What is a Community Food System?

A food system in which food production, processing, distribution and consumption are integrated to enhance the **environmental, economic, social and nutritional health** of a particular place.

Four values typically characterize community food systems – food security, sustainability, proximity, and self-reliance.
If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.
Objectives

Participants will be able to:

• Identify resources that build, support, and strengthen Farm to School programs

• Discover innovative ways districts have utilized Farm to School grants to plan for programmatic success

• Initiate Farm to School strategic plans that reflect program goals and enhance interaction with stakeholders
Planning Toolkit

1. Building Your Team
2. Establishing a Vision & Goals
3. Defining Local & Finding Local Foods
4. Buying Local Foods
5. Menu Planning
6. Food Safety
7. Promoting Your Program
8. School Gardening
9. Education & Curriculum Integration
10. Evaluating Your Efforts
11. Sustaining Your Program

www.usda.gov/farmtoschool
The USDA Farm to School Planning Toolkit

Questions and Resources for Designing a Robust Farm to School Program

United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service

#1 Building Your Farm to School Team

Building a farm to school team is a critical first step in the planning process and essential to the long-term success of your program. It’s an opportunity to create allies, bring in knowledge and expertise beyond what exists within your core group, and recruit some boots on the ground for planning and implementing your farm to school program, and fundraising to sustain it. Thinking through the questions below, you will be encouraged to define the roles of, and learn more about, your committed team members and advisors; determine what other types of members will make your team stronger; establish a structure for your team and the meetings you hold; come up with a preliminary meeting schedule; and explore existing resources that will help you form an effective group.

Team-Building Questions to Consider

Background
When was your farm to school team established and by whom? What activities has the group participated in to date?

Already Committed Members
What are the names, titles, and roles of people who have already committed to being part of your farm to school team?

TIP! You might also note other relevant roles that committee members play in the school, the community, or in their personal lives, as well as any helpful skills they might have. Does this member serve on any other committees? Is he or she the parent of a former student (in addition to being, say, the school nurse)? Does he or she love gardening or have fundraising experience?

Advisers
Outside of the team, what people or groups will you look to for guidance and assistance? What are the names, titles, and roles of people who have agreed to advise your committee on specific matters on an as-needed basis?

“Our biggest contributors and best sounding boards were the students we had on our planning committee. I believe we need to be inclusive of the people who these programs are designed to affect.”

West New York Schools, NJ
**TIP!** Your advisory committee needn’t necessarily be formal, but formalizing advisory roles might make the people who you’re hoping to get some specific advice or help from more invested in your program.

**Needed Members & Advisers**

What specific people or categories of people would you like to have on your farm to school team or advisory committee but have not yet received a commitment from? Who will be responsible for recruiting these new members? What are your expectations for these members? What role(s) will they play?

**TIP!** Some possible recruits for your team include:

- school food service representatives,
- teachers,
- students,
- school administrators (especially the school principal or vice principal),
- school board members,
- parents and grandparents,
- food producers (including farmers, ranchers, and fishermen)
- school nurses,
- guidance counselors,
- staff members of non-profit organizations,
- Master Gardeners,
- researchers,
- school maintenance staff members,
- local chefs,
- state agency staff to school coordinator,
- National Farm to School Network state lead,
- health care professionals,
- extension agents,
- PTA/PTO representatives,
- members of the local media,
- the school or district communications director,
- the school or district curriculum director, and
- other schools or districts that have farm to school programs

**Details & Logistics**

**Structure**

How is your team structured? Are you a subcommittee of a wellness committee or a food policy committee? Do you have sub-committees? Is there a team lead? Is there a cap on the number of members? Are members appointed, invited, elected, or nominated? Is there a leadership committee? Are all members of the team permanent, or do some serve for a specific period of time (e.g. the school year)?

“**Our coordinator spent a great deal of time during the planning year not only building but constantly maintaining and strengthening relationships with our collaborative partners, often on a one-to-one basis, through meetings, emails, marketing and media updates, and personal visits and conversations. These efforts paid off by making all stakeholders feel they had a personal interest in and commitment to the program.”**

Chico Unified School District, CA

**Name**

What will you call your farm to school team?

*For example: Some popular names include Farm to School Coordinating Committee, Farm to School Organizing Committee, School Nutrition Action Committee (SNAC), and Farm to School Steering Committee. Choose a name that reflects the team’s scope. If the team will address issues broader than the term “farm to school” encompasses, its name should reflect that.*

**Responsibilities & Power**

What are the functions and responsibilities of the farm to school team? Does the team, or do members of the team, have decision-making power? If not, by what means can the team’s ideas and recommendations be realized?

