Collaborating with the Petersburg Healthy Community Action Team (HCAT) has also been vital. Funded by the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth, the HCAT is a five-year project that aims to decrease obesity prevalence among children in Petersburg. Through this partnership and others, PHOPs supports efforts to increase access to healthy foods (in particular, fresh fruits and vegetables), food education and literacy, and active transportation in Petersburg.

The Challenge

According to 2022 County Health Rankings data from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the City of Petersburg faces tremendous socioeconomic challenges associated with the increased prevalence of adult obesity (45 percent). In fact, the County Health Rankings rank the City of Petersburg 133rd of 133 counties and independent cities in Virginia for having the lowest health factors and outcomes in the Commonwealth.

Poverty and food insecurity are significant contributors to the low health ranking. In Petersburg, 36 percent of children live in poverty versus 12 percent statewide. With only two major chain grocery stores available to its residents, nine out of 11 census tracts in Petersburg are classified as low-income, low-access areas (also known as "food deserts") as defined by the USDA. Additionally, the 2019 KIDS COUNT data revealed 11.5 percent of children in Virginia were food insecure, while 28.3 percent of Petersburg children were food insecure. In fact, the United Way 2017–2018 Indicators of Community Strength report that Petersburg has the highest rate of food insecurity in the region. Given these statistics, Petersburg would likely benefit from projects and initiatives that directly serve its residents by increasing access to and education about healthy foods, particularly produce.

The Solution

PHOPs addresses the identified needs of Petersburg by using both qualitative and quantitative data to drive the selection of programming. For example, secondary data (census and national health surveys) have provided target geographical areas for interventions (e.g., low-income neighborhoods, higher rates of child poverty, and lack of access to vehicles). Primary data, collected through surveys, have shown which foods are culturally acceptable, and the types of foods provided through programs have been geared to match these findings. Qualitative responses to survey questions have also influenced future programs as community members report what is most needed in their own words (e.g., mobile markets with stops on school property).

Using these data, PHOPs and area partners develop and implement programs that support buying and eating locally grown produce. One PHOPs partnership is led by the VCE Family Nutrition Program (FNP) youth program assistant, who works with school administrators and teachers to provide comprehensive nutrition education that encourages eating healthy foods, including fruits and vegetables. The program also emphasizes the benefits and support of buying and eating locally grown produce. By leveraging

collective grant resources, PHOPs and HCAT have partnered with the FNP to implement impactful educational programming to youth.
PHOPs and HCAT evaluate success by using pre/post evaluation of programming, surveys, and biometric data. For example, for interventions such as educating students in the school garden, providing a taste test, or reading a Virginia Harvest of the Month book and growing the crop in the garden, evaluation includes acceptance of new foods before and after interventions. If available, mean body mass index for students will be compared between the start and the end of the project.

It is critical to set up evaluations at the start of a project before implementing interventions to capture baseline data. In public health research, it is challenging to directly link changes in behavior or attitudes to one intervention. However, research shows that consistent messaging over time and repeated exposure to healthy choices and active lifestyles has a positive impact on overall health. The data gathered through the PHOPs and HCAT grants will provide additional supporting data to that body of research.

The Impact

Through comprehensive nutrition education, an FNP Youth Program Assistant has served more than 450 students, with over 2,100 children reached in one year through additional PHOPs initiatives. The goal of emphasizing the importance of increasing the intake of fruits and vegetables and eating more locally grown vegetables is encouraging healthier eating habits and behaviors among youth. Despite COVID-19 constraints, the FNP has continued to serve Petersburg youth by adapting to remote and virtual education, such as FNP's *Teen Cuisine*, which provides cooking skills that encourage youth to prepare healthy snacks and meals on their own.

In the fall of 2020, a FNP SNAP-Ed agent trained PHOPs program assistants to implement the *Pick a Better Snack* curriculum for K–2 students at Pleasants Lane Elementary School. HCAT partners provided Harvest of the Month vegetable kits to Petersburg City Public School students. Over 500 youth tasted spinach, sweet potatoes, and other vegetables grown by local farmers. These activities were captured by the local newspaper and celebrated in the community.

PHOPs looks forward to continuing to partner with HCAT, FNP, VCE, and other organizations to provide food and nutrition education to the City of Petersburg, promote healthy changes, and use evaluation methods to refine the program for greatest impact.

Tips for Replication

1. Develop strong community partnerships to plan and fund programming to address shared objectives.
2. Consider evaluative methods before implementation. What are the objectives, how will objectives be achieved, and how will the team know it has been successful?
3. Collect baseline data.

Resources

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Chapter

3

Telling the Farm to School Story

Introduction

Prince William County Public Schools Nutrition Director Adam Russo often says, "If you don't tell your story, someone else will." By projecting a positive image of the nutrition program and highlighting the extra effort to serve fresh, locally sourced foods, school and child nutrition programs can promote their programs to gain new customers. Using high-quality, locally grown food is a great way to market nutrition programs, but unless students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community members know about the farm to school program, the program itself will not necessarily increase meal participation or community support.

Community programs and classroom activities should also weave in program promotion. It is easy to spend the majority of the time implementing programs with students while forgetting to share the amazing work with caregivers at home and the broader community. Telling the farm to school story through social media, newspaper features, menus, and cafeteria marketing can improve the perception and acceptance of meals served and increase community awareness of farm to school activities.

This chapter details different outreach avenues and provides tips, examples, and sample social media posts to elevate farm to school programs.

Outreach Avenues and Key Messaging

What is the purpose and goal of the outreach being conducted? Determining outreach goals can help frame the key messaging or specific takeaway points for the audience. Perhaps the broad goal is to increase meal participation. Or maybe the goal is to increase community awareness and buy-in of the farm to school program. These goals help provide the framework of the key messaging. Below are ways to promote farm to school programs to further outreach goals.

Social Media

Sample Farm to School Social Media Goals

1. Increase brand engagement and public engagement.
2. Generate leads and foster relationships.
3. Thank and acknowledge growers and school nutrition professionals.
4. Create a farm to school community.
5. Increase meal participation in school and child nutrition programs.
6. Increase access to fresh, healthy, Virginia grown food.

Maximizing Social Media

1. Take high-quality photos featuring healthy, local food.
    a. Use natural light. Morning or evening light is preferable over midday glare, and cloudy days can create a good composition without shadows.
    b. Determine whether the composition looks more appealing from above or from the side.
    c. Avoid using a reflective surface such as a stainless-steel table, opting for the tray to be placed on a clean wood veneer table or a natural surface instead.
    d. Try "portrait" mode on your phone, if available, creating a depth of field with a focus on the most attractive meal component.
    e. Use a plastic five-compartment tray instead of Styrofoam when practical.
    f. Crop photos to focus the eye on key components of the image.
    g. If including students enjoying the meal, ensure you have permission to post the photo by checking for a media release or opt-out form on file in the school.
    h. Ensure photos with students represent the diversity of the school culture.
2. Post high-quality photos on the division's social media pages using hashtags to connect with other relevant parties, such as the farm or vendor. **Use the hashtag #VAFarmToSchool**.
3. Build social media posts into weekly calendars and aim for one to three positive posts per week. Optimal posting times are early in the morning, late in the afternoon, or on weekends when people are less likely to be working. Posts can be scheduled ahead of time.
4. Consider the rule of thirds for posts:
    a. one-third of content promotes farm to school activities and meals,
    b. one-third of content shares ideas and stories, and
    c. one-third of content highlights personal interactions.

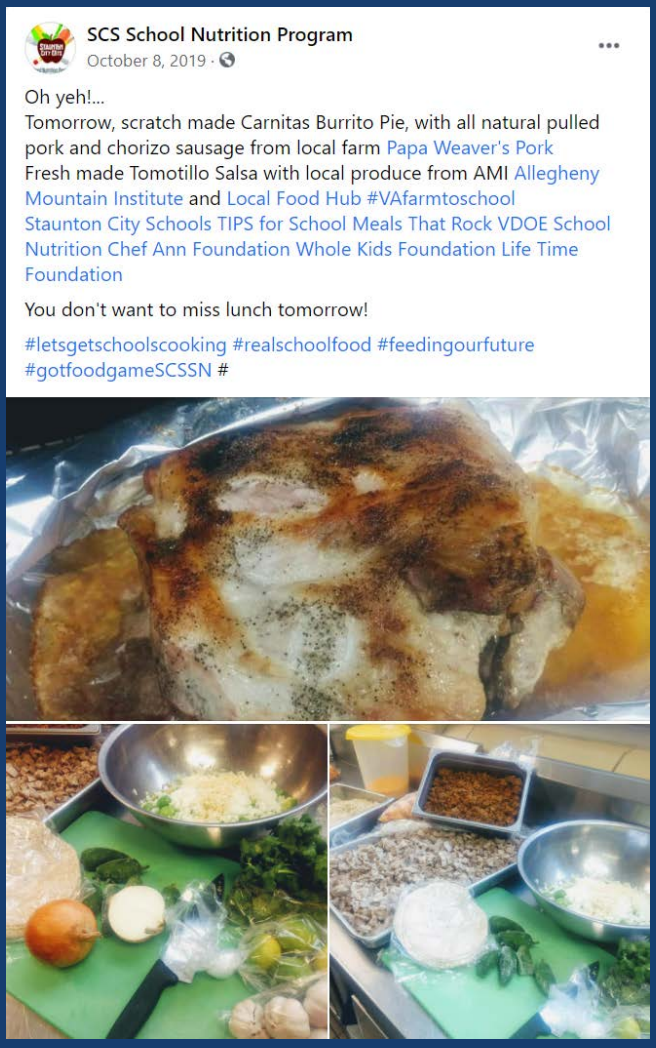
5. Gain permission to post or cross-post on the school's main social media pages, if possible, to gain a greater audience.
6. Promote special events such as tastings, garden clubs, farmer visits, and garden harvests that will be used in the school or child nutrition program ahead of time, capture images of the events, and share images the day of or the day after the event.
7. Remind your social media audience (e.g., parents, students, administrators, and community members) to like the page, follow the page, and share information using specific hashtags. Try offering farm to school prizes (e.g., a farmers market box) for "like our page" contests or hashtag photo contests.
8. Ensure that every person featured in social media posts has provided appropriate permission.

Examples of Social Media Posts

Petersburg City Schools posted photos of the Superintendent and a school board member participating in The Crunch Heard 'Round the Commonwealth. By asking school board members and school administrators to participate, school nutrition programs have an opportunity to inform school leaders about their efforts to provide fresh, local, healthy food to students and the benefits of farm to school practices.

Examples of Social Media Posts

This post from Staunton City Schools is a staged photograph of the scratch-cooked meal featuring local pork and vegetables. Staunton City Schools tagged the producers, the food hub distributor, and national social media groups while building excitement for the next day's meal.

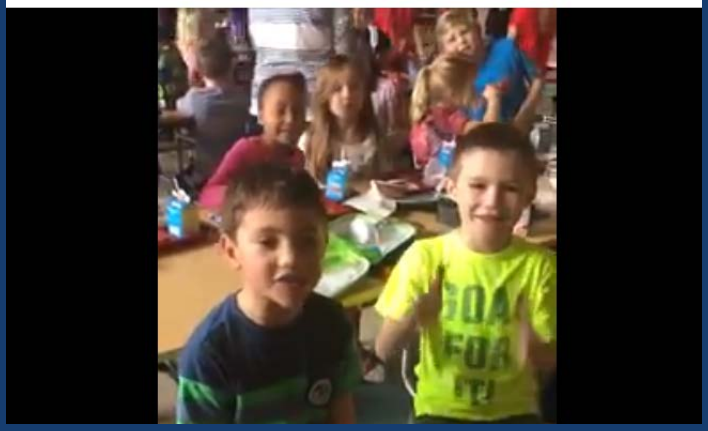


A wellness program called "Commit to Be Fit" in Rappahannock County Public Schools posted high-quality photographs of a school meal featuring local products. These meals are staged from the top perspective with proper portion sizes and with the milk carton set on its side for better visibility.

School Health Initiative Program SHIP
October 5, 2020 ·

We miss being together for Farm to School days, but don't worry, you can still get your squash! Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools will be celebrating #VirginiaFarmtoSchool week on October 8th with butternut squash. As part of our Grab and Go meals students will receive Farm to School activity booklets and whole squash with recipes for you to cook at home! #WeAreWJCC

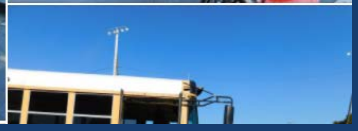
For information about FREE Grab and Go meals for all children ages 2-18, click here: https://wjccs... See More



Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools used butternut squash to entice families to pick up meals. They followed up with another post to show happy customers and to celebrate the hardworking school nutrition staff.

School Health Initiative Program SHIP
October 8, 2020 ·

Many thanks to our amazing Cafeteria staff and bus drivers who prepared and delivered 2,700 pounds of healthy, fresh Virginia Grown butternut squash as part of today's Grab and Go meals and school lunches to celebrate Virginia Farm to School Week! #WeAreWJCC #Farm2School #VirginiaFarmtoSchool Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools



Farmers find promotional benefits in selling to local schools. In this post from Laurel Springs Farm, the farmers thank the schools and inform their customers that their beef was featured in school meals in Smyth County Public Schools. Tagging growers is a way to support their businesses and promote the meal program.

Laurel Springs Farm
October 6, 2020 ·

Rich Valley Elementary, Oak Point Elementary, Sugar Grove Elementary and Atkins Elementary - we thank you for your enthusiasm, dedication to feeding the youth of Smyth County, and your optimism during these uncertain times. Deliveries look a little different this year with only seeing your smiles through your eyes under masks, but we felt the warmth!

Have an awesome week and much success of October 12, 2020 while you share our burgers with your students! 🍔

#farmtoschool #... See More

Sample Farm to School Social Media Posts

Our #SchoolLunchHeroes are at it again! Today they are serving the #VAHarvestOfTheMonth feature, *[name of crop]*, in a delicious *[recipe name]*. Thanks to the Virginia farmers who grew this produce! *[tag farm]* #VAFarmToSchool @VDOESNP

Smiles are free with this meal today! Breakfast features #VAHarvestOfTheMonth strawberries grown by *[name of farmer and tag their social media]*. #VAFarmToSchool @VDOESNP

Did you know? Kid-tested, kid-approved meals at *[name of school]* feature fresh, local vegetables and fruits. When food is grown nearby, it is fresh and delicious, and it supports our local economy. #VAFarmToSchool @VDOESNP

Our #SchoolLunchHeroes are magic—watch this delicious meal disappear! Students at *[name of school]* love fresh, healthy, local food from *[name of farm or food hub and tag their social media.]* #VAFarmToSchool @ VDOESNP *[Post a before picture of a plate featuring local food, a student eating it, and an empty tray afterward.]*

Fresh, local food nourishes bodies and minds. Tomorrow's lunch features local *[name of product]* from *[name of farm, food hub, or distributor]*. We support our local economy through #VAFarmToSchool. @ VDOESNP

You can't hide that *[name of school mascot]* pride! Horticulture students grew the *[name of product]* featured in tomorrow's meal. *[Photo depicts students using food safety strategies in harvest and delivery of product.]* Can't get more local than that! #VAFarmToSchool @VDOESNP

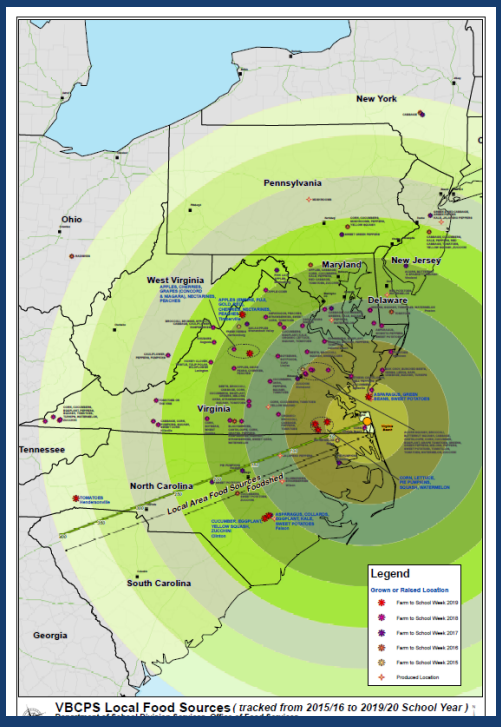
We buy local to ensure our students have fresh, healthy food and are connected to Virginia's vibrant food system. *[Name of school]* supports Virginia's economy! #LunchtimeIsLearningTime #VAFarmToSchool @ VDOESNP

Lunchtime is learning time. Students at *[name of school]* got to sample our #VAHarvestOfTheMonth feature, *[name of featured crop]*, and learn about how it nourishes their bodies. Thanks to *[name of farm, food hub, or distributor]* for growing beautiful, healthy produce that fuels our learning! #VAFarmToSchool @VDOESNP

Our students deserve the best meals to fuel them for learning. This month's #VAHarvestOfTheMonth crop will be featured on our menu tomorrow. Did you know *[add a fun fact about the crop]*? Thanks to *[name or tag farm, food hub, or distributor]* for supplying delicious vegetables and fruits for our meals. #VAFarmToSchool @VDOESNP

Menus, Media, and Special Events

1. Use symbols on menus to indicate when food is scratch-cooked and/or local. Use menu space and the school nutrition website to educate parents and students about the Virginia Harvest of the Month features.
2. Invite the school board, city council, county administrators, and county board of supervisors members to Virginia Harvest of the Month tastings, farmer visits, The Crunch Heard 'Round the Commonwealth, and other special events. Invite the local newspaper or television station by posting a brief media release at least 7 to 14 days before the event.
3. Remember to inform the VDOE-SNP about upcoming special events at least a month before the event.



menu, the Virginia Beach Public Schools Office of Food Services prominently displays a map in the cafeteria. The map identifies the farm sources of commonly procured local food items.

Student Engagement

Farm to school programs provide unique opportunities for student engagement and leadership. Consider integrating student ideas into your program promotion. What stories do your students want to tell? Younger students can share stories and drawings. Older students with computer and video-editing experience can create engaging videos to share with the school community. With any promotion, always ensure a media release is on file for each student.

Conclusion

Telling students, families, school and county administrators, and community members about the farm to school work happening in a division or community-sponsored program is important because it adds value to the program. The quality of food tells its own story, but using local products and then promoting them sets a positive tone and connects with the community. When more people recognize that lunchtime is also a learning time, school meals gain value as a critical component of the education system.

Resources

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Chapter

4

Procuring Local Foods for School and Child Nutrition Programs

Introduction

Planning menus around purchasing, preparing, and serving local food is the foundation for strong farm to school programs. Using local products places a spotlight on high-quality foods used in nutrition programs and improves the perception of school meals. Serving local food also provides opportunities to connect nutrition programs to core educational concepts and provides opportunities to increase food literacy and nutrition education. According to the NFSN's Benefits Facts Sheet, farm to school practices improve students' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors around food and nutrition and improve academic achievement, student engagement, and whole child development.

This chapter covers what federal and state procurement thresholds are, how to procure local foods step by step, how to use geographic preference, and where to find procurement templates and offers several creative options for procuring local food in Virginia. The USDA Community Food Systems Division created several procurement-related fact sheets, which are located in the Resources section of this chapter. The same federal and state procurement regulations apply whether procuring local foods or any other good or service using federal child nutrition program funds. Nutrition program sponsors must use the appropriate procurement method based on federal, state, and local procurement thresholds.

It is important to understand how each procurement process works and how a school division or child nutrition program can target local food in the solicitation process. The USDA Farm to School Decision Tree can help SFAs determine the correct procurement process to use when procuring local food. Additionally, the USDA publication entitled *Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs* is the best resource for understanding the following:

- why and how to define "local" for a child nutrition program;
- what geographic preference is and how to use it when evaluating bid responses for unprocessed or minimally processed products;
- how each of the procurement methods works and how to target local foods using a micro-purchase, small purchase, or a request for proposal (RFP);
- how to use products from the school garden or farm; and
- how to purchase local foods for summer and child care programs.

The VDOE-SNP recommends using the USDA guide to develop a solicitation that incorporates school and community values around supporting local economies. Incorporating preference for the use of small, women-owned, minority-owned, or disabled veteran-owned farms aligns with the Virginia Public Procurement Act, Va. Code § 2.2-4310. For more information, please see the Team Nutrition Training Video entitled *Procurement Profiles: Sharing Your School Nutrition Vision* found on the VDOE-SNP Training and Resources page.

Additionally, the VDOE-SNP developed several procurement resources to assist with the process of finding and procuring local foods that can also be found on the VDOE-SNP Farm to School website.

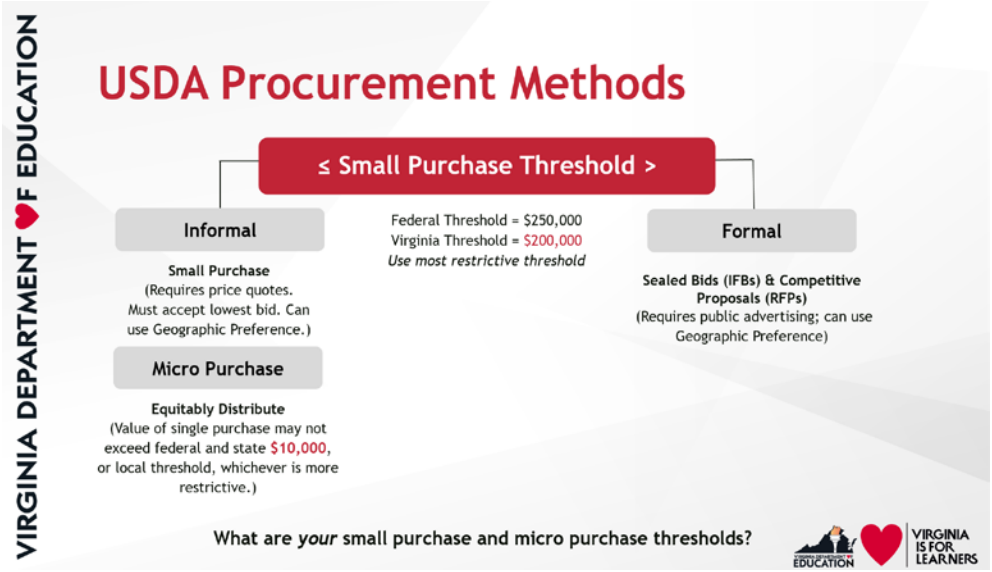

Figure 2
USDA Procurement Methods
This figure depicts the federal and state procurement thresholds as of January 2021 and indicates when a geographic preference may be applied.

