

Colorado Farm to School Primer



Healthy Community Food Systems

acknowledgements

LiveWell Colorado wishes to acknowledge the many individuals and organizations who have contributed to the development of the Colorado Farm to School Primer: the authors Jim Dyer and Kelsey Reeder of Healthy Community Food Systems who are pioneers in understanding and promoting Farm to School efforts in Colorado; Wendy Peters Moschetti of WPM Consulting who served as the project manager and a key content contributor through her precursor report, *Overview of School Food Procurement in Colorado*; the Colorado Farm to School Task Force whose members individually and collectively provided input and thoughtful reviews of this report and are working every day to make Farm to School a reality across the state; Vermont FEED (Food Education Every Day) whose Vermont Farm to School Primer served as an inspiration and model for this document; Sam's Garage for taking the content and design concepts and bringing them to life; Susan Motika our project sponsor and partner at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for their funding to do the research and writing necessary to develop this report through grant number FOA#90101ARRA09; and our partners and funders the Colorado Health Foundation and Kaiser Permanente for their on-going support and engagement in this work with us.

Work around Farm to School is just beginning. We hope that everyone who reads this primer will be inspired to learn more about how they can become a part of the movement to bring healthier foods to Colorado school children while enhancing Colorado's local and farm economies and our environment.

ABOUT LIVEWELL COLORADO

LiveWell Colorado is a nonprofit organization committed to preventing and reducing obesity in Colorado by promoting healthy eating and active living. Leading a comprehensive approach, LiveWell Colorado inspires and advances policy, environmental and lifestyle changes that aim to provide every Coloradan with access to healthy foods and opportunities for physical activity in the places they live, work, learn and play. LiveWell Colorado's strategic funders and partners include the Colorado Health Foundation, Kaiser Permanente, the Kresge Foundation, and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. For more information about LiveWell Colorado, visit www.livewellcolorado.org.

preface

What is Farm to School?

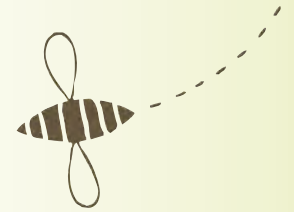


Getting healthy, local, sustainably produced foods into Colorado schools.

Helping Colorado children understand healthy, local foods and how they are produced.

What is Local?

Definitions are endless; a practical answer is ***“As local as possible; the closer the better.”***



Why?

- It's good for our children.
- It's good for local economies.
- It's good for local producers.
- It's good for the environment.



introduction



The purpose of this primer is to...

SNAPSHOT Pg. 3

Provide a snapshot of current school food conditions in Colorado.

INTRODUCING FARM TO SCHOOL Pg. 8

Introduce Farm to School & demonstrate how Colorado schools can increase the use of fresh, local foods & help children make healthier choices about the food they eat.

WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW Pg. 16

Show what is happening in Colorado, discuss how some Colorado schools are addressing common concerns, & examine the possibilities in Colorado.

STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE Pg. 23

Recognize that all of us, not just the schools, are involved in making Farm to School work well in Colorado, & we must always strive for further excellence in Farm to School.

GETTING INVOLVED Pg. 25

Supply information about how to get involved.

How big is Colorado's school food program?¹

NUMBER OF SCHOOLS

- **1,768 public schools**
- **843,316 students** in K-12 public schools (2010)

NUMBER OF MEALS

- **384,504 lunches** are served daily (on average)
 - Approximately 46% of all students
- **111,061 breakfasts** are served daily (on average)
 - Approximately 13% of all students

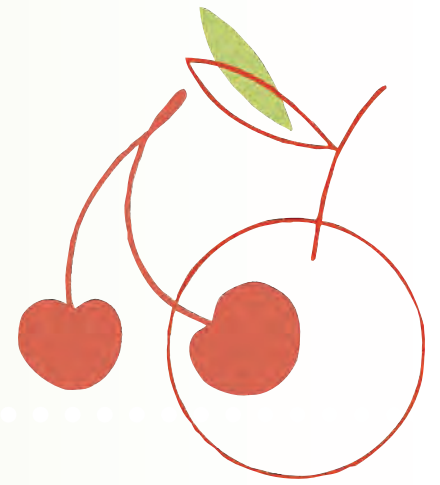
SCHOOL FOOD COMPONENTS

In addition to lunch and breakfast, school food includes:

- Summer Food Service Program
- A la carte food & snacks
- After School Care Snack Program
- Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program



How much does school food cost?



