



Farm to School

Striving for excellence.

Adapted from the Colorado Farm to School Primer
by Jim Dyer and Kelsey Reeder, published by LiveWell Colorado:
www.hcfs.org/FTS/FTS.html

Here we explore the concept, context, and promise of Farm to School to help local schools and their communities reap the **multiple** benefits of these programs.



WHAT IS FARM TO SCHOOL?

At its core, and from the beginning, Farm to School is about connecting school children to **local foods** and the **family farms** that produce them. Arising from the growing interest in local food and concern over obesity and other diet-related conditions, Farm to School programs are about healthy local food in schools *and* helping kids understand those foods and where they came from. Recently, preschools have become an additional focus.



What is local?

Definitions are endless; a practical answer is:

“As local as possible, the closer the better.”

BENEFITS OF FARM TO SCHOOL

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



In time, it should promote:

- Healthy eating habits.
- Better understanding of local food, farming, ranching, and cultural connections.
- Increased local and sustainable production.
- Sustainable local processing, distribution, and storage.
- Stable markets for producers.

UNDERSTANDING SCHOOL FOOD IN YOUR STATE OR TRIBAL NATION

As seen in the Colorado Farm to School Primer, answers to these questions are critical in understanding Farm to School.

1. **How much is spent on school food?**—a big potential market for local producers.
2. **How much do meals typically cost the student?**—full-cost and reduced prices for low-income families.
3. **Who contributes funds?**—federal/state agencies, school districts, etc.
4. **What agencies are involved?** funding, regulation, etc.
5. **How is the money spent?** labor, food, other.
6. **Who prepares the food?** school personnel or a commercial service.
7. **Who provides the food?** USDA Commodity Foods, distributors, direct purchases.



GETTING STARTED WITH HEALTHY LOCAL FOODS

Special meal—source local foods for a special meal once a month (main or side dish, culturally traditional meals, Harvest of the Month, Farmer of the Month, Local/Regional/State food 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.

Breakfast program—utilize local grains and fruits.

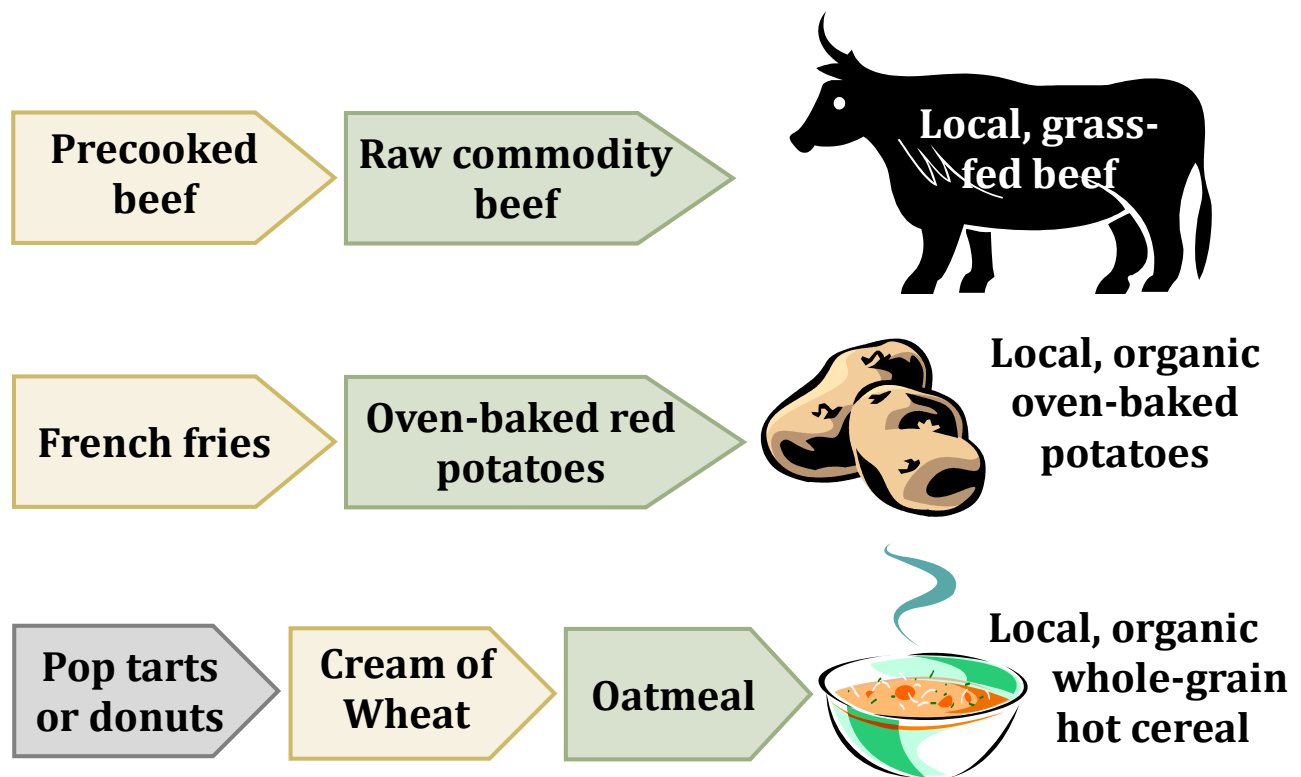
Snacks—specialty fresh fruits or vegetables.