Local Purchasing Step By Step (USDA Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs, Appendix F)

Before Starting the Procurement Process

1. Budgeting: Calculate revenues, determine the percentage of revenue to be spent on food, and identify the maximum food cost per meal available.
2. Forecasting: Identify the products and quantities the child nutrition program will purchase and estimate the total cost of the purchase.
3. Depending on the dollar amount of the purchase, determine whether to use a formal or informal procurement method.
4. Plan the procurement procedure, ensuring compliance with federal, state, and local requirements.
5. Decide how you wish to define "local."
6. As relevant, determine the criteria and method of evaluation for how to apply a geographic preference.
7. Where appropriate, incorporate these decisions into school district policy to guide food purchases.

Putting Together the Procurement

1. Clearly communicate your intent to purchase local products and explain how you define local. As relevant, apply a geographic preference to your solicitations.
2. Clearly define and communicate the evaluation criteria that will be used to select successful vendors, regardless of which method you use.
3. Identify vendor qualifications that meet your needs.
4. Write specifications to clearly identify the products you want, the level of processing you require, and any other quality, customer service, or performance criteria.
5. State preferences and how they will be weighted in the evaluation process.
6. Develop and commit to a plan for reviewing and selecting the successful bid, proposal, or quote.

Implementing the Procurement Process

1. Publicize the procurement opportunity to ensure adequate competition and maximize the likelihood of reaching qualified vendors who can supply food from your geographic preference area.
2. Fairly evaluate based on the vendor qualifications, specifications, and preferences in the procurement request, and award the contract.
3. Execute a contract that matches your specifications and preferences from the procurement request.
4. Manage the procurement. Monitor and keep documentation on service, product quality, price, and compliance with the contract.

Using Geographic Preference (USDA Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs, Appendix M)

1. Define local
   - How has your school or district chosen to define "local" or "regional"?
   - How did you establish this definition?
2. Determine whether the procurement is informal or formal
   - What is the value of the purchase?
   - What is the applicable small-purchase threshold?
   - If the purchase amount is over the small-purchase threshold, will you use an RFP or IFB?
3. Decide how much preference to give
   - How much more are you willing to pay for local?
   - How many local vendors are there?
   - What is the market price?

   Tip: Remember that the stronger the preference you give to local products, the more those products might cost you. Think carefully about how much preference you can afford to award. You may also consider using a Request for Information.

4. Determine how much preference will be applied
    - Outline how geographic preference will be applied:
    - Dollar value
    - Point system
    - Percentage
    - Other?

Sample Geographic Preference Language (USDA Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs, Appendix M)

Example One: Virginia Grown Definition of Local, Price Preference

This school division seeks to serve Virginia grown products to its students. We are currently seeking quotes for the following items for our Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program and Harvest of the Month Program. This nutrition program desires to purchase produce items grown and packed or processed in Virginia and will apply a 10 percent price preference to such products as we receive the quotes.

Example Two: Two-tiered, Price Preference

This school division desires to serve fresh, locally grown products to its students. To this end, the Nutrition Services Department is seeking to develop a list of vendors who meet all procurement requirements from which quotes may be requested.

This division defines "locally grown products" eligible for this geographic preference at two levels:
1. grown in this county or adjacent counties and
2. grown in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

As allowed under federal law, this school division will provide a price percentage preference during evaluation of quotes to "locally grown products" purchased for school food procurement as defined under this geographic preference.

The price percentage is as follows:
1. grown in this county or adjacent counties: 5 percent
2. grown in the Commonwealth of Virginia: 3 percent

The price percentage preference means that for the purposes of comparison, prices for product grown in one of the *[insert number of]* counties will be adjusted to a price 5 percent lower than the price quoted for the product by the vendor or 3 percent for product grown outside these counties and still within the Commonwealth. The price percentage preference affects the quoted price only for awarding of the quote, not the actual price paid to the vendor.

Example Three: One Point = One Penny

This division/child nutrition program seeks to serve products grown in this county to its students. We are currently seeking quotes for *[name products]* for our Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program and our Harvest of the Month program.
This nutrition program would like to purchase items grown and packed or processed in this county, and will apply 10 preference points to any bidder able to supply product from *[name county]*. For this solicitation, 10 preference points are equivalent to a 10-cent reduction in price for the purposes of evaluating the lowest bidder.

Example Four: Percentage Preference for a Minimum Percentage Local

This division/child nutrition program seeks to serve regionally grown produce from within 400 miles of the school board office in *[name location]*. We are currently seeking quotes for a variety of fruit and vegetable products. For the purposes of evaluating bids, respondents who can supply at least 60 percent of the requested items from within 400 miles will receive a 20 percent price reduction.

USDA Farm to School Procurement Fact Sheets

Food and Nutrition Service. (2017, August). *Geographic preference: What it is and how to use it*. United States Department of Agriculture. https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource-files/geographicpreference.pdf

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VDOE-SNP Local Procurement Templates

The VDOE-SNP developed two templates to assist with local food procurement. Additionally, a template memorandum of understanding between school gardens and school nutrition programs can be found in Appendix C.

Request for Information

A request for information (RFI) is a document that informs potential vendors of what the school or child nutrition program is seeking in terms of specific crops, quantities, and delivery windows. The school or child nutrition program completes the section expressing the desire to purchase certain items and then provides this information to potential vendors. Vendors complete and return the RFI to the school or child nutrition program to indicate the products that they can provide. Vendors may be asked to bid on all or some of the products. This is not a contract. Rather, it helps vendors understand the buyer's needs and expectations and assists buyers in developing their overall procurement plan.

The VDOE-SNP's template RFI focuses on Virginia Harvest of the Month products and features draft specifications that a local grower would be able to address. Additionally, there is space for potential vendors to list other items they have available. The RFI is included in Appendix B and is also available on the VDOE-SNP Farm to School website.

Template Forward Contract

A forward contract defines the agreement between a producer and a buyer in advance of the harvest. It provides written confirmation that a specified quantity of product will be purchased when it is seasonally available and details the terms of delivery, product quality specifications, and food safety requirements. Forward contracts help growers develop their product marketing plans and help school and child nutrition program administrators develop their annual procurement plans.

The VDOE-SNP developed a template forward contract for working with growers. A forward contract would be the result of a procurement process aligned with federal regulations, and can be used for informal or formal procurement processes. It contains geographic preference language and specifications to assist in developing a solicitation. This template forward contract is available in this chapter in Appendix B and is also available on the VDOE-SNP Farm to School website.

Conclusion

While education and school gardens are integral to successful farm to school programs, the heart of farm to school lies in procuring local foods to use for educational and nutritional purposes. The NFSN compiled research from across the country that demonstrates how procuring local foods creates and maintains jobs in the community and the state, increases student and teacher meal participation, and develops long-term revenue streams for individual farmers (NFSN, 2020).

The Virginia Harvest of the Month program is a good place to start. Develop menus and procurement plans highlighting each featured crop throughout the year and inform vendors of the desire to purchase locally grown foods in solicitation documents. With careful monitoring of production and sales records along with promotional efforts such as Harvest of the Month tastings, school and child nutrition programs can reap the benefits of increased participation in school meal programs, and children can benefit by developing a taste for fresh, healthy food.

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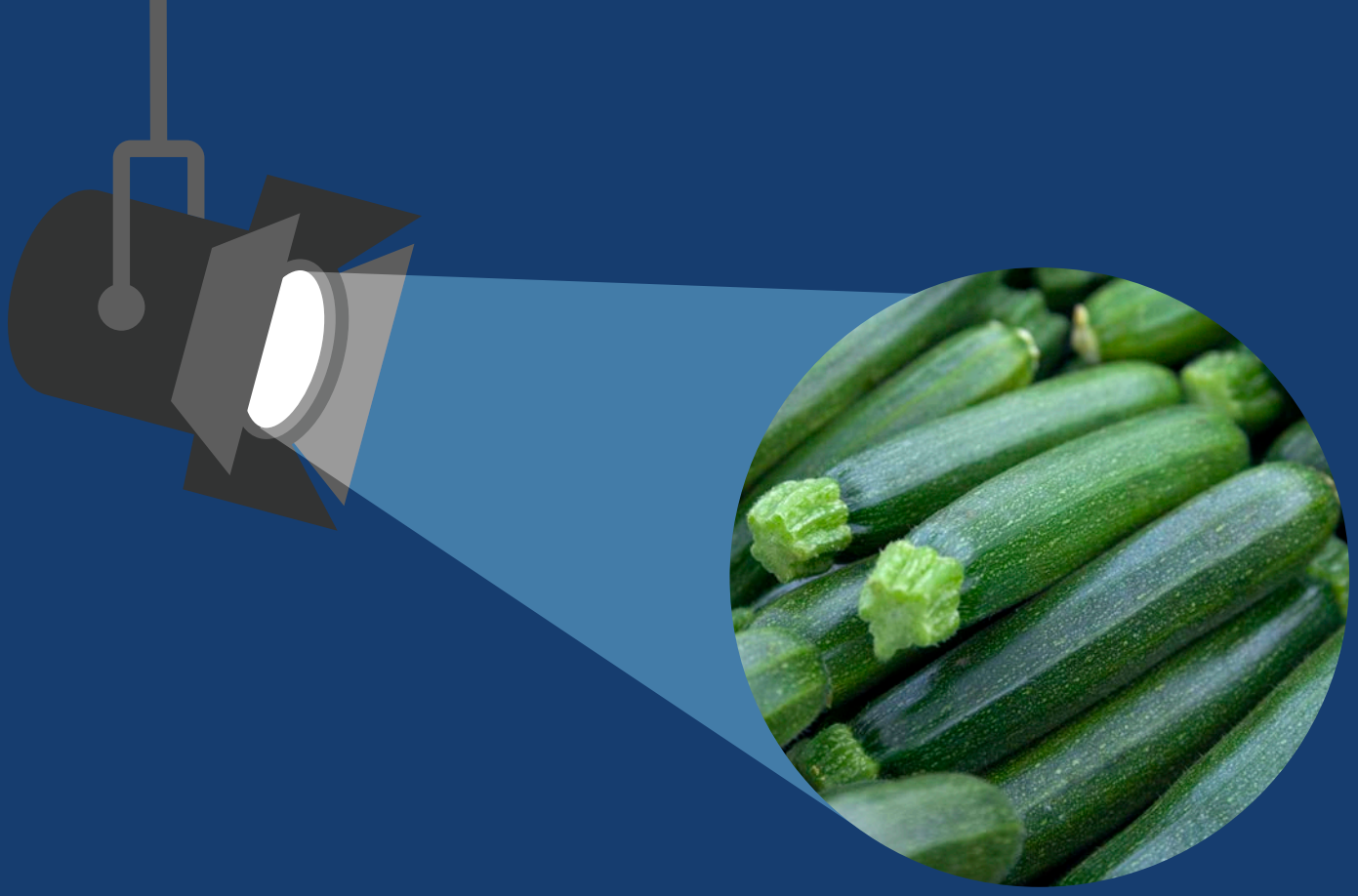

Chapter 4: Virginia Farm to School Spotlights

Spotlight: Procuring Local Food Through a Farmer Cooperative in Southside Virginia

Introduction

Mecklenburg County Public Schools (MCPS) met growers from the Southside Virginia Fruit and Vegetable Producers Association (SVFVPA) during a Virginia Farm to School Network meeting and a farm tour sponsored by Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE)/Virginia State University (VSU) Small Farm Outreach Program (SFOP) in 2019. Through a series of meetings, the MCPS director of food services, VCE, and grower members of the farmer cooperative piloted a partnership in 2019 and 2020. The pilot program included a nutrition education event during Virginia Farm to School Week featuring local foods, school garden consultation from Brick Goldman of Goldman Farms, and ongoing purchases throughout the pilot year. COVID-19 school closures disrupted the partnership, but MCPS hopes to work with SVFVPA again in the coming school year.

The Challenge

Many school and child nutrition program administrators have not yet established relationships with local farmers, and they often need assistance finding growers and building the vendor/buyer relationship. Additionally, a school division's demand may exceed the quantity or diversity that an individual farmer might be able to supply. Delivery logistics to individual schools also pose a difficulty for individual farmers.

The Solution

The SFOP, in partnership with the Charlotte County VCE Agriculture and Natural Resources agent and the VDOE-SNP, organized a farm tour for nutrition services directors in the region. Nutrition directors from Mecklenburg County, Prince Edward County, and Cumberland County Public Schools toured Goldman Farms, Archlynn Farm, Wildwood Berry and Produce, and Willowland Farm. The tours focused on product availability and food safety practices on each farm. The VSU/VCE Community Gardens and Food Specialist prepared a meal with produce from the farms. Growers and buyers had an opportunity to brainstorm what it would take to create vendor/buyer relationships.

The Impact

As a result of the Charlotte County Farm to School tour, a vendor/buyer relationship was formed between the SVFVPA and the MCPS director of food services. In 2019, the SVFVPA sold approximately $1,500 in produce to MCPS, with the potential for ongoing sales. MCPS used the micro-purchase method to purchase apples, sweet potatoes, watermelon, green beans, cabbage, broccoli, onions, and squash for meal service during Virginia Farm to School Week and for the launch of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) at one school. The SVFVPA provided one invoice per grower, which made it easier for MCPS to spread micro-purchases among qualified vendors.

The SVFVPA growers delivered product to each of MCPS's eight school sites. Since that time, the SVFVPA purchased a refrigerated truck and is determining logistics for aggregation and delivery.

In addition to the pilot purchases in 2019 from the SVFVPA, MCPS's Food Services Department teamed

up with educators and VCE to start a school garden, perform nutrition education events, and conduct fresh produce taste tests. Although COVID-19 delayed progress, MCPS and the SVFVPA are hopeful that their partnership will continue to grow. The SVFVPA is interested in selling to other school divisions in the region, and regional VCE agents are available to help build those relationships.

Tips for Replication

- **Reach out.** Growers interested in selling to schools should contact the school nutrition programs directors in nearby school divisions to learn what crops they would be interested in and in what quantities. School nutrition directors can ask local VCE agents to assist with identifying farms that may be interested in selling to schools. An ideal time for this outreach is during the winter months when growers are preparing their seed orders and marketing plans. This is also when school divisions are refining their procurement plans and considering menu changes for the following school year.
- **Communicate**. Once a relationship is established, communication is the key to ensuring both vendor and buyer are satisfied.
- **Consider using the VDOE-SNP Request for Information (RFI) found on the VDOE-SNP Farm to School website.** The RFI is intended to be completed first by school nutrition professionals and then by potential vendors. School nutrition professionals provide product specifications, note desired quantities, and indicate timeframes for delivery. Farmers, food hubs, and other potential vendors of local product complete the form, indicating estimates of product availability and prices. This is not a contract. Rather, it is a tool for sharing information between the school or child nutrition program and a potential vendor before soliciting for products.
- **Start small when working with new local vendors.** Often small growers will not be able to meet the division's entire need for a certain product, but they may be able to fulfill a monthly Virginia Harvest of the Month featured crop for one or two meals.
- **Be willing to work out delivery logistics**. Both growers and school nutrition programs may need to compromise. Consider alternatives to requiring delivery to every school, such as piloting in geographic pods or working with internal delivery systems to transport products safely to other schools or sites. Growers must ensure the deliveries are economically feasible. Aggregating supply into one vehicle and hiring a driver can reduce the time cost and carbon footprint of deliveries.
- **Reserve the right to purchase outside of the contracted distributor.** Reserve the right to purchase local items as available when soliciting for a produce distributor. Ask produce companies to indicate which products are local on invoices.
- **Provide weekly, biweekly, or monthly product availability sheets to school and child nutrition program directors.** The director of food services for MCPS would call the VCE ANR agent to find out what the SVFVPA grower cooperative had available. Streamlining this communication chain would be useful for buyers.

Resources

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Authors

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Joanne Jones, Extension Agent, Agriculture and Natural Resources, VCE, Charlotte County

Spotlight: Using Virginia Market Maker to Find Local Food

Introduction

Virginia's food system consists of farms and food businesses of varying sizes and capacities. VCE and its partners work to connect local producers to buyers of an appropriate size and scale using an innovative tool known as Virginia MarketMaker. Virginia MarketMaker is an online database of local food and farms designed to help increase market connections and promote the use of locally grown and raised agricultural products in school nutrition programs. Funded by VCE and VDACS, the MarketMaker platform is an essential resource for farm to school procurement.

The Challenge

Incorporating local food into school meals can be difficult for a variety of reasons. School nutrition directors are often looking for specific product certifications, attributes, varieties, and formats. With such specific criteria, it can be hard to know where to look for local suppliers.

The Solution

To find local vendors and producers to bid on RFPs, school nutrition directors can use local food and product directories within MarketMaker, which are built and maintained by community and local food system groups.

MarketMaker is an electronic directory and tool that provides information for food-related enterprises about products, availability, affiliations, attributes, certifications, and more. MarketMaker provides an important online presence for farmers, ranchers, and agricultural businesses. It is an ever-growing, always evolving partnership of land grant universities, state departments of agriculture, and food and agricultural organizations in a coordinated effort to build a virtual infrastructure bringing healthier, fresher food to consumers.

Virginia MarketMaker was established in 2015 when Virginia Tech obtained a license for the software funded by Farm Credit of the Virginias and VDACS.

Procurement professionals can search the online directory of Virginia MarketMaker or post the specifics of what they are seeking on the Buy/Sell Forum. These searches provide contact information for producers located within the search range indicated.

The Impact

Today, Virginia MarketMaker is the largest, most in-depth database of farmers, ranchers, fisheries, farmers markets, processors, and packers in the entire state, with over 3,000 business listings. School nutrition programs have found it to be a helpful resource in their farm to school programming:

> MarketMaker will forever be my first step in farm to school planning! I was able to quickly link to producers who had the products that I specifically wanted for my school menus. Then, most importantly, by being able to access the comprehensive business profiles, I could easily identify businesses that I could confidently reach out to. I was able to find multiple qualified producers who met my needs for goods, such as grass-fed ground beef. Previously, this type of research would have taken months, but by using Virginia MarketMaker, I had a list of potential businesses to work with within a matter of days. – *Amanda Warren, School Nutrition Program Supervisor, Staunton City Public Schools*

Resources

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Spotlight: Lulus Local Food, Online Sales for Farmers, Food Hubs, and Farmers Markets

Introduction

Since Lulus Local Food was founded in 2008, the online ordering program has provided a method for connecting farmers with fresh produce and farm products to regional school and child nutrition programs. Lulus Local Food has supported Virginia farm to school efforts by providing apples for Virginia Farm to School Week; sweet potatoes, cucumbers, hearty greens, and ground beef for school menus; and farmers for school visits. Food hubs and farmers markets using the Lulus platform have pick-up sites scattered throughout the Commonwealth from Virginia Beach to the Shenandoah Valley, which helps school and community program sponsors access local food. Goochland County Public Schools, Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools (WJCC), and Chesterfield County Public Schools have used this e-commerce ordering platform. Lulus Local Food's former sponsor, the Virginia Foundation for Agriculture, Innovation, and Rural Sustainability, received a USDA Farm to School Grant in 2019 to tailor and pilot the software for school nutrition program use.

The Challenge

Over the years, farms and school divisions have teamed together to celebrate Virginia Farm to School Week and to support special programs like Virginia Harvest of the Month and afterschool healthy snack initiatives. However, many divisions find it difficult to use locally sourced products on menus throughout the year. Ordering from one farm is often problematic in meeting the quantity requirements of large school divisions. In addition, placing separate orders to multiple farms is time-consuming and inefficient for school nutrition directors and cafeteria managers.

The Solution

Lulus Local Food is an e-commerce site custom designed for selling food from small farms. Lulus Local Food customers can place custom orders from many farms, searching through different types of items from multiple vendors in one inventory list. Farmers who post items maintain inventory lists and download orders for packaging and delivery.

A wholesale version of this system has been deployed and is being used by food hubs to sell products from many small farms to tax-exempt customers. In 2019, WJCC piloted the Lulus Local Food ordering system. In January 2020, Kelrae Farms sold kale to one of 16 schools in WJCC. This served as a test order using the Lulus Local Food software platform. The cafeteria manager placed the order online using the same schedule that she used to place other online orders. The process was seamless, and plans were in place to continue the process in the spring when more items would be available. Pam Dannon, Registered Dietitian for WJCC's School Health Initiative Program, said, "The reality is that many other items, milk, for example, and others, have moved to online platforms, so it is only logical to go to this method of ordering for fresh local produce as well." When COVID-19 closed schools, the pilot was postponed with hopes of revitalizing the pilot once schools returned to normal.

Individual schools are set up as delivery locations so that division-level buyers, such as school nutrition directors, can place orders for several cafeterias, school cafeteria managers can place their own orders, or a division can implement a combination of both methods. As customers, school nutrition staff can shop from numerous farms. Competitive pricing is offered by the farmers to provide easy price comparisons for small purchase processes. Deliveries can be made to one central location or to individual schools.

As Lulus Local Food completes system upgrades tailored to wholesale clients such as schools, school staff will also be able to purchase from participating food hubs and farmers markets online. Additional virtual food hubs are anticipated to launch in fall 2022. As schools pilot the Lulus Local Food platform and delivery process, they may consider offering ordering capability to families, staff, or nearby early care centers. Orders placed by community members would be collected at designated school sites. Using the school as a food hub or farm stand increases access to fresh, healthy, local food for families and communities, provides hands-on learning experiences for students running farm stands, and aligns with healthy fundraiser guidelines.

The Impact

Since its inception in 2008, Lulus Local Food has helped over 750 Virginia farms process direct-to-consumer sales through virtual food hubs, CSAs, and farmers markets using the innovative e-commerce platform. The Lulus Local Food platform is ready for testing with Virginia school divisions looking to connect with food hubs and farmers markets and obtain local food from hundreds of small farms using the system. In the long term, Lulus Local Food plans to establish online shopping platforms for schools across the Commonwealth. Once the platform is complete and tested by partnering schools, it will be available to all school divisions throughout Virginia.