\$248,200,000 was expended by Colorado school food programs in the 2009-2010 school year.¹

Individual school meal cost data is not available in Colorado. The latest national figures for meal costs (\$2.36 for lunch, \$1.92 for breakfast) are from the 2005-2006 school year.²

LUNCH		BREAKFAST	
<i>Average full-price charged:¹</i>		<i>Average full-price charged:¹</i>	
Elementary	\$1.76	Elementary	\$1.00
Middle	\$2.06	Middle	\$1.10
High School	\$2.09	High School	\$1.11
Reduced-price*	\$0.40	Free & Reduced-price*	-Free-
Free*	-Free-		(school year 2010)

*State & federal reimbursement to schools allows for free or reduced-price meals for children from low-income families.

Who pays for the program?¹



Government entities involved

Many agencies are involved in school food in Colorado.

STATE AGENCIES

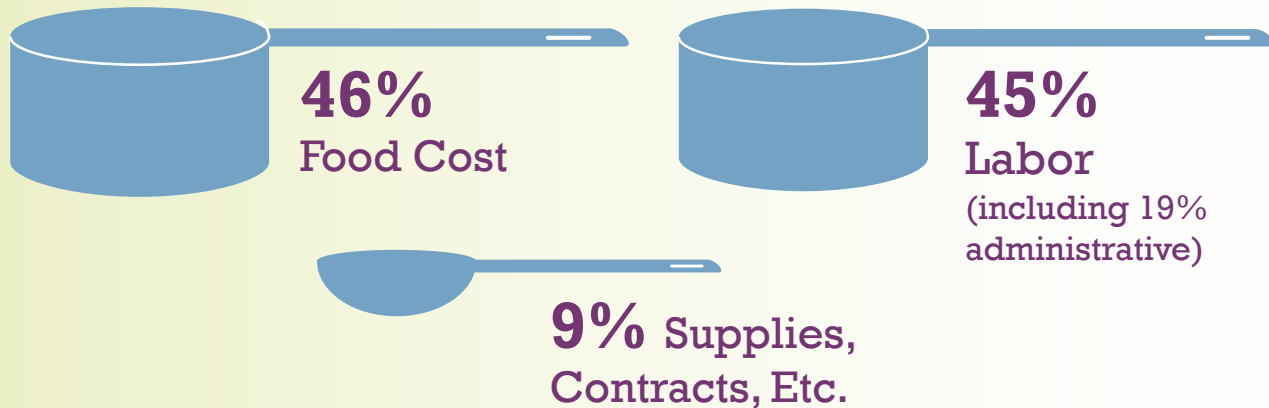
- Dept of Public Health & Environment – Food handling & safety monitoring
- Dept of Education – Management & technical assistance for reimbursable school food
- Dept of Human Services – Management of USDA Foods/Commodity Program
- Dept of Agriculture – Integration of Colorado products in school food

FEDERAL AGENCIES

- US Dept of Agriculture – Foods & reimbursable foods
- US Dept of Defense – Fresh Produce Program

To learn more, see the “What Agencies are Involved in School Food?” section of *An Overview of School Food Procurement in Colorado* available at www.livewellcolorado.org/schoolfood.

How is the money spent?² (national average)

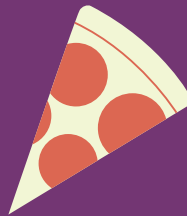


Who prepares the food?³

Most school food authorities (SFAs) still prepare the food themselves.

10% of SFAs contract with food service management companies.

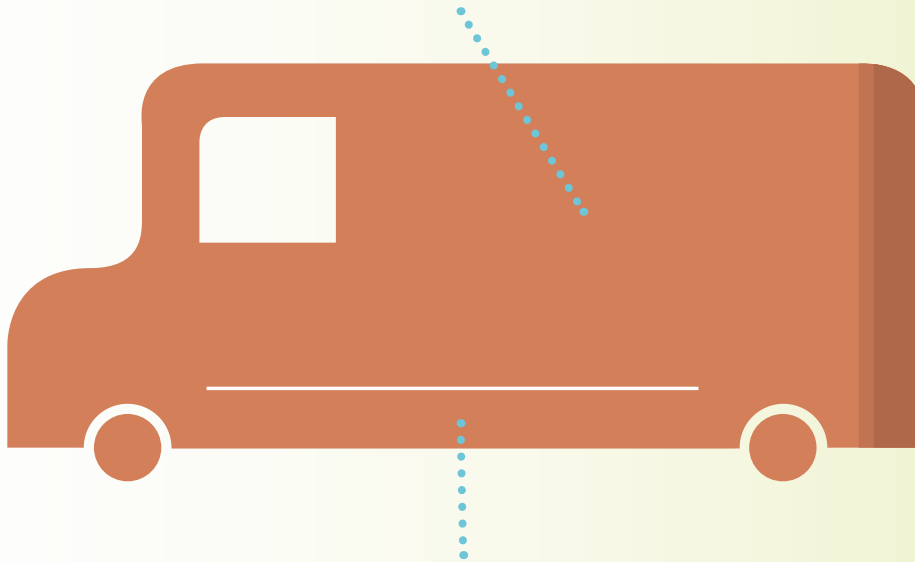
One Colorado school district contracted with a pizza franchise to supply pizza featuring local cheese. The school then served this with local salad and fruit.⁴