*For example: The types of activities a farm to school team might be responsible for include strategic planning, implementation, community outreach, regular reporting to specific people or entities, and fundraising.*

**Relationship building**

Do the various team members, [especially foodservice staff, administrators, and teachers] work together often? If not, what activities will build relationships, understanding, and trust between members?

**Meetings**

Who is the team accountable to? How often does the team meet? Where are meetings held? Are meetings open to the public? Will meetings be facilitated by a member of the team, or an external partner?

**Team Building Resources**

Following is a list of resources you may find helpful for assembling and growing your farm to school team and leading farm to school planning meetings.

**Farm to School: Assemble a Team:**

*University of Minnesota Extension*

Tips for foodservice directors on building a farm to school team, including a video and many examples.
FARM TO CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS PLANNING GUIDE

The Farm to Child Nutrition Planning Guide directs you through questions to consider when starting or growing a farm to school, farm to child care, or farm to summer program. This planning guide should be used as a supplemental tool to the Farm to School Planning Toolkit. This guide can be updated annually to ensure you are working towards your long-term goals. It follows the same steps as the Farm to School Planning Toolkit, but in a more concise and action-oriented manner. The document includes guiding questions, a planning template, and a sample of a completed planning guide. When setting goals, make sure they are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound). Every summer, child care, and school program is unique, so use this planning guide to move forward in a way that meets your needs! For more information, visit www.usda.gov/farmtoschool.

Building Your Team

Building a team is a critical first step in the planning process and essential to the long-term success of your program. It’s an opportunity to create allies, bring in knowledge and expertise beyond what exists within your core group, recruit some “boots on the ground” for planning and implementing your program, and establish a sustainable funding plan.

- What are the names, titles, and roles of people who have already committed to being a part of your farm to school team? Do you have representation from across the farm to school supply chain?
- Outside of the team, what people or groups will you look to for guidance and advice?
- What specific people or categories of people would you like to have on your farm to school team or advisory committee? What are your expectations of these people?
- What is your team structure? Do you have a lead coordinator? What is his or her role?
- How often will your team meet? What will be expected of team members at and between meetings?

Establishing a Vision

Think about your long-term hopes for your farm to school program; establish goals and objectives for the near-term; survey the federal, state, and local program and policy environment; and explore existing resources that will help set a thoughtful path towards realizing your long-term vision.

- What is behind your decision to establish a farm to school program? Why does your community value a community food systems approach?
- What benefits will a farm to school program bring to your students, school, district, or community?
- What is your long-term vision for a thriving program?

Defining Local

Before you start purchasing local foods or determining which local foods you are already serving, you must define local, determine what foods are grown, harvested, raised, caught, and processed in the region and when those foods are available. Understanding why local foods are important, as well as the availability of these foods, will help you create a definition that allows you to tap into the bounty of the local food economy without limiting competition.

- Why are local foods important to you?
- What foods are grown, harvested, raised, caught, and/or processed near you? When are these foods available?
- Based on your response, what is your program’s definition of local? Does your school already have a definition of local? Does it align with your values and vision? Does it allow you access to enough local food options to accomplish your goals?

PROMOTING AND MARKETING YOUR PROGRAM

EVALUATING YOUR EFFORTS
Setting SMART Goals

- **Specific**: State exactly what you want to accomplish
- **Measurable**: How will you evaluate success?
- **Attainable**: Is it feasible?
- **Relevant**: Does the goal meet your needs?
- **Time Bound**: Include a timeframe to achieve your goal.
Planning Grants

**Intended to**
Help school districts or schools organize and structure their farm to school efforts for maximum impact by embedding known best practices into early design considerations.

**Intended for**
School districts or schools that are just getting started in farm to school activities.

**Who can apply?**
PreK-12 SFA’s, nonprofit private schools, charter schools, Indian tribal schools.
Resources

SCHOOL GARDENS
Using Gardens to Grow Healthy Habits in Cafeterias, Classrooms, and Communities

INTEGRATING LOCAL FOODS INTO CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS

THE USDA FARM TO SCHOOL GRANT PROGRAM
Every year, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) awards grants to help schools connect with local producers and teach children where their food comes from.

Eligible Entities
Grantees include schools and districts (large and small, rural and urban), Indian tribal organizations, agricultural producers or groups of agricultural producers, non-profit entities, and extension agencies.

Timeline
Beginning in 2016, USDA plans to release a request for applications (RFA) in early fall. Applications are due approximately three months after the RFA is released, and grant agreements begin the following summer.
Planting Seeds to Grow Farm to School

Building Your Program Through Partnerships
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Questions?

www.usda.gov/farmtoschool