Resources

Lulus Local Food. (n.d.). https://www.luluslocalfood.net/

Author

Molly Harris, Founder, Lulus Local Food

Chapter

5

Procuring Safe Food, Assessing Risks, and Documenting Practices

Introduction

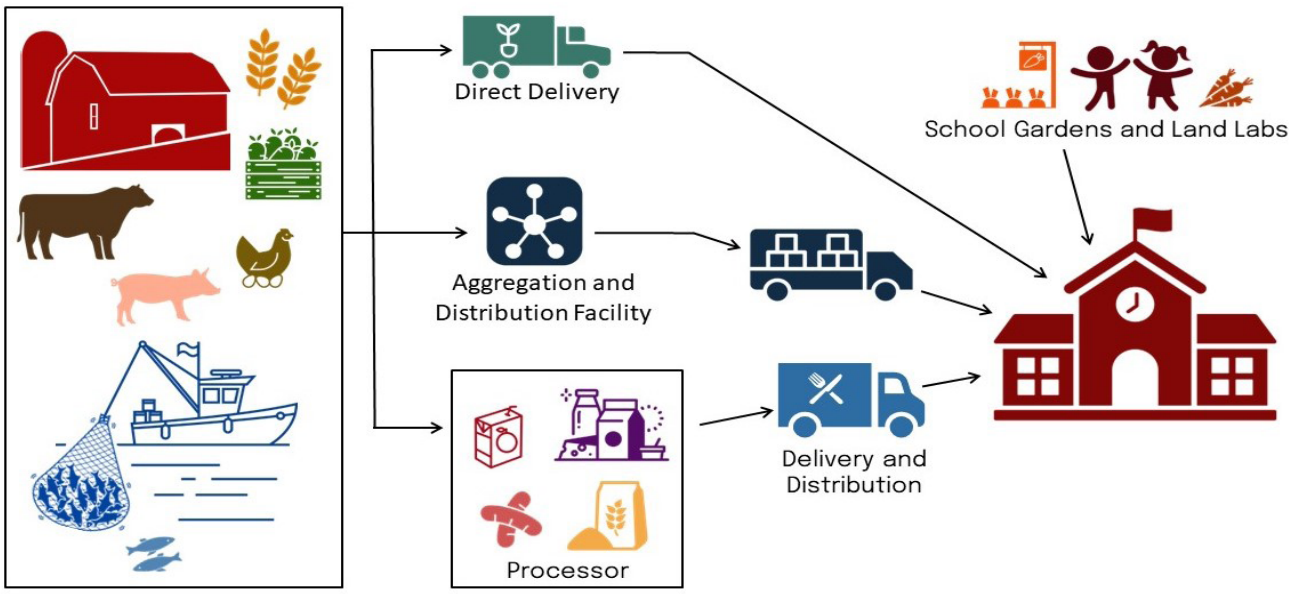
Serving safe food is critical for any school or child nutrition program. Farm to school food safety requirements, regulations, practices, and suggestions minimize risks and are built on scientific principles of microbiology, public health, and hazard assessment during agricultural production, harvest, and post-harvest handling stages. Although handling requirements differ across foods, all foods require specific conditions to ensure food safety and food quality.

This chapter will explore the most important principles affecting food safety and food quality. The *Resources* section of this chapter includes additional information and tools to assist with food safety within farm to school programs.

The Flow of Food From the Farm to the School Tray

When discussing food safety, it is helpful to consider the flow of food from farm to tray: how it is being produced or raised and how it is harvested and handled after harvest (CDC 2017). Post-harvest handling includes steps taken at the farm level as well as any subsequent steps after the food leaves the farm, which include transport, processing, delivery, distribution, and further handling, storage, and preparation at the school (Figure 3).

Figure 3
Simplified Flow of Food From the Farm to the School (Vallotton; Adapted from CDC 2017)



Broadly speaking, farms are the place where foods are produced or raised using crop fields, greenhouses, pastures, or other facilities. Farms also include fisheries where seafood is raised or caught wild. Since school gardens and land labs are also involved in producing food, the principles described in this section also apply. While most gardens are smaller and tend to focus on fresh produce and flowers, land labs are typically more diverse and integrate both animal and plant production. As with commercial-oriented farms, understanding food safety and food quality in both gardens and land labs is important to reduce risks.
Once food is harvested, the immediate post-harvest handling steps differ based on the type of food and the form desired for the end user. Will the food be used in its raw state, or will it be transformed into a different state through processing steps such as chopping, slicing, milling, liquefying, cooking, fermenting, smoking, freezing, or drying?

With harvested fresh produce, it may first be cooled to remove field heat and then either directly packed or washed, sorted, packaged, and then placed in cold storage until it is transported in its raw form (Vallotton et al. 2021a). In some cases, produce may undergo minimal processing steps (e.g., cutting, trimming, and shredding), then packaged (e.g., pre-cut foods and salad mixes). In other cases, the raw produce may undergo greater transformation to create other products (e.g., apples made into juice, tomatoes canned into sauce, and nuts made into peanut butter, etc.). With meat, poultry, and seafood, animals are slaughtered and then processed into various products. Fluid milk might be processed and packaged for fresh consumption or used for making cheese, butter, yogurt, and other dairy products (CDC 2017).

Regardless of whether the products will be eaten raw or as a processed food, their form will dictate further handling and optimal conditions for storage and transport. Delivery and distribution may be direct from the farm to the school, or it may involve many steps. Once delivered to respective school(s), there are handling procedures related to storage holding, food preparation, and serving (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services 2019a, 2019b, 2021b).

In considering the flow of food described in Figure 3, the more steps involved, the greater the potential for introducing hazards. Thus, to promote food safety and food quality, it is vital to identify the main hazards, understand the ways that food can become contaminated by the hazards, pinpoint possible problem areas, and then implement practices to minimize conditions leading to contamination (Food and Nutrition Service 2022).

There are four main categories of hazards to consider in the flow of food: biological, chemical, physical, and food allergen. Biological hazards include bacteria, viruses, parasites, yeasts, and molds. The biological hazards that have the most impact on food safety and quality are bacteria and viruses (CDC 2020; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services 2021a). Chemical hazards include cleaning products, lubricants, paints, petroleum products, bulk fertilizers, pesticides, and other similar products. Physical hazards found in food are things such as debris, hair, screws, staples, metal, glass, wood, plastic, etc. Food allergens are any proteins in a food that cause an immune system reaction soon after eating that food. A food allergy reaction can be minor (e.g., hives or rashes), serious (e.g., swelling or difficulty breathing), or even life-threatening (e.g., anaphylactic shock or cardiac arrest). While a person can be allergic to any food item, nine foods cause 90 percent of all food allergy reactions. These are called the major food allergens, or the "Big 9" (Figure 4) (School Nutrition Association n.d.-a, n.d.-b).

There are several primary routes by which food safety hazards may contaminate the food products during the flow of food (CDC 2017). While the farm and post-farm levels clearly have some differences, they share some commonalities. Each route of contamination should be considered while the food is growing or being raised as well as during the harvest and post-harvest handling stages. These routes of contamination include the following:

- people, such as farm workers, handlers, teachers, students, and visitors;
- sources of water used for handwashing, irrigation, spray applications, frost protection, post-harvest washing, icing, cleaning, and food preparation;
- animals, such as livestock, birds, deer, rodents, and pets; and
- tools, equipment, vehicles, and facilities, including knives, containers, machinery, packing lines, food-contact surfaces, dry storage areas, coolers, transport vehicles, and food processing equipment.

Additionally, an added route of contamination that may occur on farms is through the application of biological soil amendments, such as manure, compost, compost teas, and other fertilizers consisting of animal-based materials (Vallotton et al. 2021b).

Figure 4
The Nine Major Food Allergens (Vallotton)

What Does Each Practitioner Need to Know?

This Virginia-specific farm to school *Toolkit* is designed to guide practitioners. In the context of food safety, it can be confusing to know where to start, what questions to ask, who needs to be asked, and where to find reliable resources. Although food safety can seem complex—especially recognizing that different people have different roles and concerns and require specific information related to their needs—there are fundamental principles that can be applied regardless of the context. To learn more about foodborne pathogens, food contaminants, and spoilage organisms, see the references and resources section.

Farmers

Are there specific food safety protocols and regulations required for farms producing and handling foods for school sales?

Different foods vary in their overall handling requirements from farm to plate, yet all foods require specific optimal conditions to maintain both food safety and food quality. The kind of food and the level of processing will impact the type of regulations and specific handling practices needed. School nutrition professionals at the division level are the first primary contacts who can outline what is needed regarding safe food handling and documentation. They are well versed in safe food handling practices at the post-farm level, but they will need to know on-the-farm as well as post-harvest handling practices.

A guide for exploring and understanding specific food regulations is the VDACS Handbook for Small Food Manufacturers (VDACS n.d.). The handbook provides general information along with contact details for the regulatory bodies responsible for overseeing production, processing, and handling requirements for various kinds of food products.

Does a farm selling foods to a school need to be GAP certified?

First, only fresh produce (i.e., vegetables, herbs, fruit, and nuts) farms can be audited under the Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) program. Farms selling other kinds of foods have different food safety certifications, as noted previously (VDACS n.d.).

In terms of GAP certification, the VDOE does not mandate GAP certification as a requirement for accessing school sales, although some school divisions have certification requirements, such as when food service management companies (FSMCs) are contracted to handle a school division's food purchasing, preparation, and serving needs. In all cases, it is important that the farmer communicates with the school nutrition director to find out exactly what their requirements are (Vallotton et al. 2019a, 2019b). If farms are working through intermediaries (e.g., wholesalers, food hubs, and distributors) that sell to schools, then the farmer should discuss food safety certification requirements with each intermediary (Vallotton et al. 2017).

What delivery and distribution options exist for farms to use when selling to schools?

Delivery of food products and their distribution within a school division can be a major challenge for both producers and school systems, so it is important for farmers to consider which option makes the most sense for them to pursue (Figure 3). There are pros and cons with selling directly to a school or community sponsor versus selling to a hub or distributor. Selling to an intermediary means meeting certain food safety, liability, and quality standards. In many cases, the requirements may be more stringent than selling directly, so it is important to know what the intermediary requires. Typically, the larger the distributor, the more likely there will be requirements for specific food safety audits, liability insurance, and volume minimums (Vallotton et al. 2017).

Is food safety training available for farmers wanting to access school markets?

Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) has a cadre of specialists and agents who provide assistance and support for training in food safety. From the farm level through the end consumer, VCE offers a wealth of resources, expertise, and workshops (Virginia Cooperative Extension n.d.-a, n.d.-b, n.d.-c). Additionally, the Fresh Produce Food Safety Team at VCE has developed an extensive website and food safety manual templates based on the USDA checklist questions for GAP, Harmonized GAP (HGAP), and Harmonized GAP Plus and can mentor farmers seeking assistance in the certification process (Edwards et al. 2021; Edwards & Vallotton n.d.; Vallotton & Strawn 2017; Virginia Tech 2018).

In a nutshell, what are some of the key questions for farmers to ask and discuss with school nutrition directors?

- Are any certifications required to sell foods to the division? If yes, what specific audit or other food safety documentation is needed?
- What handling requirements must be met?
- For fresh produce, does it need to be washed, sorted, or packed in a certain way; that is, does the nutrition program prefer bulk containers of product, or does it want smaller pack sizes?
- For other food products, what size and quantity per unit are needed?
- What specific storage and transport vehicle conditions, such as temperature and humidity control, must be met to ensure quality and minimize spoilage?
- Are other considerations and practices necessary to avoid cross-contamination issues?
- How does the school handle invoicing and tracking of incoming products?

School Nutrition Professionals

What food safety requirements are required for farm to school purchases?

According to the USDA Procuring Local Food for Child Nutrition Programs handbook:

> SFAs should always purchase food from reliable, reputable sources that follow GAPs and good handling practices (GHPs). USDA does not require school nutrition programs to purchase from GAP-certified farms. In some instances, school divisions or states may require schools to purchase only from GAP-certified farms. Food safety requirements should be clearly outlined in the bid proposal. Ultimately, it is up to the buyer to determine and document purchases are coming from a safe source. (Food and Nutrition Service 2022)

As a best practice, school divisions should incorporate their farm to school standards within their food safety plan. If the school division is still determining its farm to school food safety requirements, the USDA Produce Safety University includes farm to school training within the curriculum.

What food safety criteria and expectations should be discussed with potential farmers?

The best examples of successful farm to school partnerships exemplify clear, consistent communication, reliability, and trust (Vallotton et al. 2019b). Make sure to discuss safe food-handling expectations for all facets of the flow of food: from the farm, to the processor, to the delivery, to the distribution, and to the school division. Refer to the VCE resource Considerations for School Nutrition Directors Seeking to Increase Farm to School Purchases before discussions with farmers.

What specific questions are vital to ask the grower about their products and practices?

Discuss the crops being grown and/or foods being raised and how the various routes of contamination are mitigated during production, harvest, and post-harvest handling stages (Vallotton et al. 2019b). It is especially important they address risks for the post-harvest stage, which includes the post-harvest environment (e.g., facilities, wash systems, and other infrastructure), repackaging, and cold storage choices

(DuPont 2015; Vallotton et al. 2021a). Similar to all food purchases, understanding traceability is important should a food safety concern be discovered after the transfer of product from the farm to the buyer (Bihn et al. 2014). Product traceability includes the ability of the farmer, intermediaries, and schools to track the products "one step forward" and "one step back" in the food supply chain to identify and mitigate sources of potential risk. The farmer should have a system to document safe handling practices from the field and the packing and storage areas to the transport vehicle and the final point of sale. The VCE resource Considerations for School Nutrition Directors Seeking to Increase Farm to School Purchases includes helpful questions to ask producers.

What kinds of information can be provided to farmers to guide their delivery and distribution food safety practices?

School nutrition professionals should discuss the pros and cons of a farm selling directly to a school division or working through an intermediary like a food hub or distributor. While various pros and cons are discussed in chapter 6, make sure to convey specific holding and handling criteria for cold storage and transport so that cold chain temperatures for all products can be properly maintained (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2021b). Discuss how food items should be handled in terms of washing, sorting, packaging, and labeling. If food items are dropped off at a central drop-off location, make sure farmers understand how the product should be conveyed and any paperwork involved.

How can on-farm practices be verified?

Ask farmers how they verify and document any food safety policies, procedures, and practices they have implemented. Verification might be a simple word-of-mouth agreement, a written checklist, a formal farm visit, a written food safety plan, or even passed audit paperwork. In whatever way practices are verified, having confidence in a farm's safe food-handling practices is vital (Vallotton et al. 2019b). School and child nutrition program administrators may want to schedule a farm tour for new potential vendors to review food safety practices, or they may ask a grower to complete a checklist. VCE has created a food safety checklist for fresh produce (Vallotton & Strawn n.d.); the checklist could easily be reworked for other foods by targeting specific risks unique to non-produce foods.

If the child nutrition program cannot inspect each farm, program administrators may ask for a signed copy of the checklist from potential producers during the bid process. While the assessment is not a substitute for a passed food safety audit or a food safety plan (which typically includes policies, standard operating procedures, and records), the assessment still demonstrates that owners/operators have identified and understood potential risks. The assessment can be used as a way to verify risks have been addressed before school sales. All documentation should be signed and dated and provide the farm contact information (Vallotton & Strawn n.d.).

What if a school division contracts with an FSMC and does not participate in farm to school through local food purchases?

School nutrition programs can be contracted to work with an FSMC. FSMCs have contracts with large regional food distributors and, due to contractual arrangements, purchase in volume with specific vendors. This may limit the opportunity for local procurement. While there may be hurdles, school nutrition program operators have found ways to integrate farm to school purchases within FSMC operations, such as in Oregon school divisions (Maidlow 2022; Sherman 2022; Whitcomb, Jr. 2022). In Virginia, the Isle of Wight County Schools' nutrition program has discussed the potential for purchasing fresh produce from the Agricultural Land Lab housed on land adjacent to Windsor Elementary School. Working with VCE, efforts are in the early stages of exploring GAP certification for the land lab. A key thus far has been fostering clear communication about the

pros and cons, challenges, and steps of the certification preparation process, which has strengthened the relationship with the Isle of Wight Schools, the FSMC, the land lab, and VCE (Vallotton 2022).

Delivery and Distribution Personnel

What role can delivery and distribution personnel play in increasing grower access to school markets?

Farmers selling to school and child nutrition programs must work through the food safety requirements at the farm level and consider the safest handling practices to use during the storage and transport of products to schools. A primary challenge for farmers can be safe, efficient delivery and distribution of products to and within school divisions. This added complexity means farmers must determine the most economical, time efficient, feasible, and realistic way to get the products delivered and distributed. Sometimes selling directly to schools may be cost-prohibitive or logistically unworkable. Instead, selling to an intermediary like a food hub or distributor might make more sense because intermediaries can often handle logistical hurdles more efficiently and economically. Further, because intermediaries aggregate products, they are often able to meet volume demands that individual farmers may not be able to meet (Vallotton et al. 2017).

What are some examples of delivery and distribution between producers and schools?

Even with the desire to purchase local foods, school and child nutrition programs are constrained by operating budgets, time, and available human resources. Having products that meet quality and food safety standards and are reliably distributed with minimal logistical issues can influence vendor selection (Vallotton et al. 2019). The spotlights in chapters 4 and 6 provide examples of Virginia farm to school stakeholders working to overcome these logistical challenges.

School Garden Coordinators and Educators

Are there specific food safety guidelines for working with school gardens and land labs?

The same food safety principles apply to school gardens and land labs as to farms in terms of training for safe practices during production, harvest, and post-harvest food handling (Bardsley et al. 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; Vallotton et al. 2021a, 2021b, 2021c). Land labs also need to incorporate best food safety practices related to livestock raising if relevant. For setups where livestock is integrated with growing produce at a land lab, it is vital that cross-contamination risks are assessed and practices implemented (Vallotton et al. 2021b). Garden and land lab coordinators should discuss food safety practices and potential requirements with their local health departments and VCE agents.

A Handbook for Beginning and Veteran Garden Organizers: How to Reduce Food Safety Risks covers food safety principles for school garden settings and offers helpful guidance (Chaifetz et al. 2012; see also Boyer & Chapman 2018). Of particular importance is assessing the land use history of the site and understanding any hazards that pose potential risks. If classroom educators or the school or child nutrition program plans to use school garden produce, it is important to develop protocols; train students, staff, and volunteers; and keep records of food safety training practices. The Oregon Department of Education's "School Garden Food Safety Training and Documentation Manual" contains staff and student training logs, which are a recommended best practice for use in school gardens (Sherman 2016).

What do volunteers and students need to know about food safety in the garden?

If edible products are grown, all individuals assisting and working in the garden should be trained on food safety procedures (Boyer & Chapman 2018). Chapter 5 of the Oregon Department of Education's School Garden Food Safety Training and Documentation Manual contains information on student food safety training.

Overall Food Safety Training

What food safety training is available?

VCE provides assistance and support for training in food safety. From the farm level through the end consumer, VCE offers a wealth of resources, expertise, and workshops (Virginia Cooperative Extension n.d.-a, n.d.-b, n.d.-c). Additionally, the National Farm to School Network created the Bringing the Farm to School curriculum, which includes information on food safety geared toward producers. For school and child nutrition programs, program operators should reach out to their SNP specialists.

Tips to Ensure Food Safety Along the Value Chain

- Develop transparency among farmers, distributors, and school nutrition personnel regarding safe food-handling requirements.
- Ensure the farmer understands food safety risks and follows best practices during the post-harvest handling stage for washing, packaging, storing, delivering, and distributing.
- Request a product traceability system that will satisfy all traceback needs in the event of a foodborne illness. This can be as simple as requesting a label on each sealed box or carton with the contents and the address of origin.
- Tap into local resources for trainings and technical assistance, including VCE agents and specialists.
- SFAs can foster relationships with local and regional food hubs and distributors to be able to offer details to farmers.

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Chapter

6

Delivery and Distribution

Introduction

Local food procurement can take different forms, with various stakeholders involved in the entire process. One key element of getting food from the farm to the school includes delivery and distribution networks. Once school and child nutrition programs have identified sources of local food, they must determine a delivery process that works for both the vendor and buyer. Delivering to individual schools in a medium to large school division may not be financially feasible for most local growers, but with creativity, communication, compromise, and partnerships, school and child nutrition programs can determine the best way to get more local food onto student trays.

This chapter details the different avenues used by school nutrition programs to get local food to the cafeteria. The spotlights in this chapter provide insight from a distributor's perspective and highlight a creative distribution pilot in Southwest Virginia.

Local Food Distribution Channels

While some school nutrition programs purchase local food directly from farms, many schools prefer working with distributors and produce companies to simplify ordering processes, ensure the product will be delivered to each school site, and benefit from the additional food safety standards required by most distributors. A farmer does not have to deliver to each cafeteria for food to be considered local. For example, procuring local food from a produce company, a broad line distributor, or a food hub are all considered farm to school purchases. Simply put, schools and community sponsors have options.

Direct from the Farm

Some SFAs find it rewarding to connect with local farms, as purchasing directly from a farm has many benefits. Direct relationships between farms and SFAs can facilitate deep connections between students and their food source. Through farm partnerships, SFAs can learn about the specific sources of local food and share those stories with students and the school community. Additionally, direct relationships with local farms can lead to educational opportunities beyond the classroom, such as farm field trips and in-school farmer visits. SFAs should discuss expectations with the farm to ensure the farm has the capacity for scheduled deliveries and the infrastructure to move food products safely.

As school divisions and community sponsors negotiate with growers to determine a delivery system that works for both parties, they should consider using the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry's Farm to School Distribution Cost Template (Excel file). This spreadsheet can aid growers in determining the most cost-effective method of delivering based on fuel costs, travel distance, and estimated costs for working with a wholesale distributor or food hub instead of performing direct deliveries.

Regional Food Hubs

The USDA Agriculture and Marketing Service (AMS) defines a regional food hub as "a centrally located facility with a business management structure facilitating the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and/or marketing of locally/regionally produced food products." (Barham, 2017). According to the AMS, "by actively coordinating these activities along the value chain, food hubs are providing wider access to institutional and retail markets for small to mid-sized producers, and increasing access of fresh healthy food for consumers, including in underserved areas and food deserts" (Barham, 2017).

Virginia is fortunate to have regional food hubs with organizational commitments to strengthening small Virginia farms and increasing farm access to institutional markets, including schools. Food hubs are able to aggregate products from multiple small farms to supply larger quantities to large customers. If food hubs are unable to meet the volume needed for a full component, SFAs can consider incorporating these items into salad bars. The AMS developed a Local Food Directory to help customers find regional food hubs.

Produce and Broad Line Distributors

SFAs may be able to increase local purchases through an existing relationship with a produce or broad line distributor. Often, these distributors have built relationships with regional farms to offer customers local products. SFAs should communicate farm to school intentions and needs during the procurement process to ensure distributors are able to provide farm source identification, if necessary, and local food items from within the SFA's local food radius.

USDA Foods and Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (DoD Fresh)

The USDA Foods program supports domestic agriculture and provides healthy food to schools (Food and Nutrition Service n.d.). SFAs have the ability to maximize these purchases to help free up funding for local food procurement initiatives. Additionally, SFAs can use their USDA Foods entitlement dollars to receive fresh produce through the DoD Fresh program. Through the DoD Fresh ordering system called Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Order/Receipt System (FFAVORS), SFAs can find produce items grown in Virginia. During the 2020–2021 school year, school nutrition programs used over $1,600,000 of their entitlement dollars on Virginia grown food using the DoD Fresh program. This number rose to over $2,100,000 during the 2021–2022 school year.

For more information on how to increase local purchasing through these food distribution programs, refer to the USDA farm to school fact sheets on USDA Foods and DoD Fresh.

Grower Cooperatives

Grower cooperatives are a group of producers that come together, often for the purpose of increasing their selling power within wholesale markets. Grower cooperatives may have a more developed distribution infrastructure than individual farms or have larger product availability. For an example of a grower cooperative in Virginia, refer to the Virginia farm to school spotlight in chapter 4, which highlights the Southside Virginia Fruit and Vegetable Producers Association.