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 an easy way to start on a small scale.



PATHS TO BETTER FOOD



FARM TO SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

- Farm tours.
- School gardens (see below).
- Nutrition education in the classroom with local foods.
- Cooking classes and demos featuring local items (Chef in the Classroom).
- Local food and farmer posters in cafeterias.
- Special meals (Farmer of the Month Meal Day, etc.).
- Farmer visits to the classroom.
- Youth farmers markets.

SCHOOL GARDENS



In the long run, school gardens and related educational activities may be just as important as serving local food in the cafeterias. Maximize educational potential by incorporating garden production into nutrition, culinary, science, math, and other academic programs and curriculum.

Besides helping children get first-hand experience in growing food that they can then eat, they are more likely to try new healthy foods and choose them again. School gardens are an excellent opportunity for kids to begin to understand how sustainable, ecologically based, and culturally based food production methods can benefit them, their community, and the environment around them. (See Wild School Gardens on our website).



CONNECTING SCHOOLS AND LOCAL FAMILY FARMS

Schools and local growers may be hesitant to approach each other—there are many questions—but the key is to meet and start talking. Producers may need to start with small sales and take time for visits to classes, field trips, and even helping with the school garden. In time, schools can be a sizeable and stable market. One serving of apples a day for each Colorado student, for example, requires 26,000 pounds of apples!

Regional Farm to School purchases can demonstrate new marketing opportunities for more local growers:

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.
- Encourage local producers & processors.
- Review local availability frequently and shift to local products when they become available.
- Make policy clear from the start—no surprises!



ENGAGE THE WHOLE COMMUNITY

Parents, teachers, and community advocates all have a role in:

- Creating local producer directories.
- Volunteering with school gardens.
- Advocating policies conducive to Farm to School.
- Getting success stories into the media.
- Hosting special meals and farmer-chef events.
- Supporting Buy-Local campaigns.
- Much, much more!

TIPS FOR EXCELLENT FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAMS

- Celebrate the small steps.
- Don't "bad-mouth" school meals.
- Keep everything as local as possible for the greatest benefits.
- Involve everyone in the community.
- Don't expect food to be cheap.
- Keep raising the bar.
- Insist food sourcing is transparent—know where it came from.
- Promote community ownership and control.
- Encourage local producers to grow for schools.
- Source local, but also the healthiest and most sustainably produced food possible.
- Work to change policies and attitudes to allow for the big steps.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Find online resources for this tool, as well as additional tool booklets on other community food topics, under "Food System Tools" at www.HCFS.org.

Funding for the adaptation of the Colorado Primer to this tool booklet came from the National Farm to School Network through Farm to Table.



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