Where does the food come from?¹

92% Food Distributors & Direct Purchases

Most Colorado schools are purchasing a large portion of their food from large food distributors and other suppliers. This includes a small but increasing amount of local purchases.



8% USDA Foods Commodity Program

Districts can use part of their commodity allotment toward the U.S. Department of Defense Fresh Produce Program

The origins of Farm to School



Interest in the local food movement and where food comes from.

How local, sustainably produced, and healthy is the food we eat?



Concern about the obesity crisis and health of today's youth.

Obesity, diabetes, & other health issues can start at a very early age. School meals can reach all the children in the community and help address this growing epidemic.



Farm to School Movement

Local food is more likely to be whole, unprocessed food and therefore healthier.



Benefits of Farm to School

- Provides fresh, healthy food choices for our children.
- Helps the local economy.
- Reduces food miles and energy use.
- Supports local farmers and ranchers.

In time, it should promote:

- Healthy eating habits.
- Increased local production.
- Appropriate local processing, distribution, & storage.
- Stable markets for producers.



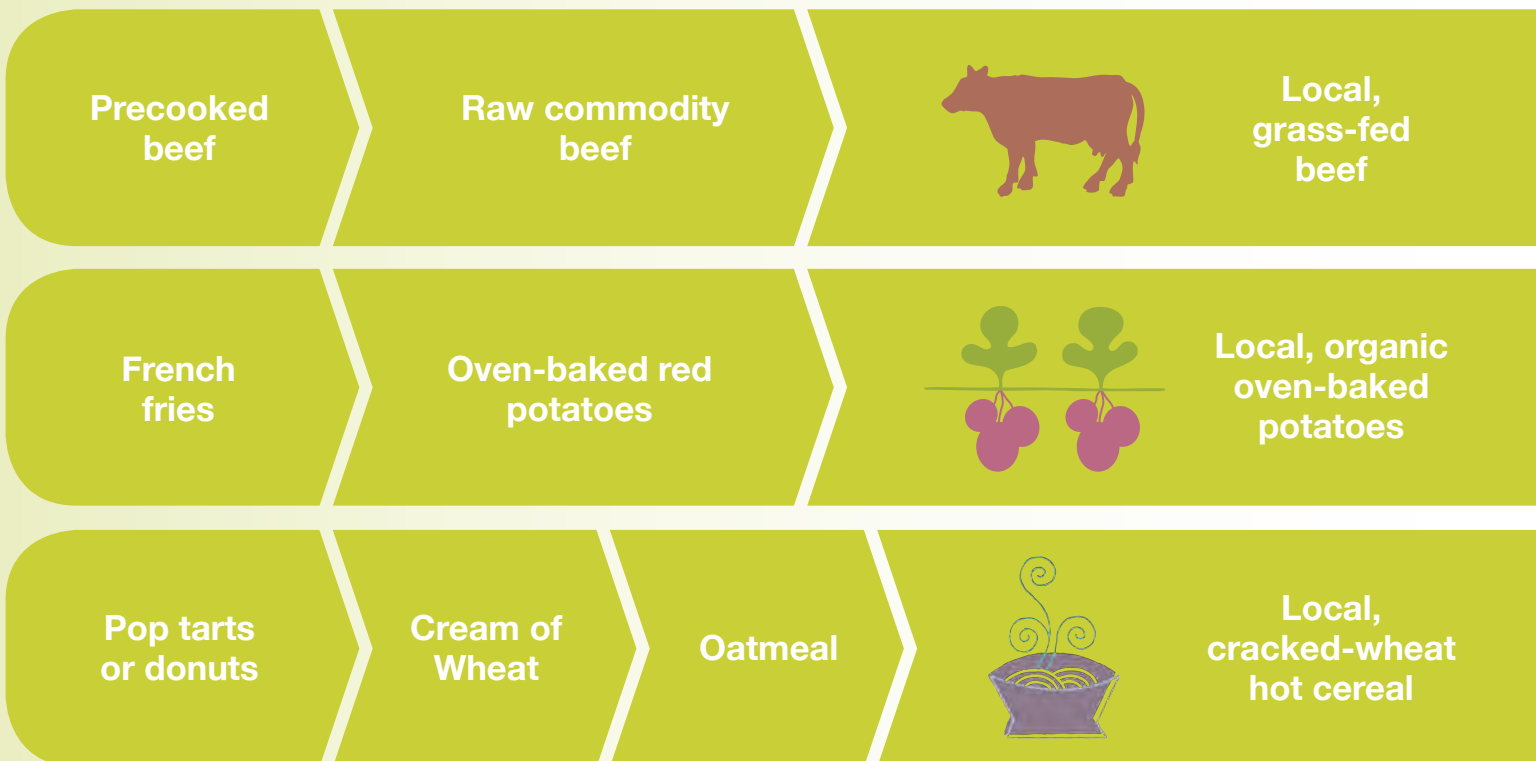
The path to better food

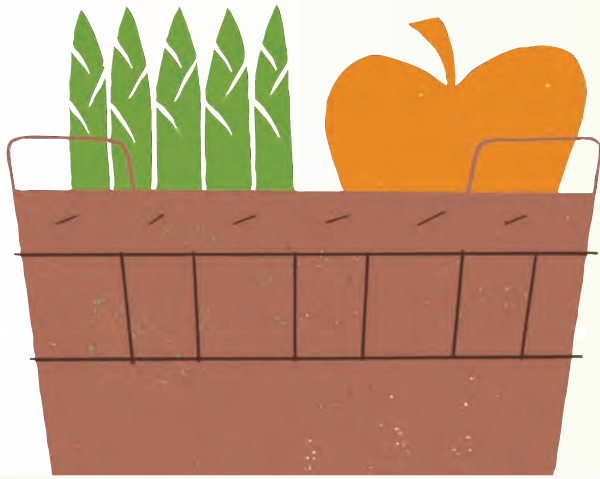


Source local food as a tool in the overall effort to provide “better food”

—food that is local and healthier for us and our families, the land and environment, farmers and ranchers, and the community as a whole.

Many districts have started by transitioning from processed and precooked ingredients to whole foods, giving them more control over the nutritional content of their meals. This also has made it easier to incorporate local foods when available, easing the fluctuations of seasonal supply.⁵





Introducing local foods

EASY WAYS TO INTRODUCE LOCAL FOODS:

Special meal—source local foods for a special meal once a month (main or side dish, Harvest of the Month, Colorado Proud School Meal Day).

Unprocessed—source local foods (potatoes, apples, cabbage, onions, meat, etc.) that can be used with minimal or no extra* processing (*beyond conventional produce).

Single item—source single products as part of a pilot program.