Communication Is Key

With every method used to distribute local food to schools, it is important for SFAs and community sponsors to effectively communicate the program's needs. On issues such as delivery needs, food safety standards, or reporting requirements, SFAs and community sponsors should express their expectations in the beginning. These early conversations are a great time to discuss the SFA or community sponsor's experience with local food. Communicating details and expectations upfront can help build a strong foundation for the procurement relationship.

Conclusion

Farm to school efforts must be mutually beneficial to farmers and buyers to be sustained over time. School and child nutrition programs should reflect the values of their communities while considering the value that local food can provide to their program for raising the profile and shifting the perception of school meals. If needs cannot be met through DoD Fresh, broad line distributors, produce companies, food hubs, or farmers, consider whether piloting a new distribution model would net a positive result for the students and the community.

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Chapter 6: Virginia Farm to School Spotlights

Spotlight: Distributor's Perspective, 4P Foods, Charlottesville

Introduction

The USDA defines a food hub as "a centrally located facility with a business management structure facilitating the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and/or marketing of locally/regionally produced food products" (Barham 2017). Food hubs help school divisions navigate common farm to school challenges and are ideal resources for starting or scaling farm to school programs, as demonstrated by 4P Foods's partnerships between Fauquier FRESH (FRESH), a nonprofit partner to Fauquier County Public Schools (FCPS), a division that offers the Virginia Harvest of the Month program, and Charlottesville City Public Schools, which sources food directly from 4P Foods for nine public schools located in Charlottesville, Virginia.

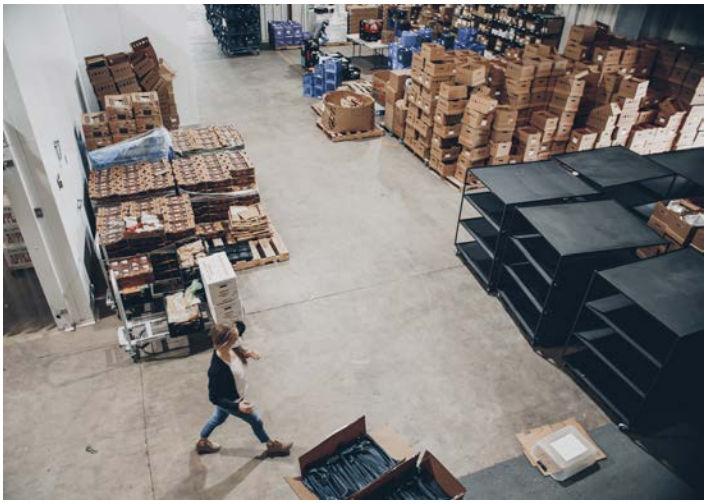
The Challenge

Many school divisions struggle to source directly from farmers regularly, especially those without a dedicated farm to school coordinator or similar position. Quantities can be a challenge, since schools typically need more than a single farmer can provide, and aggregating food from many farms increases the administrative burden. Price, payment terms, and logistics are also barriers when the needs of schools and the abilities of farms do not align.

The Solution

4P Foods partners with more than 80 Virginia farms, providing each farm to school partner with local foods that meet a school's diverse food requirements. That means every school gets access to one master produce order list and one point of contact to place food orders. 4P Foods then buys directly from local farmers and distributes them in large volumes to maintain sustainable prices and ease of purchasing for both farmers and schools.

Each school receives source-identified food and information about farmers for reporting or farm to school education and outreach. For example, 4P



Foods works with Fairfax County Public Schools to supply Virginia grown produce for its Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program.

Food hubs like 4P Foods reduce the burden of sourcing local food by taking these steps:

- managing the relationships directly with growers,
- tracking farmers' food safety and other certifications,
- serving as a single point of contact for farmer and school, and
- ensuring that school requirements are met.

This helps schools include local harvests in menu cycle planning and develops backup plans in the event of a Mother Nature intervention. When Fauquier FRESH wanted to implement a Virginia Harvest of the Month program in FCPS, it worked with 4P Foods to create a featured crop calendar highlighting seasonal produce throughout the school year. 4P Foods conducts annual production planning with its network of growers, which informs seasonal crop availability and allows for weather-dependent predictability throughout the year.

The Impact

Food hubs like 4P Foods enable schools and school nutrition leaders to easily develop and execute farm to school programs. For the Charlottesville City School System, the 4P Foods local food hub helped overcome the system's challenge of acquiring foods from local farmers. Since 2019, it has distributed locally sourced food to nine public schools located in the city. In Fairfax, Fauquier FRESH introduced eight different local fruits and vegetables to FCPS students through the Virginia Harvest of the Month program during the 2019–2020 school year, totaling 2,368 pounds of Virginia grown produce purchased through 4P Foods.

Tips for Replication

Schools and community sponsors interested in sourcing local food from a regional food hub can search the USDA Food Hub Directory. When considering working with a food hub, keep in mind the following:

- **Plan ahead:** Seasonal menu planning helps food hubs inform their growers and producers on what to plant and what quantities to harvest. This ensures there is enough food to meet your school's needs. Food hubs may also provide direction on types of food and recipes to consider for menu planning. Ask your food hub how to pre-order your food.
- **Decrease carbon footprint:** Working with local food hubs decreases food's carbon footprint significantly. While average food travels 1,300 miles from farm to plate, with 4P Foods, food travels no further than a few hundred miles from Virginia farm to Virginia school.
- **Increase freshness and nutritional quality:** When food travels a shorter distance, it's often fresher and more nutritious too!
- **Educate your students**: Food hubs may help provide insight on seasonal food, providing important nutrition information right from the cafeteria. Ask your food hub whether it has resources you can share!

Resources

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Spotlight: Fresh Local Foods for Children, Southwest Virginia Coalition to End Childhood Hunger

Introduction

The Fresh Local Foods for Children program connects school and child nutrition program directors with a regional produce distributor to deliver fresh, local foods to children's feeding sites throughout Southwest Virginia. The absence of an effective delivery system between the local produce growers and the numerous school and childcare centers has limited the amount of local produce served in school and child nutrition programs. Member organizations of the Southwest Virginia Coalition to End Childhood Hunger (the Coalition) recognized an opportunity to create a regional distribution network along main interstate corridors using a hub and spoke model throughout Southwest Virginia.

The Challenge

Although Southwest Virginia farms produce an abundant variety of fruits and vegetables, these products are typically shipped to retailers outside the region. Food deserts, which indicate the area has low access to supermarkets or large grocery stores, are common in the region (Economic Research Service, n.d.). As a result, the food families consume is often highly processed, setting the stage for health issues later in life. This lack of access to locally grown foods extends beyond households and into nutrition programs that are geared toward supporting youth. The establishment of a successful delivery system between local produce distribution centers and numerous feeding sites can help address these challenges.

The Solution

The Virginia Department of Education, Office of School Nutrition Programs (VDOE-SNP) established the Coalition in 2015 to engage diverse partner organizations across the region to improve the health of young residents. Coalition members include school nutrition directors and community sponsors of federally funded child nutrition programs, such as the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), CACFP, and the SFSP, and additional partners including food banks, the United Way, VCE, the Dairy Alliance, and Ballad Health. The diversity of Coalition stakeholders is critical to its success.

In 2020, Coalition members discussed the challenges of including local produce on menus in child and school nutrition programs. The Coalition partnered with Appalachian Sustainable Development (ASD), a Bristol-based regional food distributor that helps market produce from local farmers, to develop the Fresh Local Food for Children pilot program. The program is a model concept of an effective delivery system that supports objectives outlined in the Virginia Roadmap to End Hunger by working directly with area producers to increase access to local food for schools and families.

In the fall of 2021, ASD began delivering local produce to selected feeding sites along the I-81 corridor. During the first year of the pilot, ASD delivered fresh, local produce to select schools in Carroll, Wythe, Smyth, Washington, and Bristol counties and to a community-sponsored afterschool site in Bristol. These deliveries allowed the sites to include more regionally grown items within the meals served to students.
During the first year of the pilot program, ASD and participating schools worked collaboratively to address various hurdles. ASD expanded its offerings to include produce from a wider range of farmers. Additionally, ASD received grant funding to build a workforce development program to lightly process food items for schools. This program was implemented during year two of the project.

Looking forward, the goal is to create a hub-and-spoke distribution model, where delivery sites will be the hubs for pickups or satellite deliveries to more rural schools or childcare programs that are not on the designated route. ASD also plans to expand its delivery

services to additional school divisions and feeding sites within the region.

The Impact

Within the first year of the program, ASD reached over 5,000 students with its deliveries of fresh, local food to 11 schools and feeding sites within five school divisions. ASD delivered almost 4,000 pounds of produce to participating sites, adding $5,100 back to the regional farming community. Additionally, the Coalition worked closely with ASD and participating sites to achieve the following goals:

- increase the number of fruits and vegetables produced by local farmers for sale within children's feeding sites,
- increase the variety of fruits and vegetables available locally to children's feeding sites,
- extend the seasonal availability of local produce by assisting farmers with season extension and other assistance,
- develop a delivery system to deliver fresh produce to schools weekly,
- design a competitive pricing model, and
- establish a microprocessing facility capable of offering lightly processed produce for use in school meals.

Tips for Replication

- Develop a strong team of diverse partners, determine the team's shared goals, and identify a project lead who can dedicate time each week to the project.
- Determine the estimated needs of buyers before sourcing.
- Work collectively to apply for pilot funding. Funding can cover project coordination, route development, onboarding buyers and vendors, and purchasing equipment, such as refrigerated trucks. Funding can also cover the cost of fuel and a driver for the initial year.
- Plan for program sustainability within five years through revenues generated through product sales.
- Work with the VDOE-SNP to ensure the pilot follows federal procurement guidelines.
- Communicate with area farmers to plan for growing demand as the number of participating buyers increases.
- Communicate among various organizations regularly to plan ordering, distribution, and accurate reporting. Personal conversations can uncover issues early and devise suitable solutions.

Resources

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Chapter

7

Connecting School Gardens and Farms to Students and Cafeterias

Introduction

School gardens and farms are where food comes to life for many students. That first taste of freshly harvested lettuce can be life-changing when a child has been involved in growing it, weeding it, watering it, and monitoring its growth over time while learning about its health benefits. Harvesting and washing student-grown produce for school and summer meals cultivate interest in choosing fruits and vegetables. In addition, when math, science, health, language arts, and social studies educators incorporate garden-based learning into relevant SOL-based lessons, students begin to understand that core subjects are not isolated disciplines but that nourishing their bodies is intrinsic to nourishing their minds.

In Virginia, there are a growing number of school gardens and farms in K–12 schools, early care education sites, family day care homes, and afterschool and summer school program sites. These gardens and farms present exciting opportunities to link hands-on agricultural education to cafeteria settings. This chapter provides examples of how school gardens and farms in Virginia are connecting classrooms to cafeterias and providing hyperlocal fresh food for students. The resources section includes multiple tools to build connections between school gardens and farms to cafeterias, classrooms, and students.

Institutionalizing School Gardens in School Culture

School gardens are often started by an enthusiastic educator or parent volunteer who eventually moves on from the school community, leaving the garden unused and unkempt. This is why it is important to form a committed farm to school team that includes administrators, school nutrition program staff, educators, and community members to help institutionalize the use of school gardens throughout the school community and within the Local School Wellness Policy. The Growing School Gardens Support Organization provides resources and tools to fully institutionalize program efforts and build sustainable school gardens. To build a sustainable farm to school program, please reference chapter 1 of this Toolkit. To incorporate farm to school practices through a wellness subcommittee and the Local School Wellness Policy, please reference the spotlight in chapter 1 of this Toolkit.

Growing the Harvest of the Month

The Virginia Harvest of the Month program is designed to connect school gardens to cafeterias and classrooms. Virginia Harvest of the Month promotes seasonal eating and increased fruit and vegetable consumption and supports local economies. Sponsored by the Virginia Department of Education, Office of School Nutrition Programs (VDOE-SNP), Virginia Harvest of the Month provides ready-to-use materials for classrooms, cafeterias, nonprofits, farmers markets, and early care centers to educate children about the joys of eating seasonal, local foods.

The 12 produce items featured each month include the following:
January: Sweet potatoes
February: Butternut squash
March: Kale
April: Lettuce
May: Strawberries
June: Cucumbers
July: Zucchini
August: Tomatoes
September: Sweet bell peppers
October: Apples
November: Cabbage
December: Spinach

Growing these crops in school gardens provides tangible connections to the school cafeteria. Whether student-grown food is featured on the school menu or foods are tasted in the garden or classroom, students benefit when the school demonstrates the connection between learning and good nutrition, as highlighted in school nutrition programs.

Visit the VDOE-SNP website for Virginia Harvest of the Month resources or contact the VDOE-SNP farm to school specialist.

Integrating 4-H Programs, Master Gardeners, and Master Food Volunteers

Afterschool programs, such as garden clubs, cooking clubs, and 4-H clubs, frequently use school gardens for enriching programs. 4-H clubs are driven by student interest and can cover a wide variety of topics. Contact the local Extension Office for more information on 4-H opportunities.

Many VCE Master Gardeners and Master Food Volunteers provide expertise and time to assist with and advocate for school gardens and taste tests throughout the Commonwealth. In Williamsburg-James City County Schools, for example, VCE Master Gardeners are teaching SOL-based lesson plans that include garden visits at scheduled times. The Master Gardeners coordinate with each grade level to align garden-based lessons with classroom objectives.

Food Safety Within School Gardens and School Farms

It is important for coordinators of edible school gardens and farms to train staff, volunteers, and students on food safety best practices. Simple actions such as thoroughly washing hands with soap and potable water before and after handling produce should be embedded in garden activities. The VCE created a helpful Food Safety for School and Community Gardens Handbook that includes such information. Additionally, if garden produce is entering the cafeteria, the garden manager and cafeteria manager should have a food safety plan in place to ensure garden produce is handled, washed, and stored appropriately. The USDA School Gardens Fact Sheet provides helpful tips to consider. Additionally, the Food Safety chapter within this *Toolkit* provides a more in-depth look at food safety.

USDA Fact Sheet

School gardens: Using gardens to grow healthy habits in cafeterias, classrooms, and communities

Connecting School Gardens and Farms to Cafeterias

One of the most impactful ways to connect all school students with the garden or farm is by serving student-raised food within the cafeteria. There are a variety of ways to incorporate small or even large amounts of garden produce into meals. The Whole Kids Foundation, in partnership with Slow Food USA, created a School Garden to Cafeteria Toolkit and webinar series to help school gardens and farms connect with school cafeterias. Additionally, the VDOE-SNP created a helpful tool for school nutrition programs and garden partners to solidify their partnership. The sample memorandum of understanding between school gardens and school nutrition programs is located in Appendix C and is on the VDOE-SNP Farm to School Website.

Bridging School Gardens and Farms with the Broader Community

Community engagement can be woven into school garden activities to support the interests and needs of the garden, the student population, and the community at large. Garden educators and coordinators have a unique opportunity to engage with community members to increase support for and within school gardens. This might be through community volunteer days or garden tours, if the school allows those activities. Beyond visiting the garden, there are also opportunities for deeper community involvement. In Colorado, school gardens within Denver City Public Schools transform into community gardens during the summer months, where community members "rent" garden beds for free. These community partnerships maintain the gardens during the summer while providing community access to garden space and fresh, seasonal food. This empowers community members and ensures the food grown in the gardens represents the culture of the community. School gardens can also be a space for community gatherings. See the spotlight in this chapter on Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School for an example of how the community can transform yard space into a welcoming area for students and the community.

Providing Student Leadership Opportunities

Many farm to school programs throughout the Commonwealth provide student leadership opportunities within the curriculum and even through formal leadership programs. These opportunities can complement classroom curriculum and school programming. Leadership programs can also empower students, ensure the farm to school program reflects the interests of the students, and increase student buy-in. Blandy Experimental Farm has developed student-led garden planning lessons that align with Virginia SOLs. With regards to formal leadership programs, Project GROWS's Youth Leaders in Agriculture initiative provides opportunities for career

exploration and mentoring to increase students' skills related to farming, leadership, and entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

Hands-on, project-based learning brings lessons to life, and school gardens and farms can be exciting opportunities to bridge these lessons with cafeterias and beyond. When students see the food they grew featured in school meals, they begin to learn that lunchtime is learning time, academic subjects are not restricted to classrooms, and that good, healthy food prepares bodies and minds for learning.

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Chapter 7: Virginia Farm to School Spotlights

Spotlight: Hydroponic Lettuce Farming in Wythe County Public Schools

Introduction

The Wythe County Public Schools (WCPS) Nutrition Department incorporates student-grown lettuce within school meals. Through extensive partnerships and community support, the Nutrition Department links horticulture education to cafeteria offerings.

The Challenge

In a community where grocery stores are scarce, many students rely on school meals for access to fresh food. The WCPS nutrition coordinator recognized that students could better connect with school meals if the meals featured student-grown foods. The nutrition coordinator approached the horticulture teacher and the local VCE 4-H agent to develop a plan that would incorporate student-grown foods into the school meals program. They established a Farm to School Team that included cafeteria managers, educators, VCE agents, and local farms to identify what they could produce for the school nutrition program. The team also reached out to a hydroponics professor at Ferrum College for technical assistance.

The Solution

The Farm to School Team decided that a hydroponic system could effectively suit their needs to incorporate student-grown food. Once the plan and partnerships were in place, the WCPS Nutrition Department worked in conjunction with the Fort Chiswell High School Agriculture Department and VCE to apply for a grant. The team was awarded a Virginia Farm to School Grant and received $25,000 to purchase a hydroponic lettuce system.

The students constructed the hydroponic system and planted the first seeds in early 2020. When school shut down in March of that year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the horticulture teacher established live virtual classes so students could learn about nutrient management, seeding processes, sanitation practices, and harvest practices. Although students were unable to witness the complete process in person, they reaped the rewards in the school meals they received because the horticulture teacher continued to produce the hydroponic lettuce throughout school closures.

To assist with the project, the school nutrition department purchased five-gallon salad spinners, cutting boards, knives, and food-grade storage bins to increase kitchen efficiency and product shelf life. Fostering buy-in from school nutrition staff required additional education and training. However, as school nutrition staff became more efficient at washing and preparing the lettuce, they became more engaged and supportive of the project. Lastly, the loss of in-person student learning created additional responsibilities for the horticulture teacher, including the setup and management of the new system.

Having overcome these various hurdles, the Farm to School Team has big plans for the future. For the horticulture teacher, the goal is for the students to be fully in charge and running the hydroponic systems.

From learning about food safety and food handling to learning how to properly seed, transplant, and harvest, they eventually want the students to be in charge of growing the produce. Post-pandemic, the horticulture teacher hopes to take students to Ferrum College to see the hydroponic system on-site and discuss viable career and education paths in the agricultural sciences.

The Impact

School nutrition staff were excited about the quality of the lettuce, and the children of Wythe County were able to receive fresh, homegrown lettuce during school closures. For their part in the project, the horticulture teacher and nutrition coordinator placed fourth in the 2021 American Farm Bureau Federation Young Farmers and Ranchers Excellence in Agriculture program. In addition, agriculture students at Fort Chiswell High School are learning about viable agriculture career paths in Southwest Virginia. Most importantly, students received over 1,400 pounds of fresh, hydroponic lettuce via meals from WCPS.

Tips for Replication

This project would not have been possible without excellent communication among school nutrition administrators and the horticulture teacher. Together, these individuals fleshed out the idea and moved forward by forming a team, considering the costs, and applying for a grant for the equipment. "It was important to have buy-in from both parties and support from school and district administrators," said the nutrition coordinator. "If I had it to do all over again, I think I would have prepared my staff for the fresh product a little more with additional training, but we were in the midst of a pandemic, and we did the best we could. Now that we have a good idea of the amount of product coming in from the agriculture class, we know how much less to order from DoD and our produce distributor."

In the future, the nutrition coordinator is considering using the MOU template for school nutrition programs working with school garden programs. In the MOU, she plans to ask the agriculture program to track the value of all donated foods and ensure food safety practices are being followed.

Resources

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Spotlight: Giles County Agricultural Land Lab

Introduction

The Giles County Agricultural Land Lab integrates classroom instruction, farming skills, and hands-on practice while providing ground beef and produce for the school nutrition program. Typically, a land lab, also known as a school farm, provides classroom instruction in agriculture, uses a "learning by doing" philosophy, and incorporates math, reading, social studies, and the physical, chemical, and biological sciences into each course.

The Challenge

Although Giles is a rural county and the economy is heavily agricultural, many Giles County students do not come from farming backgrounds or are two or more generations removed from the farm setting. Given the fact that the skilled agricultural workforce is aging, it is vital to find ways to encourage the younger generation to return to or begin farming. In addition, agriculture education provides opportunities for students to learn the hard skills and work ethic required to run a successful farm business.

The Solution

In 2012 and 2013, the Giles County Administration and the county's Board of Supervisors began to discuss, explore, and promote an agricultural land lab. The school board was also agreeable but initially cautious, as were some of the teachers, given the immensity of work needed to develop and maintain the project. By 2014, local producers, the Giles County Board of Supervisors, and the School Board worked to clear and fence nearly 40 acres behind Giles County High School (GHS). While the land lab is located at GHS, it also serves and benefits Narrows High School (NHS). In January 2015, heifers donated by local cattle producers and a borrowed bull were brought to the land lab. To avoid overburdening the agriculture teachers with the responsibilities of managing the land lab, a part-time manager was hired in 2017. Subsequently, the position evolved to be full-time under the school division's supervision.

Since its inception, the Giles County Agricultural Land Lab has demonstrated a strong community approach.

Supporters include the following:

- Giles County Farm Bureau Federation;
- Farm Bureau Insurance;
- Giles Farm Bureau Cooperative;
- various producers donating time, expertise, and machinery;
- VCE agents (Jeannie Layton-Dudding, ANR-Giles County; Morgan Paulette, ANR-Pulaski County), Dr. Dee Whittier and Dr. John Currin (veterinary science), Extension specialists (Amber Vallotton, fresh produce food safety; Dr. John Fike, forage management);
- Dan Swafford (drone herding research);
- Virginia Tech (Agricultural Technology Program);
- Boehringer Ingelheim (health products supplier);
- Skyline Soil and Water Conservation District;
- Natural Resources Conservation Service;
- Virginia Forage and Grasslands Council;
- New River Community College;
- Giles County Summer Work Program;
- Goodwill Industries; and
- students from GHS and NHS who designed and built infrastructure, cattle handling facilities, water troughs, fencing, and two large high tunnel greenhouses.

From the beginning, the purpose of the Land Lab was to use student-raised products in the division's school nutrition program. This would aid the nutrition program budget and provide additional ownership and connection between the curriculum and the school meals program.

