



Farm-to-School: Identifying Applied Research and Operational Resource Needs

Purpose

Explore and identify applied research needs associated with school nutrition (SN) programs' engagement in Farm to School (F2S) initiatives.

Method

- The methodology included a literature review, three site visits, and an expert panel with SN professionals.
- Site visits were made to three school districts where the SN directors had successfully implemented F2S initiatives.
- Each site visit included structured interviews with SN directors, SN managers, and SN staff; and field observations of F2S activities at each school district.
- An expert panel was convened consisting of 14 SN directors and two state agency representatives. All SN directors had experience implementing F2S initiatives in their school districts.
- Discussion topics focused on the challenges/barriers of implementing, maintaining, and expanding F2S programs as well as needed resources and research.
- Transcripts from the expert panel were analyzed and organized to meet the objectives of the study.

Results

Challenges/Barriers Associated with Implementing a F2S Program

- Procurement barriers
 - Examples include: regulations for bids, developing specifications, engaging in contracts, identifying local farmers, evaluating pricing, and an array of issues associated with delivery and the state of the product upon delivery
- Barriers regarding general knowledge about farming and F2S
 - Examples include: defining F2S, local, and unfamiliar farm terminology; determining where and how to start implementation; and identifying what products are available
- Financial barriers
 - Examples include: potentially higher food costs, labor costs, and equipment costs
- Barriers related to food processing/cooking
 - Examples include: inadequate skills of SN staff to process raw produce, lack of standardized F2S recipes, potential employee dissatisfaction, and need for more processing equipment and refrigerated storage in many operations

Challenges/Barriers Associated with Sustaining a F2S Program

- Identifying and gaining the support of community stakeholders
 - Examples include: farmers, non-profit organizations, school faculty and administration, and the next generation of SN directors

Barriers Associated with Expanding a F2S Program

- Difficulty finding suppliers to meet expanded needs
- Expanding to include the provision of F2S education to students
- Finding time to plan the expansion of F2S operations
- Food safety associated with expanding to include raw animal proteins

Application of Results

The results of this study indicate several resources and research studies would support school nutrition directors interested in implementing, sustaining, and expanding a F2S program.

Expert Panel Recommendations for F2S Resources

- Guide to procurement regulations for purchasing local foods
- Checklist to assess farms
- List of farms that are generally accepted practices (GAP) certified
- Food specifications for F2S products
- F2S section to the Food Buying Guide
- Step-by-step guide: implementation of F2S in large and small school districts
- Website that identifies F2S resources & best practices developed across the country
- Website that identifies potential grants for F2S programs
- Standardized recipes for all possible F2S products
- Training videos for preparing F2S produce
- Boot camp training for scratch food production
- Guide with instructions and resources for marketing F2S

Expert Panel Recommendations for F2S Research

- Measure the impact of F2S on issues such as student participation, student satisfaction, and local economies
- Identify the best ways to streamline F2S procurement processes for SN directors in each state
- Determine the best practices for starting a F2S program for small, medium, and large school districts
- Determine the best practices for controlling costs associated with F2S



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