Salad Bar—can be all local produce, but may be easier to start with a salad bar that features clearly labeled local offerings when available, augmenting conventionally supplied produce.

Baked Potato Bar—offering local produce as either a complete meal or in combination with a main meal.

Breakfast program—utilize local grains and fruit.

Snacks—specialty fresh fruits or vegetables.

Local, frozen ground beef—can be an easy food to start incorporating into a program because of its year-round availability and straightforward safety requirements (USDA).

Summer Food Services Program—great time to highlight seasonal foods and easy way to start on a small scale.

Connecting school districts and producers



SCHOOL DISTRICTS

- Find producers with producer directories, Colorado MarketMaker, and Buy Local campaigns.⁶
- Create your own local harvest calendar with local producers.⁷
 - Work to make it more locally-specific.
 - Explore storage and preservation to create a year-round local food availability calendar.
- Begin pre-bid discussions with local producers to start a dialogue.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

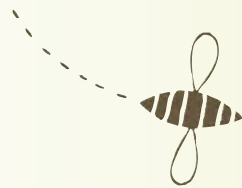
- Host a Farmer-Chef Connection Event.⁹
- Sponsor a “Locally-Grown Dinner” to introduce food service employees, families, farmers, and ranchers to one another.¹⁰

Some Colorado school districts are using local farmer directories as starting points to make contact with farmers about supplying to the schools.⁸



Farm to School educational programs¹¹

- Farm tours
- School gardens
(more info on next page)
- Nutrition education in the classroom
- Cooking classes and demos
(Chef in the Classroom)
- Local food or farmer posters in cafeterias
- Special meals
(Colorado Proud School Meal Day, etc.)
- Farmer visits to the classroom
- Youth farmers markets

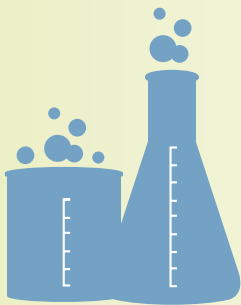


Denver Public Schools are pairing their school garden program with youth farmers markets, creating a cross-curricular educational opportunity for students and providing fresh, healthy food in communities where such resources are often scarce.¹²



School gardens

In the long run, school gardens and related educational activities may be just as important as serving local food in the cafeteria.