The Impact

On average, the Giles Land Lab produces one steer per year. While this isn't enough to fully support the division's beef needs, it allows the school nutrition department to spend money on other items. Crops grown include potatoes, cucumbers, cherry tomatoes, peppers, and berries. While other crops are used to supplement meals, the blueberries and strawberries are frozen and used for smoothies. In 2020, the Giles County Food Service Supervisor estimated that food donations from the Land Lab were worth $5,000. In addition to skills, students gained awareness of the origins of their food, especially with the COVID-19 pandemic and interruptions in the food chain. At a deeper level, they gained experience in artificial insemination, health, and quality requirements for the livestock being raised as well as in marketing and sales. The Land Lab also provided numerous learning opportunities in construction and technology applications, such as drone herding. Several students graduated and went on to pursue agriculture-related careers. The Land Lab also affected the surrounding counties by providing a resource for outdoor classes for universities and colleges.

Tips for Replication

While a land lab can offer opportunities to apply classroom concepts and engage students, developing a land lab is a complex venture that can take several years. It is critical to gain buy-in and full support from the school division, local government, and other community partners.

- Before planning a land lab, talk with other school divisions that have land labs in place. Each land lab is different and will have unique experiences to share. Some land labs in Virginia include the following:
  - Giles County,
  - Carroll County,
  - Appomattox County, and
  - Isle of Wight.
- For educators, it is easy to let the land lab consume a lot of programming time, especially in the early planning stages. Determine the best role to play based on individual expertise and skills.
- Since a land lab is unlike other farm to school projects, transparent communication with all partners is vital.
- Draw on all available resources:
  - Extension agents and specialists;
  - Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, and other institutions;
  - community and industry partners; and
  - local, state, and federal entities.
- Tap into funding resources at multiple levels:
  - local and regional donations,
  - VCE specialist grant partnerships and expertise,
  - farmer support and time,
  - organizational partnerships that provide labor and resources, and
  - USDA Farm to School grants.
- Do not be afraid of trying something new with the students. Accepting failure and learning from it is important.

Resources

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Spotlight: Farm to School Restorative Urban Garden Space, Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School, Richmond

Introduction

The Farm to School Restorative Urban Garden Space (RUGS) at Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK) Middle School is the result of a partnership to accomplish these goals:

- increase access to and consumption of fresh, healthy, locally raised food;
- provide nutrition education;
- support community resilience; and
- eliminate school and community violence.

This restorative urban garden is located in the Food Justice Corridor in the East End community of Richmond, Virginia, an area of especially poor access to fresh food and green space. Partners include Richmond Public Schools (RPS), RPS School Nutrition Services, organizational members of Community Unity in Action (CUIA) including Kinfolk Community, Inc., Richmond Food Justice Alliance, Greater Richmond Fit4Kids, Richmond City and Henrico Health Districts, the American Heart Association, and the Virginia Department of Education.

The Challenge

The challenges of poverty, violence, economic inequality, and the resulting health disparities are significant but not insurmountable. The largest "food desert" in Richmond spans from St. Paul's Baptist Church in Eastern Henrico County to Gilpin Court public housing in Richmond's Northside. These are the poorest black communities in Richmond. Transportation to grocery stores is problematic, and children do not have consistent access to fresh, healthy food or land to grow a garden in public housing. It is no coincidence that the poorest black communities in Richmond also reside in the largest food desert. Within the Food Justice Corridor, learned violent and disruptive behaviors funnel children into the school-to-prison pipeline.

The Solution

The Food Justice Corridor reframes the narrative of a food desert and seeks to create community assets, such as urban agriculture, to solve these challenges. Through successful partnerships of diverse stakeholders brought together under the umbrella of CUIA and with financial support from the VDOE Farm to School Grant, the RPS Farm to School Team began to expand the existing school garden at MLK Middle School to a full RUGS envisioned by the manager of school culture and climate strategy at RPS. By expanding the garden to the exterior of the school intentionally below the windows of MLK's Mindfulness Room (formerly an in-school suspension room), the RUGS will be used to heal trauma and create entrepreneurial opportunities while engaging students around growing and nurturing plants, their own bodies, and their communities.

Healing gardens are effective if they foster the following elements:

- **Sense of control:** When students and community members are encouraged to make choices about their environment, it fosters a sense of control and reassures individuals their ideas are valued and appreciated, that is, being involved in the design and maintenance of a garden;
- **Social support:** All communities need beautiful, accessible settings that encourage socializing in small and large groups. Growing food together creates a sense of pride and camaraderie around health-positive activities.
- **Physical movement:** Exercise is encouraged by accessible design, such as walking loops.
- **Access to nature:** Students and the nearby public housing community deserve the experience of growing medicinal and edible fruits and vegetables while having a green space to enjoy.

The Impact

The RPS Farm to School Team developed the foundation needed for a space that will support healing, food access, and nutrition education. Initial funding allowed the team to build raised garden beds, a greenhouse, a shed, and plant an urban orchard. The next steps will include community outreach and engagement with MLK students, families, and staff as well as the surrounding Mosby community. Upon students' return in the fall of 2021, the school garden will be incorporated into MLK Middle School's Mindfulness program and will expand to include seasonal crop production. The student entrepreneurship program will launch in the spring of 2022 with a plant sale.

By healing students' generational trauma through mindfulness, entrepreneurship, leadership, and food cultivation in a beautiful, biodiverse school garden, the Farm to School principles reflected in the RUGS aim to improve access to food and agriculture-related jobs, break the school-to-prison pipeline, and diminish mass incarceration of black people in Richmond, Virginia.

Tips for Replication

To successfully replicate this model, the RPS Farm to School team discourages the use of traditional top-down approaches. Allowing students and communities to voice their needs and preferences and participate in the design is critical for buy-in and long-term success.

- Include trusted community voices, grassroots leaders, and students in the program's planning, design, development, and implementation.
- Provide financial and capacity-building resources to traditionally underserved community organizations led by Black, indigenous, people of color (BIPOC).
- Design culturally appropriate health education messaging and programs that align with urgent needs faced by the community by creating listening sessions, town halls, and focus groups.
- Include diverse partnerships within the school and community, including school administrators, grounds maintenance staff, school nutrition partners, nonprofits, and community health organizations.
- Develop short- and long-term goals for student and community engagement and design long-term infrastructure and maintenance plans.

Resources

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Chapter 8

Sparking a Love of Local Food and Farming in Cafeterias, Classrooms, Early Care Sites, Afterschool Programs, and Summer Programs

Introduction

Farm to school programs provide opportunities to weave nutrition education, food literacy, and core curriculum through educational opportunities in classrooms, school gardens, cafeterias, and communities. Using Virginia grown food as a springboard for education provides the context for young scholars to make the connection between the food they eat and their ability to learn, thrive, and grow. They also begin to understand their roles in the food system and can consider the impact of their food and career choices on the community and the environment.

This chapter focuses on how farm to school programming spans schools, early care sites, afterschool programs, and summer programs in fun and interactive ways so students gain food literacy while pursuing scholastic goals and serving their community.

Incorporating Nutrition Education Into School Nutrition Programs

Providing nutrition education is a critical component of running a successful school or child nutrition program. Nutrition education not only helps students make the healthiest choices for their bodies but also promotes the program objectives to all stakeholders: parents, educators, school administrators, municipal leaders, and, most importantly, children. Providing nutrition education with meals also raises the profile of federally funded meal programs that, in turn, attracts customers and ensure more children have equitable access to fresh, healthy food. The Fairfax Grow at Home kit highlighted in the spotlight section reflects efforts to educate students in virtual and in-person settings in conjunction with the nutrition program.

Tying Nutrition Education to Learning Objectives

Beyond the place-based experiential learning that takes place in school gardens and land labs, farm to school programming can be woven into the classroom curriculum. These opportunities can even extend into early care settings, afterschool activities, and summer programs. The Commonwealth of Virginia has a robust network of organizations that develop farm to school and nutrition education for students. Visit the Resources section for more information. Additionally, the spotlights in this chapter demonstrate a few Virginia farm to school programs that incorporate nutrition and agriculture education into family education programs, summer programs, and afterschool programs.

Conclusion

Farm to school programming crosses disciplines, creates learning opportunities around personal and community wellness, and brings the core curriculum to life through kinesthetic learning opportunities in cafeterias, classrooms, school gardens, summer programs, and on local farms. The projects highlighted represent efforts to procure and grow local food, educate children and their caregivers, and increase access to fresh, healthy, Virginia grown food in schools and communities.

For more information on how to initiate a similar project, contact your local VCE office or the farm to school specialist at the Virginia Department of Education, Office of School Nutrition Programs.

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Authors

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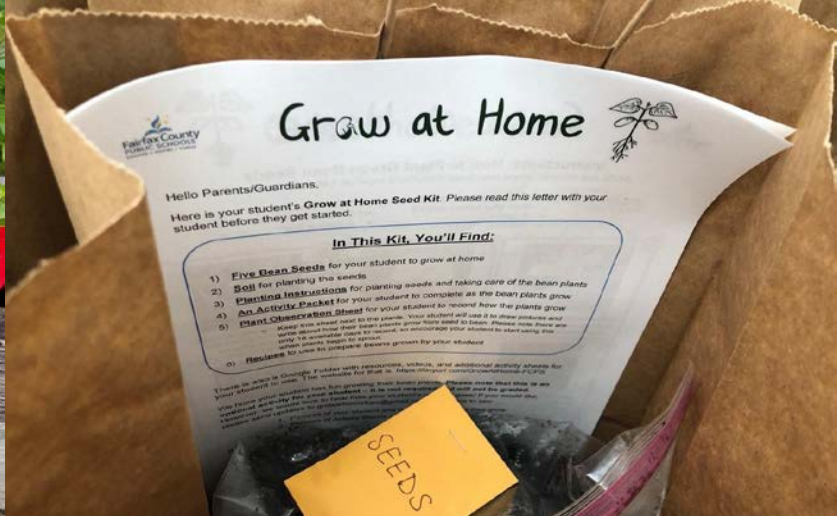
Chapter 8: Virginia Farm to School Spotlights



Spotlight: Grow at Home, Fairfax County Public Schools

Introduction

During the 2019–2020 school year, the Fairfax County Public Schools Office of Food and Nutrition Services (FCPS-FNS) was in the midst of developing a strategic plan, piloting a garden to cafeteria program, and exploring farm to school curriculum integration via a USDA Farm to School Planning Grant. The FCPS-FNS Garden to Cafeteria pilot program was designed to connect school gardens and farm to school learning with meals and snacks served in FCPS cafeterias. In 2019, FCPS-FNS piloted its Garden to Cafeteria Program with three elementary schools serving school garden-grown produce on their salad bars during lunch.

The Challenge

While the FCPS-FNS had plans to expand the Garden to Cafeteria pilot during spring 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures shifted the focus to providing virtual farm to school learning opportunities for students. The FCPS-FNS team needed to pivot its operations to find an innovative solution that still revolved around the core focus of Garden to Cafeteria. The team partnered with the USDA Office of Community Food Systems, National Farm to School Network (NFSN), FCPS Get2Green, FoodCorps, Arcadia Center for Sustainable Food and Agriculture, and Merrifield Gardens to come up with a solution.

The Solution

With internal and external partners, the FCPS-FNS team developed its take on vegetable growing kits for students, which they called "Grow at Home." The primary goal of the Grow at Home program was to provide a farm to school learning opportunity at home so that farm to school education would feel continuous for students even during school closures. Through this program, the FCPS-FNS wanted to provide the opportunity for children to connect farm to school to the meals they received from grab-and-go sites at their schools or along school bus routes. Grow at Home equipped students to engage interactively through a kit that included everything needed to grow a green bean plant at home. Each kit contained five green bean seeds, a gallon bag filled with soil, and two resources in both English and Spanish: a letter to caretakers with instructions for how to plant the green bean seeds with their children and a Grow at Home activity booklet for children to learn about their plants as they grew. The FCPS-FNS also created supplemental videos for children to support learning throughout the various stages of their plant's growth, from starting seeds all the way through harvest. Kits were distributed at SFSP emergency meal sites along with no-cost meals.

The farm to school operations specialists reached out to a local nursery that agreed to create a special soil blend, sell it at a discounted price, and deliver it to a local educational farm where the Grow at Home kits were assembled. Assembled kits were then taken to the FCPS central kitchen, where they were distributed along with meals to schools and feeding sites. Managers distributed the Grow at Home kits, while staff distributed meals.

The Impact

After piloting Grow at Home at one school through the USDA Farm to School Planning Grant, the FCPS-FNS received additional grant funding from the NFSN to expand the Grow at Home program, ultimately distributing over 4,000 kits across 63 emergency meal sites during summer 2020.

Since then, the program has undergone its third expansion at FCPS and has also been replicated by other school divisions across the country. In spring 2021, FCPS Get2Green was awarded a grant from Dominion Energy to fund Grow at Home kits. Get2Green, the FCPS-FNS, and several offices in the FCPS Department of Financial Services collaborated to design, assemble, and deliver kits directly to classroom teachers to be used as farm to school educational tools. By May 2021, they distributed Grow at Home kits to over 5,500 FCPS students learning both in-person and virtually.

Tips for Replication

Reach out to community stakeholders to explain the project and solicit donations, discounts, and partnerships. The key recommendation for reaching out to local organizations for donations is to visit them in person. Introduce yourself, your organization, and the project. Have talking points written down if needed, but engage in the conversation with smiles and eye contact. Include the following information:

- the project purpose (goals and potential impact),
- the project timeline (start and end dates, plus important days in between),
- the project budget (share what resources you have to make the project happen and ask whether they might be able to donate some of the rest), and
- a specific request for contribution.
- Timely follow-up is important to confirm the donation and establish a relationship with the entity moving forward. An email would be appropriate here and should be followed by a handwritten thank you note after the donation is received. If the entity gives permission, consider acknowledging the contribution in any printed or online resources created.

Resources

The public Grow at Home Google Folder contains all of the FCPS-FNS Grow at Home resources, including the activity booklet and supplementary videos, letters to caretakers, and more.

Authors

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Spotlight: Co-Designing a Farm to School Program With Student and Teacher Input, Surry County High School

Introduction

Surry County Public Schools (SCPS) uses student input and teacher guidance to design projects that meet competency requirements in Career and Technical Education (CTE) Agriculture. The SCPS agriculture educator developed an agriculture program for SCPS in 2017. Using his experience as a sixth-generation farmer, the agriculture educator is cultivating the future farmers of Surry County.

The Challenge

Surry County has deep agricultural roots, yet the number of farms is decreasing (National Agricultural Statistics Service 2017). Agriculture education can pique student interest in farming, and leadership opportunities can increase student buy-in.

The Solution

At Surry County High School (SCHS), students take ownership of the garden. Students research crops, select seeds, and develop an annual garden management plan. Students use raised garden beds, hydroponic systems, and aquaponics systems to demonstrate the various technologies used in agricultural production. Some of these practices are implemented in urban areas where land availability restricts full-scale production.

The agriculture educator uses project-based learning, providing for deeper engagement and interaction with learning content, cultivating higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills, developing collaborative skills while working in groups with their peers, and allowing students to demonstrate their competence and capabilities. Students choose projects that include garden bed construction, site and plant selection, irrigation methods, soil deficiency evaluation, and plant nutrient requirements.

In partnership with the Department of Social Services, students donate food harvested from the school's gardens to families in need. They also collaborate with the culinary arts program to wash and lightly process the produce harvested from the school gardens following appropriate guidelines. As students taste the products they have grown, class lessons include nutrition and wellness concepts that encourage healthy living and a sustainable lifestyle.

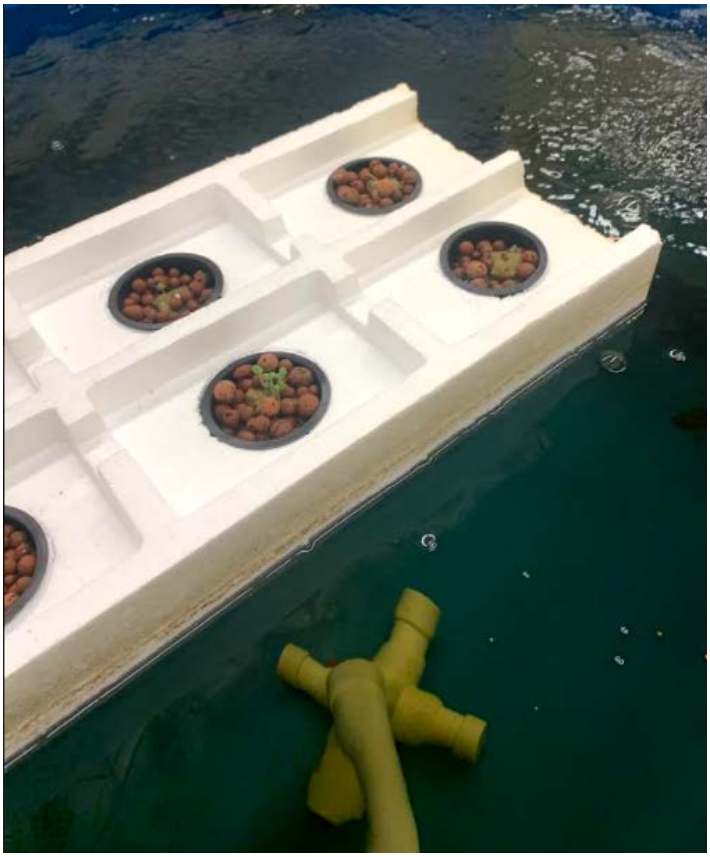
Students enrolled in this course learn the value of making eye contact, giving a firm handshake, and being time conscious as well as the importance of having integrity, being honest, having a sound work ethic, and dressing appropriately for the workplace. This supports the 21st Century Workplace Readiness Skills (WRS) for the Commonwealth, instilling personal qualities, professionalism, and technology literacy found in the first 22 competencies of every state CTE course framework. These life skills align with the five C's outlined in the VDOE's Profile of a Virginia

Graduate. Agricultural education provides the fertile soil for planting the seeds of career preparation in the minds of Surry County youth, inspiring them to grow, flourish, and prepare for success in current and emerging professions in the agriculture industry.

The Impact

Students in Surry County are able to apply classroom instruction in a real-world agricultural environment. "We must make growing our own food normal again," said the agriculture educator. "Incorporating agricultural education in our schools on the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels creates a knowledgeable, well-educated, and skilled workforce for the Commonwealth's agricultural industry."

Tips for Replication



- Elect a school garden management team to ensure the garden is taken care of no matter what. Make this a TEAM effort.
- Be prepared to adapt your project to meet both the needs of the students and the school.
- Consider partners who can help bring the project to fruition including teachers, administration, cafeteria staff, community members, parents, and students.
- Take time to "onboard" partners so that everyone understands the objectives and their role in making the school garden a success.
- Establish clear mutual expectations.
- Review, learn, and revise.

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Spotlight: Nutrition Education for the Littlest Eaters, Stafford Schools Early Childhood

Introduction

Stafford Schools Early Childhood is home to two early care centers that include Head Start, Early Head Start, Virginia Preschool Initiative, and Early Childhood Special Education programs. On-site registered dietitians (RDs) incorporate nutrition and food education activities into the curriculum and design activities to engage both participants and their families. Together with their community partners, they are building knowledge of and access to fresh local food in an effort to reduce childhood obesity.

The Challenge

Stafford Schools Early Childhood is working to combat childhood obesity. All of the early childhood programs are designed to encourage children to eat healthier foods and move more.

The Solution

Since the early 2000s, Stafford Schools Early Childhood has woven nutrition and food education into its everyday curriculum. Under the leadership of the director of early childhood programs, Stafford Schools Early Childhood collaborates with multiple local organizations, including their Head Start grantee, Stafford County Public Schools (SCPS) Nutrition Program, VCE, Smart Beginnings Rappahannock Area, and community funders such as the Stafford Hospital Foundation and Stafford Education Foundation to enhance their programming.

Stafford Schools Early Childhood uses a two-pronged approach to combat childhood obesity. First, the organization works directly in the classroom. It provides nutrition education lessons to students, conducts monthly healthy food activities in partnership with VCE, grows an indoor garden thanks to a grant from the Stafford Education Foundation, and provides nutritious vended meals from SCPS through the CACFP.

The second approach is through family partnerships. Outside the classroom, RDs provide nutrition and food education to families as well as individual counseling to families based on their child or family member's specific dietary needs. Monthly activities include cooking demonstrations, nutrition lessons, educational trips to the grocery store, and seasonal snack ideas. Stafford Schools Early Childhood pivoted its robust curriculum to meet the needs of families during COVID-19 by delivering workshops virtually and, in doing so, found that the virtual platform worked better for families on tight schedules.

Stafford Schools Early Childhood works closely with SCPS on menu development for its centers' vended meals. For The Crunch Heard 'Round the Commonwealth (The Crunch), SCPS procured Virginia grown apples and provided the apples to the early care centers. The cafeteria managers collaborated with teachers and students to conduct farm education activities for The Crunch. Activities focused on learning about Virginia farms through "Meet the Farmer" cards supplied by Produce Source Partners and by coloring apple pictures. Students also received apple stress balls provided by Virginia Quality.

This team of engaged teachers, creative RDs, and resourceful cafeteria managers seeks community support and uses every available opportunity to connect with students and families and promote healthy eating. Together with their organizational partners, they are able to offer a robust curriculum linking local food, gardening, and nutrition education with participants and their families.

The Impact

In addition to tracking biometric data, Stafford Schools Early Childhood sends a survey to participant families each year. The response remains overwhelmingly positive—families are continuously appreciative of the programming and have improved their ability to feed their families with healthy meals.

Tips for Replication

Stafford Schools Early Childhood identified four key pillars needed for a successful Farm to School and Farm to CACFP program:

1. Student engagement: Activities with students have better outcomes when students are able to handle and make food themselves. When students have tactile experiences with new foods, their likelihood of consumption increases.
2. Family engagement: Over the years, Stafford Schools Early Childhood worked to increase engagement among family members. They found that flyers in backpacks and other reading materials were not enough to increase participation. Instead, outcomes are more successful when all elements of an activity are provided for the family to complete at home, including sending food home with the students or preparing food with the parents when possible.
3. Partnerships: One key driver of creating robust programming for the students and families was using resources from community partners. Identifying intersections with different organizations allowed Stafford Schools Early Childhood to grow and amplify its programs.
4. Scheduled activities: Instead of expecting staff and teachers to plan food and nutrition lessons on their own, Stafford Schools Early Childhood builds it into the calendar. It provides teachers with the activity and food supplies in advance and sets up the lessons. Scheduling activities in advance allows the teachers to prepare and be more engaged in the activities.

Resources

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Spotlight: Project GROWS, Verona, VA

Introduction

Project GROWS is an educational nonprofit organization with a mission to improve the health of youth in Staunton, Waynesboro, and Augusta County through garden-based education and access to healthy food. In partnership with schools, afterschool programs, summer programs, and community organizations, Project GROWS brings hands-on food education to youth and families year-round through farm to school tastings, field trips, mentorship programs, and summer camps. Project GROWS also manages multiple farmers markets in the region, offering a range of healthy food incentive programs that improve the affordability and accessibility of fresh local foods while supporting producers within the local food economy.

