

The Why and How of Farm to School & Preschool —a quick guide with resources for digging deeper

Jim Dyer, Healthy Community Food Systems, August 2022

Eating, growing, and learning about local food is the essence of Farm to School and Preschool—aiming to connect our schools with farmers and ranchers in the local foodshed for the betterment of our children, growers, community, environment, and our future. Experiential learning about food—in the classroom, the cafeteria, the garden, and on the farms, ranches, and gardens that make up the local foodshed is the key. This guide is designed to help school staff, volunteers, and parents learn the basics so they can be even better teachers and role models for our children.



The “Why” comes first. Nearly everyone would say that Farm to School and Preschool are great ideas, but unless they are **convinced enough** of its importance to our children, their community, and their future, few people will decide to implement it. Our experience over the past twenty years shows that if staff are convinced enough, they will find a way to make it happen despite obstacles. Fortunately, the “How” of Farm to School and Preschool is becoming easier as more and more schools and preschools adopt this program—as you will see in our resources section below.

Becoming the best educator and role model for local food—walking the talk. We know that staff eating the same healthy food as served to kids is essential to modeling good food choices. Until eating, growing, and learning about healthy local food is part of your life, it will be much harder for you to model good food choices, to be comfortable in the garden and prepping snacks, and to incorporate local food concepts into science, math, health, history, and social lessons. Becoming a “local foodie” may be harder for us adults since we need to unlearn much of what we have come to expect about food, but children have an amazing ability to accept this enlightened approach—with your help.

Sustainable food is fair food—food that is fair to our health, to farm workers, to other people (especially the underprivileged), to farm animals, to the environment, and to our very future.



Unsustainable food is often described as industrial food (emphasizing synthetic chemicals and quantity over quality), as anonymous food (we rarely know much about where it came from or how it was produced), and based on “fast food values” (overly convenient, fast, unhealthy, and cheap—at all costs). When discussing unsustainable foods, it is important to always mention available alternatives, so people don’t become fixated just on the problems and miss the opportunities—and to mention that society needs to push for policies that make more sustainable food options readily available.

Why not now? It may seem that this is a very inconvenient time to try new things with all the very real challenges of funding, staff shortages, supply chain issues, inflation, and COVID complications. Yet, while we would like challenges to all go away, that's not likely. If we—all of us as staff, parents, voters, and community members—put off the innovations we know will help our children and their future, we are clearly not meeting our responsibilities. Taking small but meaningful steps and making a commitment to greater efforts is the best path forward.



The How: Tips and Resources for Getting Started

If reading this as a hardcopy, see [HCFS.org/files/Why-and-How.pdf](https://www.hcfs.org/files/Why-and-How.pdf) for active links to resources and
See our companion guide, **Wild School Gardens** at [HCFS.org/files/Wild-School-Garden-Guide.pdf](https://www.hcfs.org/files/Wild-School-Garden-Guide.pdf)

1. Learn more on our comprehensive [Farm to School and Preschool](#) pages.
2. See more on choosing, finding, and using local foods on our [Good Local Food](#) pages.
3. Learn all about growing and gardening with an emphasis on paying attention to nature in our [Wild School Gardens Guide](#).
4. To become a better local food educator and role model, start featuring some local foods at home, start growing in containers or a small garden or with others in a community garden, and visit farmers markets and farm stands to meet growers.
5. See our [Pathways Infographic](#) on how you can start small, but continue to eat and grow more healthy local food over time.
6. Digging Deeper:

- Explore the health of local foodsheds with your kids, including Citizen Science activities with our [Exploring Foodshed Health Field Guide](#), and if in SW Colorado, our [San Juan Mountain Watch Field Guide](#).
- Visit the [National Farm to School](#) website to learn from programs across the country.