Maximize educational potential by incorporating garden production into nutrition, culinary, science, math, and other academic programs and curriculum.

Through the efforts of volunteer parents, community organizations, and committed food service staff, Denver Public Schools has established a diverse and growing school garden program. Food from the gardens is being served in school cafeteria salad bars, and funds are being sought to build greenhouses to provide an extended growing season and additional science laboratory space.¹³

How to engage the community in Farm to School

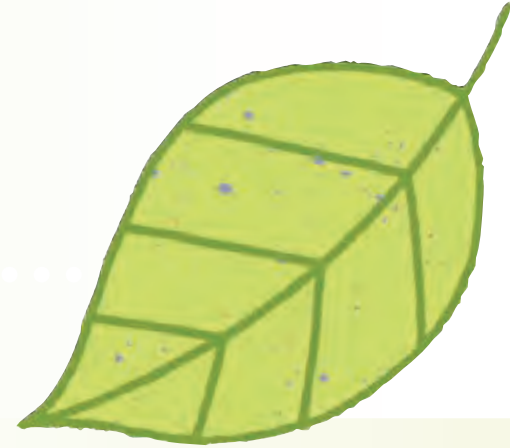
- Keep parents informed (parent newsletters, etc.).
- Involve media to gain and keep project momentum.
 - Websites are great tools for program updates and media links.
 - Letters to editors and newspaper articles are great outreach.
- Sponsor a Farmer-Chef Connection Event.⁹

Colorado Springs School District is finding community support through screenings of good food movies, creation of a website and Facebook page, and inviting media to important events!¹⁴



A successful Farm to School program requires **all of us** to be involved!

What's happening in Colorado?



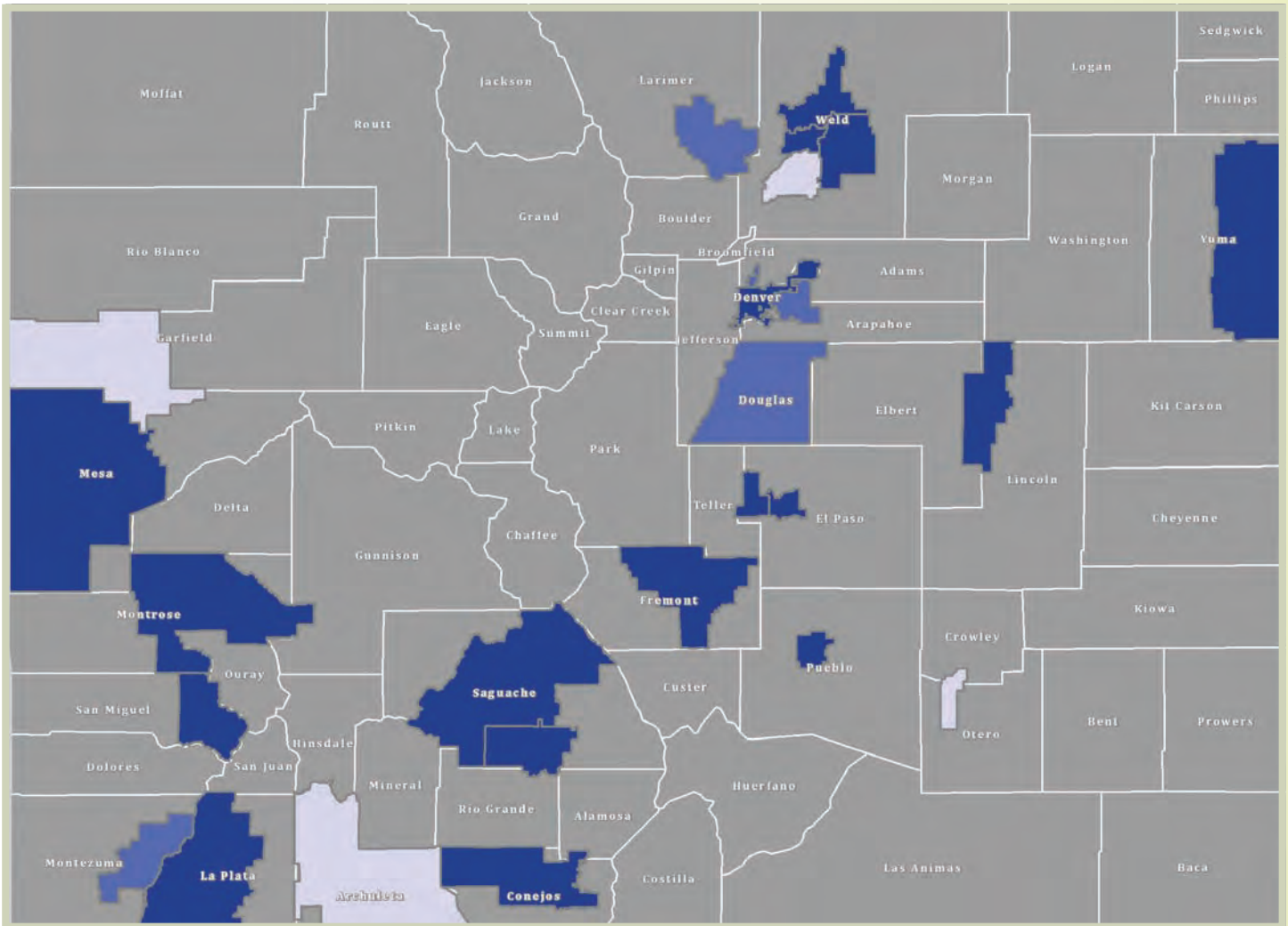
Local and regional Farm to School initiatives are emerging in schools and communities across Colorado.