The Challenge

Project GROWS was formed in 2010 when a group of nine human service agencies representing at-risk populations throughout the region came together to address serious health issues facing the community, including high rates of obesity and diabetes and high rates of hunger and other nutrition-related conditions.

The Solution

After two years of planning and research, the Project GROWS educational farm broke ground with support from the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth, Augusta Health, and the County of Augusta, focusing on food education and food access as critical pieces of the solution for improving long-term health.

Since Project GROWS's founding, one of its stalwart partners in furthering food and environmental education and improving food access has been the Boys and Girls Club of Waynesboro, Staunton, and Augusta County. The Club provides afterschool and summer programming to local youth and provides meals through the At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program of the CACFP and the SFSP. The first students to experience a field trip at the Project GROWS farm were youth from the Club. When Project GROWS launched its Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program in 2014, the Club offered its site as one of Project GROWS's pick-up locations, forever earning the Project GROWS staff the title of "The Veggie People."

Over the years, this partnership launched many farm to afterschool initiatives, including the following formal programs:

- weekly summer field trips to the Project GROWS's farm and farmers markets;
- Youth-Run Farm Stand, a pop-up market held at the Club and staffed by Garden Leader Club teens to sell Project GROWS produce to youth and their families at the Club;
- Young Chefs, a cooking series program for youth featuring seasonal veggies from the Project GROWS farm; and
- sales and donations of Project GROWS produce for use both on-site in the Club's meal program and as take-home "snack packs."

Along with various other afterschool nutrition and gardening lessons, veggie tastings, and teen volunteer events with the Club, these programs have been made possible thanks to many strategic partnerships, including with VCE; the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank; the Community Action Partnership Staunton, Augusta, and Waynesboro (CAPSAW); faith-based groups; and internship placements coordinated through college career development programs. Resourced with healthy recipes developed for families on tight budgets and skilled in leading cooking demonstrations, SNAP-Ed agents and interns through VCE's Family Nutrition Program have been key in delivering essential food education to youth and families at the Youth-Run Farm Stand and other Project GROWS farmers markets. Even when the pandemic put a hold on in-person programming, a local SNAP-Ed Agent began filming cooking demonstrations for Project GROWS as well as a virtual Virginia Harvest of the Month series and Super Summer Chefs series reaching thousands of educators, students, and families across the region.

These programs with the Club build on the Farm to School programs that Project GROWS delivers in partnership with schools across Staunton, Waynesboro, and Augusta County. Collaborating with school nutrition directors in Staunton City and Waynesboro City Public Schools, Project GROWS produce is featured regularly on lunch lines, in summer meals, and through monthly in-school veggie tastings. When school nutrition programs began operating emergency feeding at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Project GROWS staff and interns jumped in alongside school staff to prepare meals, pack them onto buses for delivery, and distribute them at curbside pick-up sites along with bags of donated produce and recipe flyers. With field trips canceled, Project GROWS stayed connected with students through its educational videos, bringing students lessons on plant identification as well as how to grow, harvest, and cook seasonal veggies. These farm to school initiatives empower a new generation of youth to build ownership of their health rooted in the experience and knowledge of where food comes from and how it affects their lives.

Key to Project GROWS's community food access goals is its partnership with the Staunton-Augusta Health Department. Together, they co-manage the Farmers Market at the Health Department, which is located in the health department's parking lot. The market's location reduces the transportation and scheduling barriers experienced by WIC clients enrolled in the Farmers Market Nutrition Program. Since the market was founded in 2016, voucher redemption rates in the region have steadily increased. In 2019, the Staunton-Augusta Health Department had an 84 percent redemption rate—the highest in the state—which

translated to about 500 women and children getting fresh, healthy produce. Despite the obstacles the pandemic posed, this partnership continued in 2020, providing families with critical access to fresh produce.

The Impact

Since 2014, Project GROWS hosted over 100 events with Club students totaling over 1,600 hours of instruction. Students excelled through leadership opportunities and formed close relationships with the land. At the end of one of the Club's field trips to the farm, a student proudly declared, "I like this farm because it's OUR farm."

Maintaining close partnerships has been critical to increasing the impact of Project GROWS's programming, both within and beyond their work with the Club. Annually, Project GROWS delivers garden-based education on its farm and in the community to over 4,000 youth, grows over 12,000 pounds of nourishing produce for a mix of sales and donations to community initiatives, and makes healthy local food more accessible and affordable for customers and more profitable for producers. This work is made possible *only* by leveraging the collective strength of forward-leaning leaders across the sectors of education, business, government, nonprofit, and faith-based organizations.

Tips for Replication

Programs happen with and through partnerships. When assembling a team, consider those partners—community members and organizations—with shared or complementary goals.

- Be clear on your team's mission and core values, and continue to ask how your program(s) align with your mission and values or whether adjustments to the program are needed.
- Spend time researching whether similar initiatives are already underway in your community. If so, how might your team offer support to existing programs rather than duplicating efforts?
- Consider all the resources (e.g., time, funding, skills, and talent) needed to deliver your program sustainably, and identify what resources your team can contribute or assemble.

Explore all avenues of funding. Since 2010, Project GROWS has received funding from individuals, families, corporations, foundations, and governmental agencies at the local, state, and federal levels. The core base of support includes the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth, Augusta Health, the Community Foundation of the Central Blue Ridge, the United Way of Greater Augusta, and the USDA Food and Nutrition Service.

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The channel features farm tours and Project GROWS's Harvest of the Month and Super Summer Chefs video series.

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Author

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Spotlight: 4-H Livestock Service-Learning Projects, Fauquier County

Introduction

In 4-H programs, engaging youth in livestock projects connects students to agriculture career exploration while teaching life skills like responsibility and time management. During the pandemic, 4-H livestock service-learning projects allowed youth to continue engaging in hands-on positive projects by raising and donating chicken, eggs, and beef to local food banks.

Turning traditional 4-H livestock projects into service-learning projects amplified positive outcomes while supporting the community in a meaningful way. Youth were empowered to serve their communities, and the community benefitted with additional proteins to feed those most in need. Partners included the Fauquier County 4-H, Fauquier FFA, the PATH Foundation, the Northern Piedmont Community Foundation, American Heritage Farm, and the William A. Hazel Family Foundation.

The Challenge

As schools transitioned to virtual learning in March 2020, families looked for new ways to keep their children engaged in positive hands-on activities that could be conducted at home. Meanwhile, a rise in unemployment doubled the demand at the Fauquier County Food Bank.

The Solution

Early in 2020, 30 youth signed up to raise 60 broiler chickens and 190 layer chickens so they could donate the resulting proteins to local food banks. A grant from a local foundation provided funding for the birds and feed; participating families provided housing, labor, and other supplies needed to raise chickens successfully, and Fauquier Extension agents

provided training and project coordination to ensure each family's success. The first round of participants began donating protein to the food pantry in June 2020, resulting in an outpouring of appreciation and financial support that allowed the program to expand and extend through 2022. The Fauquier FFA program supported an expansion of the project in the winter of 2021 by raising chicks.

The Impact

In total, 150 youth have been involved in 4-H livestock service-learning projects since 2020 and contributed 7,714 dozen eggs, 11,170 pounds of meat, and 500 ounces of dog treats to three local food banks with their livestock projects. Local donors provided over $120,000 for these projects. After a donation of ground beef, a representative from the food pantry said, "We were just a day away from running out of meat. Young farmers saved the day." 4-H'ers efforts have been uplifting for community members. The executive director at the Fauquier Food Bank said, "There are no words to say how grateful we are to receive the eggs from our 4-H friends. To see the smiles when they come in with their eggs is magic."

Youth involved in these livestock projects are not only responsible for raising the animals but must also keep track of their projects with a 4-H record book. In keeping a record book, youth learn valuable life skills such as goal setting, planning, recordkeeping, and reflection. The reflection component of the 4-H record books helps club members discover unanticipated educational outcomes. Several participants helped a parent build housing for their animals and remarked that they learned some practical construction skills while learning how to communicate better with their parents.

Another theme that emerged from the project books was improved problem-solving skills. For one 4-H'er, it was figuring out how to rehome a black snake that had taken up residence in her chicken coop. One participant that raised laying hens had trouble reading, and his mother commented that he was so interested in learning more about chickens that the project actually improved his reading skills. All of the participants mentioned that they were happy to be able to donate to local feeding initiatives and were encouraged to get involved in other service activities.

Tips for Replication

- Reach out to the local VCE office to see what resources are locally available.
- Build partnerships with community stakeholders to create robust programming.
- Market the initiative to increase program knowledge and buy-in.

Resource

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Author

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Appendix

A

Farm to School Lesson Plans

Virginia Agriculture in the Classroom Lesson Plans—Introduction and Overview

The following lessons are provided courtesy of Virginia's Agriculture in the Classroom program. Agriculture in the Classroom connects children to agriculture by providing educators and families with engaging tools and resources. Each year Agriculture in the Classroom influences over 500,000 children across the state through classroom grants, educational resources, online enrichment, and volunteer initiatives. Please see the vast curriculum collection at AgInTheClass.org and search Virginia Agriculture in the Classroom on YouTube and Facebook for the latest news as well as video demonstrations and virtual tours.

Agriculture in the Classroom is proud to collaborate with the Virginia Farm to School program to educate students about the many nutritional foods grown and raised in Virginia. On average, each American farmer feeds 166 people domestically and abroad, providing nutritious food to consumers across the globe. These lessons will introduce students to both the nutritional benefits of the various fruits and vegetables farmed in Virginia and will explore how these crops came to be grown within the Commonwealth.

Today, Virginia has one of the most diverse agricultural industries in the country, with farmers growing a wide variety of crops. However, the majority of these are not native to the area, giving students the opportunity to explore cultural diffusion through food. The lessons are intended for elementary, middle, and high school students and are aligned to the appropriate SOLs. Teachers of various grades and subject areas will be able to easily adapt and differentiate the activities for their needs and student abilities.

Super Salad Party: A Virginia Harvest of the Month Lesson

Author: Lynn Black, the Virginia Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom

Standards of Learning

Mathematics: 1.12, 2.15, 3.15
English: 1.12, 2.10
Health: K.1, 2.3

Overview and Objectives

Students will participate in a salad taste test using ingredients found in the Virginia Harvest of the Month. They will vote on their favorite and graph the results. Next, they will also use all five senses to describe their favorite.

Time Estimate

60 minutes

Supplies

- Lettuce
- Spinach
- Tomatoes, chopped
- Cucumbers, sliced
- Peppers, sliced
- Salad dressing
- Veggie Fanatic worksheet, attached

Introduction

Virginia farmers grow some of our favorite salad ingredients, such as lettuce, spinach, tomatoes, cucumbers, and bell peppers. Salads are packed with nutrients and are easily customizable to fit many tastes. Depending upon the age of your students, you may choose to prep the vegetables before the lesson or to have students take ownership of the activity by washing and slicing the vegetables. Be sure to gain proper parent permissions by sending an itemized list of included foods before the lesson. Include alternatives for those with food allergies, if necessary.

Lesson

1. Begin by reviewing proper food handling and preparation procedures, such as hand washing and rinsing of food.
2. Arrange the salad ingredients as a buffet so that students may serve themselves.
3. Invite students to build their salads using all available ingredients, but allow them to determine how much of each to include.
4. On a piece of paper, have students list each salad ingredient and then assign each a rating from 1 to 5 stars. Then have them circle their favorite.
5. Take a class vote by asking each student to share their favorite and then represent the votes using tally marks on the board.
6. Compile the results in a bar graph and have students write a summary sentence describing the results.
7. Next, have students complete the Veggie Fanatic graphic organizer by using all five of their senses to describe their favorite salad ingredient. Encourage students to use vivid descriptive vocabulary that would persuade others to try the vegetable.

Virtual Adaptation

- Challenge students to try three different vegetables at home. These may be fresh, canned, or frozen. Give examples from the Harvest of the Month foods, but allow for the tasting of any vegetable found within the home. As an alternative, you may have the students choose three vegetables from that week's curbside food distribution. Have students conduct their rating of the three vegetables and then complete the graphic organizer using their favorites.
- Share student favorites and see create a class tally to see whether favorites emerge from the class. Graph the results.

Extension and Enrichment

- Provide a copy of the school cafeteria menu for the month. Have students study the menu to see whether any of the taste-tested foods are offered. Are their favorites on the menu? Have students write a letter to the school nutritionist or cafeteria manager sharing what vegetables they would like to see offered. Letters should include an introduction, a request and reasoning, and a conclusion.
- Grow your own salad greens as a class. Salad greens make a perfect container crop. Watch a demonstration video about container gardening.

- Include root vegetables such as carrots, seeds such as sunflower seeds or corn kernels, and stems such as celery for a complete Plant Parts We Eat taste test.
- Learn more about your favorite salad ingredients, including how to grow them hydroponically, with AITC's Journey of a Salad newsletter.

- Have students use their graphic organizer to create descriptive posters for the school cafeteria encouraging other students to try the various vegetables.

Super Salad Party Graphic Organizer

See next page for a printable organizer.

Be a Veggie FAN-atic!

Feels Like:

Smells Like:

Looks Like (sketch):

My Favorite Salad Ingredient: _____

Sounds Like:

Tastes Like:

Food Explorers: A Virginia Harvest of the Month Lesson

Author: Lynn Black, the Virginia Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom

Standards of Learning

English: 6.7, 6.9, 7.7, 7.9, 8.7, 8.9
Health: 7.1, 7.3

Overview and Objectives

Students will select a Virginia Harvest of the Month crop to research. Research findings will include the food's origin as well as nutritional benefits.

Introduction

Virginia agriculture is among the most diverse in the nation, with farmers growing a wide variety of fruits and vegetables. But how did those crops find their way to Virginia? In this lesson, students will learn about how various crops were brought to North America. It is suggested to use sweet potatoes, cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers, and squash due to their modern-day prevalence in Virginia agriculture; however, you may expand the list if desired. This lesson will highlight what is known as the Columbian Exchange: a period of cultural and biological exchanges between the Americas and Europe, Africa, and Asia following Columbus's arrival in the Americas.

Time Estimate

2 hours, may be split among multiple class periods

Supplies

- Computers with internet access
- Food Explorers graphic organizer, attached

Lesson

1. Begin by dividing the class into five groups: sweet potatoes, cucumbers, tomatoes, bell peppers, and squash.
2. Assign students the Food Explorers graphic organizer to research and complete. Upon completion, have them meet in groups to share and synthesize information.
3. Individually, have students prepare reports based on their research. Reports can be done in the form of a slide presentation or a writing assignment. Place students into mixed groups to share their findings and reports.
4. After students have shared their reports with each other, print a copy of the school cafeteria (or curbside meal distribution) menu and have students use a highlighter to mark each time one of the researched foods is on the menu. Which one appears most often? Are any left off? Which Virginia Harvest of the Month item would they like to see offered more often? Have students create a proposal to the cafeteria manager for the increased inclusion of this item on the menu. Be sure to include nutritional benefits as well as results from any taste testing (see the extension below).

Extension and Enrichment

- Have a Food Explorers Tasting Party where students will bring a dish to share featuring their researched vegetable. *Remember to gain appropriate permissions and have students clearly list all ingredients in their dishes.* Invite other classes to participate in the tasting and take a blind vote for the winning dish. Have each group present their research findings collectively to the other class during the tasting.
- The cultural diffusion of food did not end with Columbus. Much to the contrary, various foods, spices, and cooking techniques continue to be introduced in this country. In fact, most family celebrations involve food and the preparation of "traditional" dishes. Have students pick a food that is either served frequently at their home or made on special occasions. For example, perhaps their family enjoys sauerkraut on Thanksgiving, tamales for birthdays, or pho for family dinners. Instruct students to create recipe cards with a picture of the food or dish on one side and a description on the back to share with the class. Optional: Have a tasting party and encourage students to bring these dishes in. *Remember to gain appropriate permissions and have students clearly list all ingredients in their dishes.*

Food Explorers

Place of Origin:

How did it spread to North America?

Food: _____

Nutritional Benefits:

Interesting Facts:

Become a Food Explorer

Most of the foods we eat have traveled all over the world. Bread is made from wheat, which first grew in the Middle East. The meat in your hamburger is from beef animals, which came to us from South Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. French fries are made from potatoes, which are native to South America. The tomatoes in your ketchup came from South America also. Lettuce comes from Europe, oranges from China, and apples from Eastern Europe.

Corn, beans, sweet potatoes, peppers, squash, pumpkins, sunflower seeds, and pecans are foods native to the Americas. Potatoes, peanuts, and tomatoes started in South America, made their way to Europe and Africa with Spanish explorers, and then found their way back to North America with colonists.

Many new foods were introduced around the world during the 1500s, the great era of exploration. Explorers risked their lives and fortunes seeking valuable spices and found other foods along the way. Spices were important because there was no refrigeration, and fresh meat spoiled quickly. Strong spices covered the flavor of slightly rotten food. Some spices, like rosemary and cinnamon, helped preserve food. Spices also covered unpleasant smells in unsanitary times and were used to embalm dead bodies. Black pepper was more valuable than gold.

Many of the foods we know traveled from continent to continent because sailors needed fresh foods to survive. Without means to preserve fresh fruits and vegetables, sailors had to exist on salted meat, dried fish, unleavened bread, and biscuits. Without the Vitamin C found in fresh produce, sailors would develop a disease called scurvy that made their gums bleed and joints swell. Reaching land for fresh food and water was the only way to survive. In their search for fresh foods in new lands, the explorers brought back tomatoes, potatoes, bananas, chocolate, and tea from the New World and discovered new grains, like Indian corn.

Fresh fruits and vegetables are just as important for our health today as they were for the 16th-century explorers. Some of the foods you find on the grocery shelves may seem as exotic to you as tomatoes and squash did to early explorers. Unlike the pioneers, we only have to explore the produce shelves in the grocery store. How brave are you? How many new foods have you tried this week? Check the list on the following page.
Source: Oklahoma Agriculture in the Classroom

Food Explorer Survey
Source: Oklahoma Agriculture in the Classroom

Fruits I have tried:

- apples
- apricot
- bananas
- blackberry
- boysenberry
- cantaloupe
- date
- fig
- grape
- honeydew melon
- kiwi
- mango
- nectarine
- orange
- papaya
- peach
- pear
- pineapple
- raspberry
- strawberry
- tangerine
- watermelon

Vegetables I have tried:

- asparagus
- beet
- black beans
- broccoli
- butternut squash
- cabbage
- carrot
- cauliflower
- chard
- collard greens
- corn
- eggplant
- green beans
- jicama
- kale
- lettuce
- okra
- onion
- parsnips
- peas
- spinach
- sweet bell peppers
- sweet potato
- tomato
- turnips
- zucchini

Food Detectives: A Virginia Harvest of the Month Lesson

Author: Lynn Black, the Virginia Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom

Time Estimate

90 minutes

Supplies

- Computers with internet access
- Copies of world map
- Where in the World food cards and Key, attached
- Around the World without Leaving the Cafeteria graphic organizer, included

Standards of Learning

Social Studies:
WHI.1
WHII.2, WHII.4
WG.1, WG.15

Overview and Objectives

Students will investigate the origins of common food items. They will discover how trade and exploration contributed to the spread of food and traditions, thus affecting their lives and diets today.

Introduction

Food and farming have always been an essential part of human history. In fact, the first permanent civilizations were made possible through the advent of farming and the domestication of animals. However, people were limited to items native to their environments. This changed during the Age of Exploration. For example, in 1492, when Christopher Columbus came to the Americas, he saw plants and animals that he had never seen before. He took them back to Europe with him. Soon people were exposed to different foods and spices from around the world. The Columbian Exchange refers to the transfer of animals, plants, ideas, diseases, and more that occurred during the two centuries following Columbus' arrival in the Americas. Global trade and cultural exchanges significantly altered the lives of people around the world, starting with one of their most basic needs: food.

Lesson

1. Begin by dividing the class into groups of 3 or 4. Have each student list what they ate for breakfast or lunch that day. Next, have them break their meal item down into main ingredient components. For example, pizza would be broken down into wheat (crust), tomatoes (sauce), and cheese.
2. Next, pass out the Where in the World food cards to each group. Have each student in the group choose one card that corresponds to one of their meal ingredients. For instance, someone who ate french fries for lunch could choose potatoes, while someone who ate a peanut butter and jelly sandwich could choose grapes.
3. Explain to students that while the United States has a diverse agricultural economy that provides a wide variety of food, not all foods are native to the United States and instead were introduced here through trade, exploration, and colonization.
4. Pass out a world map to each group and have them place their food cards where they believe the food originated historically. Be sure to point out that you are not looking for where the item is farmed today but rather where it originated.
5. After students have completed the assignment in their groups, ask them to share with the class by placing their items on a large class map at the front of the class. Note that groups may place the same items in different locations.
6. Pass out the Where in the World Key and have students correct the items on the map. Did any foods and locations surprise them?
7. Now pass out a copy of the school cafeteria menu (or the curbside distribution menu) for the week/month. Tell students to apply their new knowledge of food origins to take a trip "Around the World without Leaving the Cafeteria." They will each select one complete meal from the menu (i.e., one entrée, vegetable, and

fruit). They will break the meal down into its main elements as they did earlier in the lesson. In addition to researching the historical origin of each food item, they will also include where it is farmed today.

Extension and Enrichment

- Extend the learning of the history of food with the Food, Land, People and World Civilizations PowerPoint:

- Have students select a food with important significance to their family, culture, or heritage. Tell them you will be hosting a multicultural food fair, and they are to create information cards for their food including its origin and what makes it special to them. *Optional: Students may prepare the dishes and bring them in to share. Please be sure to have appropriate permissions and have students clearly list all ingredients in their dishes.*

Food Detectives Graphic Organizer

See next page for a printable graphic organizer.

Food Detectives "Where in the World?" Food Cards

See the page after the graphic organizer for the food cards.

Around the World without Leaving the Cafeteria

Entrée: _____

Fruit: _____

Vegetable: _____

Elements: _____

_____

_____

Places of Origin:

Where are they predominantly farmed today?

Interesting facts about how the foods were spread or how they are enjoyed today:


Pumpkin


Sugar Cane


Grapes


Pineapple


Quinoa


Eggs


Chicken


Soybeans


Avocado


Peppers


Bananas


Cattle


Hogs


Sheep


Carrots


Coffee Beans

Black Pepper

Broccoli

Chocolate

Vanilla

Lettuce

Onions

Lentils


Celery


Olives


Peas


Sweet Potato


Watermelon


Wheat


Tomatoes


Oranges

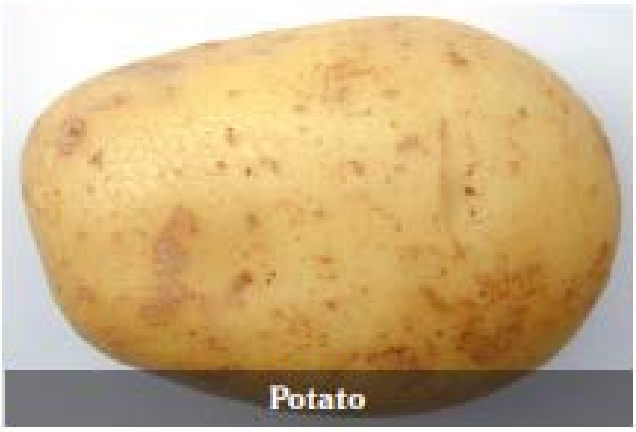

Rice

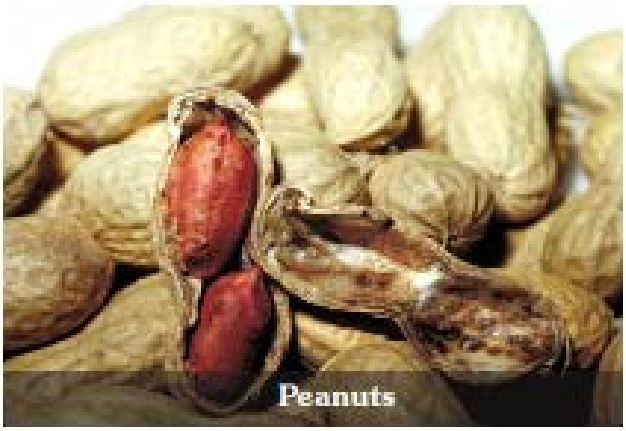

Turkey


Sunflower


Cotton Seeds


Popcorn Kernels


Potato


Peanuts


Corn (Maize)

Black-Eyed Peas

Okra

“Where in the World?” Food Cards Answer Key

Old World

Bananas—Indo-Malaysia
Cattle—Southwest Asia
Black Eyed Peas – West Africa
Black Pepper—India
Broccoli—Mediterranean
Carrots—Afghanistan, Middle Asia
Celery—Mediterranean
Chicken—China, India
Coffee Beans—Ethiopia
Cotton Seeds—South Asia
Eggs—Southeast Asia
Grapes—Turkey
Hogs—Southwest Asia
Lentils—Mediterranean
Lettuce—Asia Minor
Okra – West Africa
Olives—Mediterranean
Onions—Pakistan, Central Asia
Oranges—Pakistan
Peas—Northwest India, Afghanistan
Rice—India
Sheep—Middle East, Central Asia
Soybeans—Northeast China
Sugarcane—India
Watermelon—Africa
Wheat—Turkey

New World

Avocado—South Mexico
Chocolate—South Mexico
Corn (Maize)—Central America
Peanuts—South America Peppers—South America
Pineapple—South America (Brazil, Paraguay)
Popcorn—North America
Potato—South America
Pumpkin—Mexico
Quinoa—South America
Sunflower—North America
Sweet Potatoes—Central America
Tomatoes—South Mexico
Turkey—North America
Vanilla—South Mexico
For additional information on food origins, visit Virginia Tech’s food timeline.
Picture Cards and Key Credit: Utah Agriculture in the Classroom

Appendix

B

Procurement Templates

Request for Information

Template Request for Information (RFI)

Instructions: *This information form provides product needs and information regarding* **[County Name]***'s school nutrition program and requests information from potential vendors.* **[School Division Name]***'s nutrition program will use this information to develop the division's annual procurement plan. School food authorities (SFAs) will enter their information on this form, including products and quantities desired, and provide it to potential vendors. Vendors will return the RFI to the school division with the products that they can provide for the school division. Vendors may be asked to bid on all or some of the products. Vendors, please return this RFI via email or USPS to* ***[School Nutrition Director/Proxy Email Address]*** by **[date]**. *For questions, please contact* **[name]** *at* **[email address]** *or call* **[phone number]**. *You can expect an email confirming receipt of the information and next steps within two weeks of mailing. Thank you for your interest in selling to this school division.*

School Point of Contact Name:

School Division Name:

Mailing Address:

Address Line 2:

City, State, Zip:

Email Address:

Contact Phone:

Number of Schools:

Number of Meals Served Daily:

Percentage of Free and Reduced Eligibility in School Division:

Buyer's Preferred Delivery Day:

Farm/Vendor Name:

Farm/Vendor Primary Contact:

Address:

City, State, Zip:

Email:

Phone:

1. **Acreage in Production:**
2. **Do you have a written food safety plan?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. **Are you Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certified?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

1. **Do you hold product liability insurance?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

   If yes, what amount? $

2. **Can you provide one student field trip per school year?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

3. **Can you provide one school visit per school year?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

4. **Will you permit site visits by school nutrition directors or their designees?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

5. **Provide a brief description of your farm operation.**

6. **What kind of farming practices do you use, i.e., conventional growing methods, conservation tillage, hydroponics, GMO-free, certified organic, integrated pest management (IPM), etc.?**

7. **Where do you currently sell your products?**

   Check all that apply. Answering this question is not mandatory, but it could assist in developing a product distribution plan.

   ☐ Food Service Company:
   ☐ Food Hub:
   ☐ Farmer Cooperative:
   ☐ Farmers Markets:
   ☐ School divisions:
   ☐ Produce Auction:
   ☐ Other:

11. **Do you have a delivery truck or van?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

    If yes, is it refrigerated? ☐ Yes ☐ No

    Note: Children are a high-risk population, and food safety is critical for school sales. Follow all USDA, Department of Health, and Department of Agriculture food safety guidelines for product handling and transport.

    See USDA-ARS Handbook Number 66, Commercial Storage of Fruits, Vegetables, and Florist and Nursery Stocks, for more information on proper storage temperatures and optimal humidity rates. See also University of Kansas' resource entitled "Enhancing the Safety of Locally Grown Produce: Storage of Fresh Produce" for a chart of optimal storage temperatures and relative humidity.

12. **Number of schools per week you could deliver to:**

13. **Preferred delivery days:**

14. **Case Minimum for Delivery:**

15. **Can you accept net 30 payment?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

16. **Required terms of payment (Note: Schools typically have a net 30 payment policy):**

Chart Instructions

This chart describes typical pack sizes and product specifications for Virginia's Farm to School Harvest of the Month Program and other specific products desired by school nutrition programs. The product's featured month is in parentheses.

SFAs

1. *Enter estimated product needs, including the number of pounds or cases needed per week or month and the duration the product will be needed. If quantities change during summer months, please explain.*
2. *Edit product specifications as needed.*
3. *Enter the preferred pack size(s).*
4. *Provide this RFI to potential vendors and specify the deadline to return the form.*

Potential Vendors

1. *Enter wholesale price per pack size. You may enter a different pack size in the pack size column if typical pack sizes vary from what is listed.*
2. *Enter the window of availability for product.*
3. *Estimate the total projected supply available for this school division.*
4. *If vendors are sourcing from other growers, please indicate whether the farm of origin will provided on invoicing. The farm of origin will help school divisions and summer food sponsors market the products in their meals.*

[School Division] Product Needs	Product Description & Specifications	School Preferred Pack Size/ Description	Wholesale Price per Pack Size or Vendor No.	Product Availability	Projected Supply	Farm of Origin
Notes: Includes the product and month needed.	**Notes:** This column contains school needs. **SFAs:** Edit the product specs to meet your needs.	**Notes:** **SFAs:** Edit to meet your needs. **Vendors:** Include your pack size if different.	**Notes:** **Vendor:** Insert price per pack size.	**Notes:** **Vendor:** Insert typical number of months and weeks available.	**Notes:** **Vendor:** Insert weekly and total supply projections.	**Notes:** Provided at ordering and on invoice. Indicate if filled in by vendor by checking yes/no.

[School Division] Product Needs	Product Description & Specifications	School Preferred Pack Size/ Description	Wholesale Price per Pack Size or Vendor No.	Product Availability	Projected Supply	Farm of Origin
Example: ***Sweet Potato*** *School division requests 200 lbs. per month October–January*	*Use baked or mashed. Firm and good internal quality; mature but not overly large; wiped free of dirt and no decay; cosmetic or shape imperfections okay; large and medium size preferred.*	*40# carton, 20# carton, or 10# carton* ***Vendor****: We also pack in bushels, $28/per bushel*	*$18.00 per 40# carton; $17.00 per carton for bulk pallet delivery*	*October–January 12 weeks*	*10 cartons per week Total: 120 cartons, approx. 4,800#*	☐ *Yes* ***Vendor:*** *We grow all the produce listed and provide invoices with our farm name.*
(January) Sweet Potato **[No. lbs., frequency, duration]**	Use baked or mashed. Firm and good internal quality; mature but not overly large; wiped free of dirt and no decay; cosmetic or shape imperfections okay; large and medium size preferred.	40# carton, 20# carton, or 10# carton	**[Cost per pack size]**	**[Typical no. months and weeks available]**	**[No. cases/# available per week and total cases/#]**	☐ Yes ☐ No
(February) Squash, Butternut **[No. lbs., frequency, duration]**	Use roasted, mashed, in soups. Firm and good internal quality; mature; hard rinds, solid external color; flesh is orange with fine moist texture; slight stem attached; cosmetic or shape imperfections okay; wiped free of dirt and debris; no decay; large size preferred but variety of sizes considered.	40# carton, 20# carton, or 10# carton	**[Cost per pack size]**	**[Typical no. months and weeks available]**	**[No. cases/# available per week and total cases/#]**	☐ Yes ☐ No

[School Division] Product Needs	Product Description & Specifications	School Preferred Pack Size/ Description	Wholesale Price per Pack Size or Vendor No.	Product Availability	Projected Supply	Farm of Origin
(March) Kale [No. lbs., frequency, duration]	Use fresh or cooked. Fresh and full leaves, bunch or loose leaf; dry and free of dirt, decay, damage, insects, and injury; varieties acceptable. Fully washed, partly trimmed, with stem.	5# case or 10# case	[Cost per pack size]	[Typical no. months and weeks available]	[No. cases/# available per week and total cases/#]	☐ Yes ☐ No
(April) Lettuce, Hydroponic Head [No. lbs., frequency, duration]	Use fresh on salad bar and in chef salads. All varieties; fresh; fairly tender; well-trimmed; not bitter. characteristic color/no discoloration; root intact.	Carton bulk packed, 18-24 heads or 10# case. Root intact, no clamshells	[Cost per pack size]	[Typical no. months and weeks available]	[No. cases/# available per week and total cases/#]	☐ Yes ☐ No
(April) Lettuce, Romaine Head [No. lbs., frequency, duration]	Use fresh on salad bar, in chef salads, on sandwiches. Insect free. All types and varieties; fresh; fairly tender; well-trimmed; characteristic color/no discoloration; not bitter. Fully washed and trimmed.	Carton packed, 24 heads or 10# case	[Cost per pack size]	[Typical no. months and weeks available]	[No. cases/# available per week and total cases/#]	☐ Yes ☐ No

[School Division] Product Needs	Product Description & Specifications	School Preferred Pack Size/ Description	Wholesale Price per Pack Size or Vendor No.	Product Availability	Projected Supply	Farm of Origin
(May) Strawberries [No. lbs., frequency, duration]	Use fresh whole, sliced, and in smoothies. Can freeze bulk deliveries for later use. Quarts preferred; firm; fairly uniform red color and shape; mature but not overripe nor underdeveloped; cap attached; field packed, dry; at least 3/4-inch diameter; free of dirt, decay, damage and injury.	8-quart flat or 12-quart crate (approx. 18#)	[Cost per pack size]	[Typical no. months and weeks available]	[No. cases/# available per week and total cases/#]	☐ Yes ☐ No
(June) Cucumbers [No. lbs., frequency, duration]	Use fresh sliced or diced. Firm, glossy, crisp and dark green; free from decay, damage, and injury; fairly well formed; not overgrown; 1–2½ inch diameter. Fully washed.	1+1/9 bushel waxed box or carton (approx. 28#) or 10# box	[Cost per pack size]	[Typical no. months and weeks available]	[No. cases/# available per week and total cases/#]	☐ Yes ☐ No
(July) Zucchini [No. lbs., frequency, duration]	Use sliced, diced, or spears, fresh and cooked. Mostly straight. Firm on the outside; tender on the inside; fully green; stems or portion of stem attached; fairly well formed; free of dirt, damage, and injury.	10# box or 20# box	[Cost per pack size]	[Typical no. months and weeks available]	[No. cases/# available per week and total cases/#]	☐ Yes ☐ No

[School Division] Product Needs	Product Description & Specifications	School Preferred Pack Size/ Description	Wholesale Price per Pack Size or Vendor No.	Product Availability	Projected Supply	Farm of Origin
(August) Tomatoes, cherry [No. lbs., frequency, duration]	Use whole on salad bar and in chef salads. Varieties acceptable; firm; fairly uniform and smooth; shiny color characteristic of variety; not overripe or soft; free of dirt, decay damage, and injury.	8 pints/flat or 12 pints/flat	[Cost per pack size]	[Typical no. months and weeks available]	[No. cases/# available per week and total cases/#]	☐ Yes ☐ No
(August) Tomatoes, slicing [No. lbs., frequency, duration]	Used fresh, sliced or diced. Medium (2¼") to large 2½" diameter) preferred. Varieties acceptable; firm; fairly uniform and smooth; shiny color characteristic of variety; not overripe or soft; free of dirt, decay damage, and injury. ¾ ripe to fully ripe.	20# case or 10# case	[Cost per pack size]	[Typical no. months and weeks available]	[No. cases/# available per week and total cases/#]	☐ Yes ☐ No

[School Division] Product Needs	Product Description & Specifications	School Preferred Pack Size/ Description	Wholesale Price per Pack Size or Vendor No.	Product Availability	Projected Supply	Farm of Origin
(September) Peppers, sweet ripe bell [No. lbs., frequency, duration]	Use fresh, sliced or diced and cooked. Medium or large preferred. All varieties; firm flesh, sweet flavor; no shrivel or pitting; 3+" diameter preferred; large size (but not woody) and slightly misshapen or cosmetic issues acceptable; free of dirt, decay, damage and injury. ¾ ripe to fully ripe for red, orange, and yellow peppers.	10# carton or 15# carton	[Cost per pack size]	[Typical no. months and weeks available]	[No. cases/# available per week and total cases/#]	☐ Yes ☐ No
(October) Apples, eating [No. lbs., frequency, duration]	Small apple (125–138ct); minor cosmetic imperfections (e.g., minor flyspeck) acceptable. Sweet, crisp, tart; unique varieties preferred (e.g., Winesap, Stayman). No Red Delicious or Golden Delicious.	Loose pack case, 125–138 count	[Cost per pack size]	[Typical no. months and weeks available]	[No. cases/# available per week and total cases/#]	☐ Yes ☐ No
(November) Cabbage, green [No. lbs., frequency, duration]	Use shredded in slaw and cooked. Untrimmed, whole. Solid, well-formed heads: free from dirt and decay; cosmetic or shape imperfections okay; minor soil deposits allowable on outer leaves only.	20# case 10# case	[Cost per pack size]	[Typical no. months and weeks available]	[No. cases/# available per week and total cases/#]	☐ Yes ☐ No

[School Division] Product Needs	Product Description & Specifications	School Preferred Pack Size/ Description	Wholesale Price per Pack Size or Vendor No.	Product Availability	Projected Supply	Farm of Origin
(November) Cabbage, red [No. lbs., frequency, duration]	Use shredded in slaw. Untrimmed whole. Solid, well-formed heads: free from dirt and decay; cosmetic or shape imperfections okay; minor soil deposits allowable on outer leaves only.	Flat crate (1.75 bushels, 50–60#) or carton (53#)	[Cost per pack size]	[Typical no. months and weeks available]	[No. cases/# available per week and total cases/#]	☐ Yes ☐ No
(December) Spinach [No. lbs., frequency, duration]	Use fresh on salad bar or in salads. Bunches, loose packed or baby; fresh; fairly tender; triple washed and cleaned with potable water; free of dirt, decay, damage and injury.	Case (approx. 10#). Fresh, partly trimmed, fully washed. Bunches, loose pack, or baby.	[Cost per pack size]	[Typical no. months and weeks available]	[No. cases/# available per week and total cases/#]	☐ Yes ☐ No

Other Products Needed by School Division

[School Division] Product Needs	Product Description & Specifications	School Preferred Pack Size/ Description	Wholesale Price per Pack Size or Vendor No.	Product Availability	Projected Supply	Farm of Origin
Notes: SFAs should insert specific needs in this column: Total lbs., frequency, duration, weekly or monthly delivery forecast	**Notes:** **SFAs:** Insert specifications.	**Notes:** **SFAs:** Insert desired pack size **Vendor:** Insert standard pack size if different.	**Notes:** **Vendor:** Insert cost per pack size.	**Notes:** **Vendor:** Insert months and number of weeks available.	**Notes:** **Vendor:** Insert weekly and total supply projections.	**Notes:** Provided at ordering and on invoice. Indicate if filled in by vendor by checking yes/no.
[No. lbs., frequency, duration]	[Product specifications]	[SFA desired pack size or vendor standard, if different]	[Cost per pack size]	[Typical no. months and weeks available]	[No. cases/# available per week and total cases/#]	☐ Yes ☐ No
[No. lbs., frequency, duration]	[Product specifications]	[SFA desired pack size or vendor standard, if different]	[Cost per pack size]	[Typical no. months and weeks available]	[No. cases/# available per week and total cases/#]	☐ Yes ☐ No
[No. lbs., frequency, duration]	[Product specifications]	[SFA desired pack size or vendor standard, if different]	[Cost per pack size]	[Typical no. months and weeks available]	[No. cases/# available per week and total cases/#]	☐ Yes ☐ No
[No. lbs., frequency, duration]	[Product specifications]	[SFA desired pack size or vendor standard, if different]	[Cost per pack size]	[Typical no. months and weeks available]	[No. cases/# available per week and total cases/#]	☐ Yes ☐ No

Other Products Available from Vendor

[School Division] Product Needs	Product Description & Specifications	School Preferred Pack Size/ Description	Wholesale Price per Pack Size or Vendor No.	Product Availability	Projected Supply	Farm of Origin
Notes: **Vendor:** Describe product.	**Notes:** **Vendor:** Insert specifications.	**Notes:** **Vendor:** Insert standard pack size.	**Notes:** **Vendor:** Insert cost per pack size.	**Notes:** **Vendor:** Insert typical number of months and weeks available.	**Notes:** **Vendor:** Insert weekly and total supply projections.	**Notes:** Provided at ordering and on invoice. Indicate if filled in by vendor by checking yes/no.
[Product description]	[Product specifications]	[Standard pack size]	[Cost per pack size]	[Typical no. months and weeks available]	[No. cases/# available per week and total cases/#]	☐ Yes ☐ No
[Product description]	[Product specifications]	[Standard pack size]	[Cost per pack size]	[Typical no. months and weeks available]	[No. cases/# available per week and total cases/#]	☐ Yes ☐ No
[Product description]	[Product specifications]	[Standard pack size]	[Cost per pack size]	[Typical no. months and weeks available]	[No. cases/# available per week and total cases/#]	☐ Yes ☐ No

Forward Contract

Sample Forward Contract Template for Agricultural Products, [20XX-20XX]

INSTRUCTIONS: This document is a sample and is not intended to be all-inclusive. The school food authority (SFA) is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the contract complies with all federal regulations, state procurement regulations, and local procurement policies. The content formatted in bold and italics throughout this document is instructional and should not be included in the SFA's contract. All content within [brackets] should be modified as needed. This template forward contract can be used by school divisions, child nutrition programs, food service management companies, or purchasing cooperatives and is intended to follow a vendor's submission of a request for information and subsequent bid on a request for proposals. [Farm/Vendor business name]
[Name of farmer/vendor representative]
[Address]
[Phone number]
[Email address]

[Buyer name—school division, child nutrition program, or purchasing cooperative]
[Contact person name]
[Address]
[Phone number]
[Email address]

Purpose

Upon performing a cost/price analysis and evaluating responses to a request for proposals with price and other factors considered with price as the primary factor, it is the intention of [School Division, Department of Nutrition Services/Child Nutrition Program/Purchasing Cooperative] to purchase the products listed in the table below. This document describes the contract terms between the farmer, herein known as the Contractor, and the [School Division/Child Nutrition Program/Purchasing Cooperative], herein known as the Buyer. Retain this signed document and follow the instructions below to fulfill orders. The quoted prices are firm throughout this purchase period [July 20XX until June 20XX].

Background

This nutrition program feeds an average of [number of students] daily in grades [indicate grade levels] at [number] of schools. ***Include free and reduced percentages and number of schools qualified for Community Eligibility Provision, if applicable.*** [School division/program] participates in the [indicate federal nutrition programs, e.g., National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, etc.]. This nutrition program ensures that all students have equitable access to fresh, healthy foods that are locally grown when feasible.

Values Statement

Adapt as applicable. [School Division, Department of Nutrition Services/Child Nutrition Program/Purchasing Cooperative] aligns its purchasing practices to reflect the following values:

- Access to nutritious, safe, healthy, and delicious food is paramount for the success of all students.
- The work of farmers and ranchers is important in our community and throughout Virginia.
- Providing health, nutrition, and agriculture education opportunities for students enhances their educational experience.
- Supporting local and regional producers benefits growers, students, customers, and the community. Supporting local growers creates job opportunities in agriculture.

Geographic Preference

Adapt as applicable. [School Division, Department of Nutrition Services/Child Nutrition Program/Purchasing Cooperative] desires to serve Virginia-grown products to its students. The Buyer recognizes the value of serving fresh foods from local sources when possible to enhance learning opportunities, ensure freshness, and create local economic opportunities.

1. Under federal law, this [School Division/Child Nutrition Program/Purchasing Cooperative], as the purchasing institution, has the authority to apply a geographic preference to minimally processed foods and to determine the definition of "local" for the purposes of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs such as the National School Lunch Program, the School Breakfast Program, the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, the Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program, the Special Milk Program, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, the Summer Food Service Program, and the Department of Defense Fresh Program.
2. This [Division/Program/Cooperative] defines "locally grown" produce, meat, poultry, fish, seafood, and grains as [insert definition of local]. The definition of fluid milk is broader to encompass the regional nature of the fluid milk industry and is defined as [insert definition of local fluid milk]. This [Division/Program/Cooperative] will apply applicable federal procurement procedures.
3. As provisioned under federal law, the Buyer provided a price percentage preference of [XX] percent [or insert other point calculation system] during evaluation of bids to "locally grown products" as defined under this geographic preference. The Buyer will pay the Contractor the quoted price, not the discounted price for evaluation purposes.
4. Pursuant to USDA regulations, the geographic preference in this section is applied only to "minimally processed" agricultural products which retain their inherent character.

Terms and Termination

Adapt as applicable. The quoted prices are firm throughout this purchase period [July 1, 20XX until June 30, 20XX]. This agreement may be extended or amended upon the written mutual agreement of both the Contractor and the Buyer.