Many groups are involved with Farm to School in Colorado, including¹⁵:

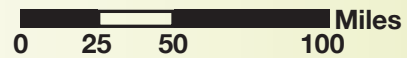
- Colorado Department of Agriculture Specialty Crops Farm to School Project
- LiveWell Colorado
- Colorado Farm to School Task Force
- National Farm to School Program
- Colorado Department of Education
- Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment
- Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council
- Colorado Proud

Colorado School Districts Participating in Farm to School

(as reported by districts in Colorado Farm to School survey¹⁶)



- Serving Local Food
- Farm to School Education Activities (including school gardens)
- Both



Map by Reeder
Healthy Community Food Systems



*As of April 16, 2011. Districts can contact Lyn Kathlene lyn@csi-policy.org to take survey and report activities

Colorado concerns



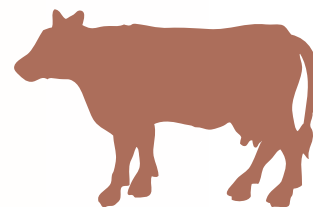
A recent survey of Colorado School Food Service Directors ranked these as the top concerns for Farm to School programs¹⁶:

- 1** Cost.
- 2** Lack of trucking or distribution routes.
- 3** Lack of cool storage.
- 4** Lack of facilities or equipment to store, prepare, and/or serve fresh produce.
- 5** Student preferences.
- 6** Inability to distribute to individual schools in a timely manner.
- 7** Lack of central warehousing.
- 8** Lack of staff training to prepare or cook fresh produce.

How are Colorado schools addressing some of these concerns?

COST

Durango's Food Service Director discovered that a local rancher she met at a Farmer-Chef Connection Event was selling their specialty beef cuts at premium prices and thus were able to provide ground beef to the schools at a competitive price. This method doesn't work for all producers, but when it does, it is an excellent first step.⁵



Knowledge is key. St. Vrain School District reviews market prices regularly and maintains an open, honest dialogue with farmers which has allowed them to buy local and save money.¹⁷

WAYS AROUND CENTRALIZED FACILITIES

Networking with the school districts in your region can help overcome barriers facing single districts. For example, districts in southwest Colorado have been cooperatively ordering from several local and regional producers, taking deliveries at the largest district and distributing them from there.⁵

STAFF TRAINING

LiveWell Colorado's School Culinary Training programs have been helping train staff to prepare and cook fresh foods and produce.¹⁸



Student preferences & participation



Introduce children to new foods through cooking, taste testing, or garden education.¹⁹



If the food looks more familiar to them, they are more likely to eat it.¹⁹



Only a portion of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches in Colorado are actually eating school lunch.



Getting students interested in eating school lunches can also help increase participation in free and reduced-price lunches.¹⁹

Farm to School initiatives have resulted in²⁰:

- Increased preference and consumption of fruits and vegetables in younger students.
- Improved attitudes towards school food and the cafeteria.
- Greater awareness of in-season produce tasting better and ways in which food choices affect the environment.
- Fresher products.

Programs may help maintain fruit and vegetable consumption in older ages where consumption usually declines.²⁰

Colorado possibilities



What is being purchased by Colorado schools?

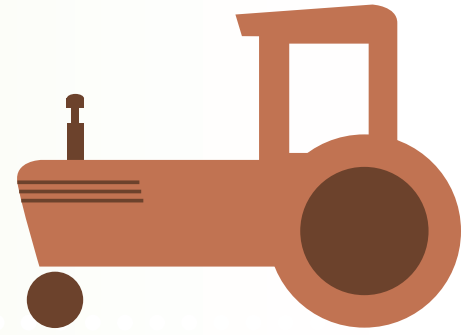
Ranking in top fruit & veggie purchases made by schools in 2006 ^{21*}	Product	Availability during school year (with storage and season extension) ⁷	Amount needed per day for one serving per student eating school lunch at all CO schools ²²
#1	Apples	100%	26,000 lbs
#2	Lettuce	60+%	12,000 lbs
#4	Carrots	100%	37,000 lbs

*#3 and #5 (oranges & bananas) are not grown in Colorado

- A cooperative bid request from three northern Colorado school districts for the 2010-2011 school year showed a demand of approximately \$350,000 worth of produce for their Farm to School program, including \$99,500 in apples.²³

“The high altitude at which Colorado apples are grown makes them taste better”²⁴

A case in point: Colorado-grown dry beans



Beans are commonly used in school food for burritos, soups, and salads.

BENEFITS²⁵

- Colorado ranks 8th in the nation in dry bean production.
- Beans are available year-round.
- Beans are a low-cost, no-cholesterol, and low-sodium source of protein, fiber, vitamins, and minerals.

CONCERNS

- Must have labor and facilities to cook dry beans.
- Commodity program already offers dry beans.



Possibilities:

- Adjust facilities in schools to use dry beans and properly train food service personnel.
- Entrepreneurs: build a canning facility to produce Colorado beans for school and public consumption.

What has Farm to School done for me?

I know the farmers who grow my food!

Now I know a lot more about how our food is grown!

I don't expect my food to be cheap.

I'm excited to eat school lunch because fresh food tastes better!

I enjoy learning math and science in the school garden.



I eat better now at home!

Lots of different people come and visit the school cafeteria and gardens now. Last week, we met the town mayor!

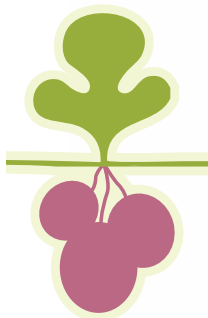
My mom says she likes the school lunches because they are healthy and good for the environment. I like them because they taste good!

Each year, we meet more farmers that are making a living growing our food.

Helping producers move into the local school food market

When the local supply is seasonal or lacking, it is sometimes necessary to source items from farther away—until a local source becomes available.

- Celebrate this initial success, but recognize that you haven't captured all the benefits of Farm to School.
- Maintain a standing preference for local producers & processors.
- Keep sources & prices transparent.
- Support local producers & processors.
- Review local availability frequently and shift to local products when they become available.
- Make policy clear from the start—no surprises!



A glimpse of the potential:

Durango schools had previously bought baking potatoes regionally from the San Luis Valley for a special meal. The district then found a local producer who supplied 1,100 lbs of organic potatoes to the district and is now planning to plant six times that amount for next year.⁵

Community Action Plan

for an excellent Farm to School program

- ▶ We celebrate the small steps.
- ▶ We don't "bad-mouth" school meals.
- ▶ We keep everything as local as possible for the greatest benefits.
- ▶ We involve everyone in the community.
- ▶ We don't expect food to be cheap.
- ▶ We keep raising the bar.
- ▶ We insist food sourcing is transparent—we want to know where it came from.
- ▶ We promote community ownership and control.
- ▶ We encourage local producers to grow for us.
- ▶ We want local, but also the healthiest and most sustainably produced food possible.
- ▶ We work to change policies and attitudes to allow for the big steps.



Call to action



Celebrate successes, no matter how small, and keep striving for further excellence.

There is a role for everyone in advancing Farm to School.

Schools:

- Get to know your local farmers and ranchers.
- Take small first steps, and build your program from there.
- Integrate learning about local food and agriculture into the whole school day.

Farmers and Other Producers:

- Talk with your local school about using your products.
- Help your local school staff and students learn about local food, farmers, and ranchers — about you!
- Be prepared for the school market to grow.

Parents, Teachers, and Community Advocates:

- Get involved with your local school: in the garden, classroom, wellness committee, or school board room.
- Learn how good policies can support Farm to School.
- Check out www.coloradofarmtoschool.org for additional information.