The Buyer has the option to renew this agreement. The renewal shall be contingent, at a minimum, on the Contractor's satisfactory performance of this contract as determined by the Buyer and subject to the availability of funds.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, either party may terminate this agreement for cause or convenience, at any time without penalty, by providing 30 days advanced written notice to the other party.
The Contractor is expected to update the Buyer to confirm product availability approximately four to six weeks prior to estimated product delivery so [School Division/Child Nutrition Program] can develop menus, tastings, and promotions. [School Division/Child Nutrition Program] will place orders at least one week prior to serving. The [School Division/Child Nutrition Program] reserves the right to additional competition, including purchase from other sources if the vendor is unable to deliver items within the designated time.

Product, Price, and Order Timeline

Include all products the Buyer will purchase from the Contractor. Add a column for summer purchases if they will be on the same contract.

Product	Product Description and Specifications	Wholesale Price per Pack Size	August–September 2020	October–November 2020	December 2020–January 2021	February–May 2021
Example: Sweet Potato	*Use baked or mashed. Firm and good internal quality; mature but not overly large; wiped free of dirt and no decay; cosmetic or shape imperfections okay; large and medium size preferred.*	*$19.00 per 40# carton, including delivery;*	*2 cartons per week delivered to 8 sites (16 cartons/wk, 6 weeks) Total: 96 cartons, approx. 3,840#*	*2 cartons per week delivered to 8 sites (16 cartons/wk, 7 weeks) Total: 112 cartons, approx. 4,480#*	*2 cartons per week delivered to 8 sites for (16 cartons/wk, 5 weeks) Total: 80 cartons, approx. 3,240#*	*2 cartons per week delivered to 8 sites (16 cartons/wk, 14 weeks) Total: 224 cartons, approx. 8,960#*
[Enter product name]	[Enter product description]	[Enter price per pack size]	[Enter order estimate]	[Enter order estimate]	[Enter order estimate]	[Enter order estimate]

*Volumes listed are based upon historic consumption and represent conservative minimum purchase estimates for this contract. Additional volumes may be purchased if price, quantity, and quality are acceptable. [School Division/Child Nutrition Program/Purchasing Cooperative] may obtain additional similar items through other channels (contracted vendors, seasonal quotes, DoD Fresh entitlement funds) during the year outside of this award.

Contractor's Obligations

1. All deliveries shall be to designated sites listed in "Delivery Locations."

2. ***Select applicable obligation:*** Contractor shall maintain *Good Agricultural Practices (GAP)* certification verifying production and handling practices in accordance with recommended safety guidelines.
   AND/OR
   Contractor shall complete, sign, and return *Attachment A, Virginia Cooperative Extension Assessing On-Farm Produce Safety Risk* with the executed contract.

3. [School Division/Child Nutrition Program/Purchasing Cooperative] [requires OR prefers] a vendor with capacity to deliver to each school kitchen. The "Delivery Locations" list indicates sites where products will be delivered. The Contractor agrees to deliver products at the contract price to locations as indicated during the contract period.

4. Products shall be transported in vehicles capable of maintaining the quality and food safety of all products up to the time of delivery and acceptance at the Buyer's specified delivery locations. **Note:** Children are a high-risk population, and food safety is critical. The Contractor must follow all USDA, Virginia Department of Health, and Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services food safety guidelines for product handling and transport. See USDA-ARS Handbook Number 66, Commercial Storage of Fruits, Vegetables, and Florist and Nursery Stocks, for more information on proper storage temperatures and optimal humidity rates. See also the University of Kansas resource entitled "Enhancing the Safety of Locally Grown Produce: Storage of Fresh Produce" for a chart of optimal storage temperatures and relative humidity.

5. Delivery should be on the agreed-upon date and time discussed when order is placed. Should delivery be delayed for any reason, Contractor will contact the appropriate personnel. Contact personnel for [School Division/Child Nutrition Program] can be found in the "Contact Information" below.

6. Deliveries shall not be left outside the building. All deliveries will be placed inside the kitchen area in the location designated by the food service site contact. Any losses resulting from the Contractor's failure to deliver within specified timeframes shall be borne exclusively by the Contractor.

7. When an agreed-upon amount of produce becomes unavailable, the Contractor must notify the Buyer with seven days' notice, excluding weekends and holidays, before scheduled delivery so other arrangements can be made. **Any changes in product availability or delivery scheduling must be immediately communicated with the division contact.**

8. The [School Division/Child Nutrition Program] has the right to refuse produce upon delivery if it does not meet the agreed-upon quality and pricing requirements. Damaged or unacceptable product shall be credited to the Buyer. All products shall be free from spoilage and/or damage.

9. The quote is a unit price and includes delivery cost. The [School Division/Child Nutrition Program] shall not be charged for any additional cost [except tax should it incur]. Participating sites will honor the minimum delivery requirements as set forth in the vendor proposal. **Note:** Some school divisions require a single delivery location, while others require multiple drop sites during the school year and a single delivery location during the summer months. See "Delivery Locations" for details.
    a. Minimum delivery requirement:

10. Contractor shall comply with all laws, rules, codes, ordinances, and licensing requirements that are applicable to the conduct of its business, including those of federal, state, and local agencies having jurisdiction and authority.

11. Contractor shall carry a minimum of [$1,000,000 to $5,000,000] in product liability insurance during the contract period.

Invoicing

A detailed invoice must be provided with each delivery of product. The invoice should be separate for each [Site/Division/Child Nutrition Program] and contain the following information:

1. Name, address and phone number of Contractor selling products.
2. Date of delivery.
3. Itemized list of quantity, item description, origin of the item (farm, location), unit of sale (ea., cu., lb., etc.), price per unit and extended total price for each item listed on invoice.
4. Grand total amount each district has to pay for the total purchase [including sales tax if applicable].
5. Signature of school personnel authorizing receipt of products.

Billing and Payment

Contractor will prepare a separate statement for each school monthly. Statements will be forwarded no later than five days after the billing period to [address and contact of accounts payable].
Payment shall be made after satisfactory performance of the contract, in accordance with the provisions thereof, and upon receipt of a properly completed delivery ticket.
Payment by the division or child nutrition program is net 30 [unless other terms have been discussed and agreed upon].

Liability

Contractor will hold [School Division/Child Nutrition Program] harmless for any damages resulting from consumption of products delivered under this contract, when such damages are attributed to foreign materials or other defects in products delivered by the Contractor.

General Terms and Conditions

a. **Applicable Law and Choice of Forum**: This agreement shall be construed, governed, and interpreted pursuant to the laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia. All disputes arising under this agreement shall be brought before a proper court in [name of county/city], Virginia.

b. **Status of the Parties**: The relationship of the parties to each other is solely that of independent parties. No party shall be considered an employee, agent, partner or fiduciary of the other except for such purposes as may be specifically enumerated herein. Nothing contained in this agreement shall be construed to create any partnership or joint venture between the parties. The Contractor shall provide services as an independent contractor. Under no circumstances will the Contractor be considered an employee of [name of School Division/Child Nutrition Program].

c. **Conflict of Interest**: No employee, officer, or agent may participate in the selection, award, or administration of a contract supported by federal, state, or local awards if he or she has a real or apparent conflict of interest as detailed in the [Division/Program]'s Code of Conduct.

d. **Nondiscrimination/Equal Opportunity Statement**: In accordance with federal civil rights law and USDA civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g. Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.), should contact the Agency (State or local) where they applied for benefits. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities may

contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, (AD-3027) found online at: How to File a Complaint, and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

1. mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
   Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
   1400 Independence Avenue, SW
   Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
2. fax: (202) 690-7442; or
3. email: program.intake@usda.gov.
   This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

e. Debarment and Suspension: No contract shall be made to parties listed on the General Services Administration's List of Parties Excluded from federal procurement or non-procurement programs in accordance with E.O.s 12549 and 12689, "Debarment and Suspension." This list contains the names of parties debarred, suspended, or otherwise excluded by agencies, and contractors declared ineligible under statutory or regulatory authority other than E.O. 12549. Contractors shall provide the required certification regarding its exclusion status and that of its principal employees.

f. Byrd Anti-Lobbying Amendment: Contractors who apply or bid for an award of $100,000 or more shall file the required certification. Each tier certifies to the tier above that it will not and has not used federal appropriated funds to pay any person or organization for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a member of Congress, officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a member of Congress in connection with obtaining any federal contract, grant or any other award covered by 31 U.S.C. § 1352. Each tier shall also disclose any lobbying with non-federal funds that takes place in connection with obtaining any federal award. Such disclosures are forwarded from tier to tier up to the recipient.

g. Buy American: In this paragraph, the term "domestic commodity or product" means:

i. an agricultural commodity that is produced in the United States; and

ii. a food product that is processed in the United States comprised of over 51 percent agricultural commodities produced in the United States.

(2) Requirement. (i) *In general.* Subject to paragraph (d)(2)(ii) of this section, the department shall require that a school food authority purchase, to the maximum extent practicable, domestic commodities or products.
(ii) *Limitations.* Paragraph (d)(2)(i) of this section shall apply only to—
(A) A school food authority located in the contiguous United States; and

(B) A purchase of domestic commodity or product for the school lunch program under this part.

Contact Information

Please send the signed contract ***and if applicable*** [and signed copy of the Virginia Cooperative Extension Food Safety Risk Assessment] to:
[Enter the name of the School division, Child Nutrition Program, Purchasing Cooperative managing the contract.]

School Division Name:

School Point of Contact Name:

Mailing Address:

Address Line 2:

City, State, Zip:

Email Address:

Contact Phone:

School Nutrition Program/Child Nutrition Program Contacts:

Delete this section if this contract is for only one school division. The contacts below will order product from you. Invoice each [Division/Program] separately. Do not send signed contract forms to the contact(s) listed below. ***Instructions for purchasing cooperatives: Enter the point of contact for the participating school divisions and child nutrition program sponsors (i.e., local CACFP or SFSP sponsors). Maintain documentation of participating divisions for procurement review records. Attach additional sheets as necessary.***

1. School Division/Child Nutrition Point of Contact Name:
   School Division Name:
   Mailing Address:
   Address Line 2:
   City, State, Zip:
   Email Address:
   Contact Phone:
2. School Division/Child Nutrition Point of Contact Name:
   School Division Name:
   Mailing Address:
   Address Line 2:
   City, State, Zip:
   Email Address:
   Contact Phone:
3. School Division/Child Nutrition Point of Contact Name:
   School Division Name:
   Mailing Address:
   Address Line 2:
   City, State, Zip:
   Email Address:
   Contact Phone:

Delivery Locations

Instructions for each school division/sponsor: Enter specific points of contact and information for each delivery site. Include loading dock information, anticipated months of delivery, and other important information (i.e., ID and sign-in required). Divisions may instead attach a spreadsheet of each site with the necessary information for delivery. Attach additional sheets as necessary.

Each of the below sites will receive deliveries. A receipt is required at time of delivery.

School Division/Child Nutrition Program 1:

School Name:

School Point of Contact Name:

Delivery Address:

Address Line 2:

City, State, Zip:

Email Address:

Contact Phone:

Delivery Time Window:

Delivery Location Details:

Anticipated Months for Delivery:

Additional Information:

School Name:

School Point of Contact Name:

Delivery Address:

Address Line 2:

City, State, Zip:

Email Address:

Contact Phone:

Delivery Time Window:

Delivery Location Details:

Anticipated Months for Delivery:

Additional Information:

School Division/Child Nutrition Program 2:

School Name:

School Point of Contact Name:

Delivery Address:

Address Line 2:

City, State, Zip:

Email Address:

Contact Phone:

Delivery Time Window:

Delivery Location Details:

Anticipated Months for Delivery:

Additional Information:

School Name:

School Point of Contact Name:

Delivery Address:

Address Line 2:

City, State, Zip:

Email Address:

Contact Phone:

Delivery Time Window:

Delivery Location Details:

Anticipated Months for Delivery:

Additional Information:

School Division/Child Nutrition Program 3:

School Name:

School Point of Contact Name:

Delivery Address:

Address Line 2:

City, State, Zip:

Email Address:

Contact Phone:

Delivery Time Window:

Delivery Location Details:

Anticipated Months for Delivery:

Additional Information:

School Name:

School Point of Contact Name:

Delivery Address:

Address Line 2:

City, State, Zip:

Email Address:

Contact Phone:

Delivery Time Window:

Delivery Location Details:

Anticipated Months for Delivery:

Additional Information:

Appendix

C

School Garden Template

Sample Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Between School Gardens and School Nutrition Programs

INSTRUCTIONS: It is a best practice to have a written agreement between the school nutrition program and a school garden representative when food is grown on school property to be used in the school nutrition, summer feeding, or CACFP At-Risk After School programs. This document should be signed by the school nutrition program director and the division-level garden administrator over multiple sites, i.e., the Career and Technical Education (CTE) director, or a school administrator. School food authorities may sign intergovernmental agreements with operators of the school garden when the operator is a governmental agency such as the LEA (school division) or a municipal Parks and Recreation Department. If the garden operator is a nonprofit or for-profit entity, proper procurement methods must be followed. See USDA FNS Memo SP 06-2015 for more information.

This is a sample MOU. The school food authority (SFA) is responsible to comply with procurement guidance. The content formatted in bold and italics throughout this document is instructional and should not be included in the MOU. All content within [brackets] should be modified, as needed, according to each SFA/school garden agreement.

[NAME OF SCHOOL DIVISION]

SCHOOL YEAR [20xx-20xx]

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN

[SCHOOL GARDEN REPRESENTATIVE] AND SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS DIRECTOR/ADMINISTRATOR

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) covers the period commencing [date] through [date].

[SCHOOL GARDEN REPRESENTATIVE, NAME OF SCHOOL DIVISION]	[SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAM DIRECTOR, TITLE]
Date	Date

SCHOOL GARDENS COVERED UNDER THIS MOU

Enter information for each school garden site to be considered for this MOU. Attach a separate sheet or use a spreadsheet if desired.

Name of School:

Address:

Cafeteria Manager:

Phone:

Email:

Garden Site Leader:

Phone:

Email:

Garden Co-Leader (if applicable):

Phone:

Email:

Garden Location on Campus:

[SCHOOL DIVISION NAME]

SCHOOL GARDEN/FARM AND SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAM

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

Introduction

(Adapt as applicable.) This MOU establishes guidelines for providing school garden/farm grown foods for use in the school nutrition program.
Ensuring the safety of the food supply is critical to a healthy student and healthy community. School and retail food facilities regulated under the Virginia Food Code are required to obtain their food from an approved source, as defined in § 12 VAC 5-421-10 of the Virginia Food Code. "'Approved' means acceptable to the department based on a determination of conformity with principles, practices, and generally recognized standards that protect public health" (Virginia Department of Health, 2016). The regulation of food sources helps ensure a safe food supply.

Purpose

The purpose of this agreement is to establish a memorandum of understanding between the [School Division] nutrition program and the [name of school/school garden program]. The intention is to feature student-grown products in the school nutrition program and to provide hands-on learning experiences in food production, marketing, and food safety.

Terms and Payment

Select the appropriate scenario(s) below to include in the agreement. Delete scenarios that do not apply.

1. The school nutrition program will purchase unprocessed school garden/farm grown foods at a fair market value using the micro-purchase process, spreading purchases equitably among qualified sources (i.e., other local vendors).
   OR
   The school nutrition program will purchase unprocessed student-grown products at a fair market value using the small purchase method, in which student-grown produce is the lowest priced vendor among qualified vendors. Geographic preference may be used if the SFA is using a small purchase method to purchase when the school garden is one source. (Note: fair market value can be obtained using daily wholesale market reports published on the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service website.)
   OR
   The school nutrition program will develop a forward contract for purchasing select items from the school garden or school farm at a set price for the growing season using the micro-purchase or small purchase method. All produce is to be the current season's harvest. Products will be used to enhance nutrition and agricultural education opportunities in cafeterias, classrooms, and school gardens through farm to school efforts such as the Virginia Harvest of the Month program.

Sample Specifications for Desired Products

[edit to meet the child nutrition program's needs]

Produce Item	Product Description	Pack Size/ Description	Approximate Delivery Periods	Approximate Quantity Needed	Estimated Qty Available; Price per unit
Sweet Potatoes	Use baked or mashed. Large size preferred. Cosmetic issues are okay.	Bushel (approx. 55 # or crate (approx. 50#). Rinsed, debris-free.	Monthly delivery October–January or can drop for dry storage at one delivery time.	*x* bushels or *y* crates per week	*z* bushels available @ $ per crate
Butternut Squash	Use roasted, mashed, in soups. Large sizes preferred. Cosmetic issues okay.	Bushel (approx. 55# or crate (approx. 50#). Rinsed, debris-free.	Monthly delivery October–January or can drop for dry storage at one delivery time.	*x* bushels or *y* crates per month	*z* bushels available @ $ per crate
Kale	Use fresh or cooked. Minor insect damage accepted, bronze or slightly yellowish edge okay if the edges are not dried. Insect free.	10# case or 25# carton or crate. Fully washed, partly trimmed, with stem.	October–December as available; March and April (approx. 16 weeks)	*x* cartons or *y* crates per week	*z* cartons available @ $ per crate
Lettuce, Hydroponic Head	Use fresh on salad bar, in chef salads, on sandwiches. Insect free.	Carton packed, 24 heads or 10# case. Root intact.	Year-round.	*x* cartons or *y* cases last week Aug-first week June; *x* cartons or *y* cases June-Aug for summer feeding program	*z* cases available @ $ per crate

Produce Item	Product Description	Pack Size/ Description	Approximate Delivery Periods	Approximate Quantity Needed	Estimated Qty Available; Price per unit
Lettuce, Romaine Head	Use fresh on salad bar, in chef salads, on sandwiches. Insect free.	Carton packed, 24 heads or 10# case. Fully washed and trimmed.	April–June and September–October as available (approx. 20 weeks)	*x* cartons or *y* cases per week	*z* cases available @ $ per crate
Strawberries	Use fresh whole, sliced, and in smoothies. Can freeze bulk deliveries for later use. Blemish free.	24-quart crate (approx. 36#) or 12-quart crate (approx. 18#)	May–June as available (approx. 6 weeks)	*x* 24-quart crates or *y* 12-quart crates per week	*z* 12-quart crates @ $ per crate
Cucumbers	Use sliced or diced. Large size or cosmetic issues okay but not hard or overripe.	1+1/9 bushel waxed box or carton. Fully washed.	June–3rd week of Aug for summer feeding program; September–October (approx. 19 weeks)	*x* 1+1/9 bushels, June–3rd week Aug; *y* 1+1/9 bushels September–October	*z* 1+1/9 bushel box @ $ per bushel box
Zucchini	Use sliced, diced, or spears. Mostly straight. Large size or cosmetic issues are okay but not hard or overripe.	20# box. Rinsed, free of debris and soil.	July for summer feeding program, last week August through first frost (approx. 10 weeks)	*x* 20# boxes every two weeks.	*y* 20# boxes total @ $ per box

Produce Item	Product Description	Pack Size/ Description	Approximate Delivery Periods	Approximate Quantity Needed	Estimated Qty Available; Price per unit
Tomato	Used sliced or diced. Cosmetic issues okay but no decay. Medium (2¼") to large (2½") diameter preferred.	Lug box (approx. 32#), 2-layer flat (approx. 21#), or Case (approx. 10#). Free of debris. ¾ ripe to fully ripe. (approx. 32#), 2-layer flat (approx. 21#), or Case (approx. 10#). Free of debris. ¾ ripe to fully ripe.	July–3rd week of August for summer feeding program. Last week August–October as available (approx. 15 weeks)	*x* lug boxes, *y* 2-layer flats, or *z* cases every two weeks.	*a* cases total @ $ per case
Sweet Red Bell Peppers	Use fresh, sliced or diced and cooked. Medium or large preferred.	Bushel (approx. 25#) or carton (approx. 16–25#). Free of debris, ¾ ripe to fully ripe.	September (approx. 4 weeks)	*x* bushels or *y* cartons every two weeks.	*z* cartons total @ $ per carton

Produce Item	Product Description	Pack Size/ Description	Approximate Delivery Periods	Approximate Quantity Needed	Estimated Qty Available; Price per unit
Apples	Primarily fresh, whole or sliced. 125–138 count preferred. 125s=2.75" diameter. 138s=2.68" diameter. Prefer Ginger Gold, Granny Smith, Fuji, Stayman, Winesap. Red Delicious or Golden Delicious accepted if spec'd with other varieties.	Bushel (approx. 48#) or loose pack case (approx. 38–42#)	September–March as available	*x* bushels or *y* loose pack cases every two weeks.	*z* cases @ $ per case
Cabbage, green and red	Use shredded in slaw. Untrimmed whole.	Flat crate (1.75 bushels, 50-60#) or carton (53#)	October–December as available (approx. 12 weeks)	*x* flat crates or *y* bushels every week. Every other week delivery can be considered.	*z* flat crates @ $ per case
Spinach	Use fresh.	Bushel (approx. 18-20#) or case (approx. 10#). Fresh, partly trimmed, fully washed.	September–June as available (approx. 36 weeks)	*x* bushels or *y* cases weekly.	*z* cases total @ $ per case

Note: Use the USDA Food Buying Guide or the Food Buying Guide Mobile App to assist with planning purchases.

OR

The school nutrition program will purchase school garden seeds and garden supplies using school nutrition program funds from the nonprofit school nutrition account in exchange for student-grown products throughout the year at no charge to be used in the nutrition program(s).

OR

The school garden/farm will donate food to the school nutrition program at no cost to the school nutrition program.

2. School nutrition professionals are provided access to visit the school garden/farm site to observe conditions under which foods are produced.

Responsibilities of the [School Division] Nutrition Program

1. ***If applicable:*** The school nutrition program will pay the school garden program for products (identify terms, e.g., net 30 invoicing and payment). ***Describe the agreed-upon method of payment prior to signing agreement.***
2. The school nutrition program will promote the student-grown products to customers and parents.
3. The school nutrition program will maintain all receipts for three years as required by the federal National School Lunch Program procurement guidance.
4. The school nutrition program will use proper procurement methods to obtain the school garden products.
5. The school nutrition program will follow food safety procedures and Hazard Analysis for Critical Control Points (HAACP) plans for all served foods, including school garden products.
6. The school nutrition program [will or will not] provide reusable containers for transport and storage and will sanitize containers before returning.

Responsibilities of the [School Division] School Garden/School Farm Program

1. The school garden/farm will follow all food safety guidelines to mitigate the risk of foodborne illness. This includes ensuring all food is grown, harvested, and delivered using food safety practices.
2. The school garden/farm will maintain logs of food safety trainings for students, staff, and volunteers.
3. The school garden/farm will provide itemized receipts for all products at the time of delivery.
4. The school garden/farm will provide a list of garden/farm grown products, including the estimated harvest time and estimated quantity available.

The school garden/farm will provide notice to the cafeteria manager prior to product delivery.