End Notes

- 1: Colorado Department of Education Nutrition Unit, personal communication, 2011.
- 2: Susan Bartlett, Frederic Glantz, and Christopher Logan, *School Lunch and Breakfast Cost Study—II, Final Report (2008)*. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Research, Nutrition and Analysis, Report No. CN-08-MCII.
- 3: Wendy Peters Moschetti and Lauren Tatarsky, *An Overview of School Food Procurement in Colorado, March 2011*, available under Colorado School Food Operations at www.livewellcolorado.org/schoolfood.
- 4: Victoria A.F. Camron, *A Slice of Community*, July 27, 2010, Longmont Times-Call.
- 5: Krista Garand, Durango 9-R School District, personal communication, 2010.
- 6: Colorado Market Maker: www.comarketmaker.com. Producer Directories: www.coloradoagriculture.com/farmfresh, www.slvheritage.org/localfoods, www.mesaverdefood.org. Buy Local campaigns: www.foodroutes.org.
- 7: Healthy Community Food Systems, *Year-Round Local Food Calendars*, available under Food Systems Tools at www.healthycommunityfoodsystems.org.
- 8: Colorado Farm to School, *How Do I Establish Relationships with Local Producers?* available under Resources for Schools at www.coloradofarmtoschool.org.
- 9: Healthy Community Food Systems, *Farmer-Chef Connection Event*, available under Food Systems Tools at www.healthycommunityfoodsystems.org.
- 10: Kelli Sanger and Leslie Zenz, *Farm-to-Cafeteria Connections: Marketing Opportunities for Small Farms in Washington State, 2004*, Washington Department of Agriculture, Pub 200-102 (R/1/04), available at <http://www-stage.agr.wa.gov/marketing/farmtoschool/>.
- 11: Healthy Community Food Systems, *Farm to School: Educational Activities*, available under Food Systems Tools at www.healthycommunityfoodsystems.org.
- 12: Colorado Farm to School, *How Are Youth Farmers' Markets Helping Eliminate 'Food Deserts'?* available under Resources for Schools at www.coloradofarmtoschool.org.
- 13: Colorado Farm to School, *How Do I Start a School Garden and Use Its Produce in the Cafeteria?* available under Resources for Schools at www.coloradofarmtoschool.org.

End Notes



- 14: Colorado Springs School District 11 Food and Nutrition Services, www.d11.org/fns/.
- 15: Websites for each of these groups are as listed: Colorado Department of Agriculture Specialty Crops Farm to School Project, www.coloradofarmtoschool.org; LiveWell Colorado, www.livewellcolorado.org; National Farm to School program, www.farmtoschool.org; Colorado Department of Education, www.cde.state.co.us/index_nutrition.htm; Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, www.cdphe.state.co.us; Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council, www.livewellcolorado.org/FSAC; Colorado Proud, www.coloradoproud.org.
- 16: For more information about the *2010-11 Colorado Farm to School Survey*, contact Lyn Kathlene at Center for Systems Integration, lyn@csi-policy.org
- 17: Colorado Farm to School, *How Do I Contract with Local Farmers at a Competitive Price for Both Them and Me?* available under Resources for Schools at www.coloradofarmtoschool.org.
- 18: Information about LiveWell Colorado's school culinary training programs is available at www.livewellcolorado.org/schoolfood.
- 19: Chez Panisse Foundation, *2008 Lunch Matters: How to Feed Our Children Better, The Story of the Berkeley School Lunch Initiative*, available at www.chezpanissefoundation.org.
- 20: Suzanne Rauzon, May Wang, Natalie Studer and Pat Crawford, *An Evaluation of the School Lunch Initiative: Final Report, 2010*, available at <http://cwh.berkeley.edu/node/1103>.
- 21: For more information about the *2007 Colorado K-12 Schools: Farm to Cafeteria Survey*, contact Lyn Kathlene at Center for Systems Integration, lyn@csi-policy.org
- 22: Oklahoma Farm to School, *Produce Calculator within Tips, Tools, and Guidelines for Food Distribution and Food Safety*, available at www.okfarmtoschool.com/resources.
- 23: Wendy Moschetti, WPM Consulting, personal communication, 2010.
- 24: Colorado Department of Agriculture, *Colorado Proud Fun Facts*, available at www.coloradoproud.org.
- 25: USDA Economic Research Service, *Briefing Rooms: Dry Beans*, www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/DryBeans/



**The Colorado Farm to School Primer is
available online at www.livewellcolorado.org.**