

The Benefits of a Farm to School Program

Why Implement Farm to School?

The Farm to School Program benefits both students and the local economy. Farm to school enhances students' educational experience and cultivates long-term healthy eating habits.

Whether you buy locally grown food directly from a farmer or through a distributor, you're

Schools provide children fresh, tasty, nutritious produce, while local farmers acquire new markets.

helping to support Idaho farmers. Because food doesn't have to travel as far, you might find that locally grown also means a

fresher and higher quality product. Decreasing the distance your food travels from farm to cafeteria helps minimize transportation costs and fossil fuel use creating a smaller "carbon footprint."

Offering locally grown foods in your cafeteria also gives you a chance to use food as a teaching tool. It can help students understand where their food comes from and opens doors to great marketing opportunities for your foodservice program.

The Research:

Existing research shows that Farm to School Programs influence students on many levels; increasing their knowledge and awareness about food sources, nutrition, and eating behaviors and lifestyles. Farm to School Program studies have shown the following benefits:

Meal Participation Increases

- A 3%-16% increase in school meal participation has been seen in schools implementing the program^{1,2}.
- Teacher and administration participation in school meals also usually increase¹.

Encourages Healthy Choices

- Farm to School Programs have shown a 25%-84% increase in student fruit and vegetable consumption¹.
- Farm to School may lead to positive family food choices, including purchasing fresh, healthy, local foods².
- Demonstrated willingness to try out new foods and healthier options. In one school in Ventura, CA, on days in which there was a choice between a farmers' market salad bar and a hot lunch, students and adults chose the salad bar by a 14 to 1 ratio².

Provides Educational Opportunities

- Increased knowledge of nutrition, healthy eating, local foods, agriculture, and the environment².

Supports the Local Community

- Creates new markets for local farmers¹.



Developing a Successful Farm to School Program

Build Support for Farm to School:

Implementing a Farm to School program, as with any new program, takes time and effort. So, before you begin, make sure you have the help and support of others affected by the program. You need to involve parents, school teachers and administrators, and parent-teacher organizations, and invite local farmers, farm organizations, and others in the community that might be interested in assisting with the program.

Start building consensus by consulting your own staff to make sure you have their support first. Make sure you address their concerns before moving forward with a larger group. Identify interested parties (see list below for some ideas) and agencies/organizations that can assist you and invite them to a meeting to discuss Farm to School opportunities. Many of the issues you may want to discuss are detailed in this manual and may help you better answer questions and concerns.

Develop a Plan and Start Small!!

Once you have built school and community support, develop a plan for your Farm to School Program. This does not have to be a detailed, lengthy document. It does need to lay out your plans and include what you are going to do, how it will be implemented and who is going to help. It may be limited to just foods in the cafeteria, or may include educational components, plans for a school garden or other activities.

Regardless of how big or small your plans are, start simply with one or two easy changes to your menu. You don't have to rewrite all of your school menus to start or be involved in a Farm to School program. Small steps count! Buy a couple of different Idaho products and start implementing new foods slowly. Choose one or two ideas from the list on the next page – or create your own great program – one “fresh” idea at a time.

Consider Including:

At School

- School Foodservice Staff
- Students
- Teachers
- School Administrators
- Nurse
- Janitorial Staff
- Parent-Teacher Association
- School Board Trustees

In the Community

- Farmers
- Farmers' Market Vendors
- Cooperative Extension
- Local/County Farm Bureau
- Local/Sustainable Groups
- City Council Members
- State Congressional Representatives

State Organizations and Agencies

- Idaho State Department of Agriculture's Idaho Preferred® Program
- Idaho State Department of Education Child Nutrition Programs
- Commodity Boards and Commissions



Simple Tips for Including Local Food on Your Menu:

Fruits and Vegetables: Substitute a locally grown fruit for an imported one. For example, in September serve Idaho apples, pears or grapes instead of bananas, oranges or kiwi.
Make it a goal to have at least one local fruit or vegetable available in your cafeteria during the spring and fall.

Whole Grains Find a local whole grain product to add to your menu once a week. Idaho companies offer whole grain breads, tortillas and soups.

Low-Fat Milk All of the milk served in schools comes from local dairy farms – make sure your students and staff realize your milk is local. Contact United Dairymen of Idaho for great milk promotion ideas in your school.

Food Bars Have a local food bar once a week during the local harvest season. Include a variety of colorful fresh fruits and vegetables daily.

Special Days and Events Plan special days to include local foods like Healthy Harvest in September or Farm Fresh Friday. Be creative and use local foods to market your program using signage, stickers, banners and other promotional materials available through the Idaho Preferred® program.

Other Programs Serve local fruits and vegetables in the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program.
Take advantage of the summer growing season in the Summer Food Program.

Attention Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program Schools

You have an advantage in purchasing local, fresh produce because you are receiving additional funding to buy fresh!

Use this opportunity to develop some new relationships with local food producers and provide your students with the best, fresh produce by buying local.

It's easy for everyone to support a Farm to School Program. Here's what YOU can do...

Parents and Community Members

Communicate your support of Farm to School programs with school administrators, school board members, teachers and foodservice personnel. Offer suggestions, solutions, and opportunities to volunteer in the cafeteria and classrooms.

School Foodservice Personnel

Work with your current distributors to identify and source locally produced foods. Contact the Idaho State Department of Agriculture's Idaho Preferred® program at www.idahopreferred.com for help in finding local farmers, growers and processors interested in working with school cafeterias. Let everyone know about your Farm to School efforts to provide healthy, nutritious foods to students and support the local economy.

Teachers

Support the Farm to School effort by incorporating food and agriculture concepts into your curriculum. Materials are available through Idaho State Department of Agriculture Idaho Preferred® program, Idaho State Department of Education Child Nutrition programs, and through Idaho Agriculture in the Classroom at www.idahoaitc.org

Farmers and Food Producers

Consider growing products that children will eat and are easy for school cafeteria staff to serve. Contact schools in your area to see what they might be interested in purchasing locally. Contact the Idaho State Department of Agriculture's Idaho Preferred® program to find out which schools are seeking local products for their cafeteria.

Foodservice Distributors

Talk to your school foodservice customers about local products already available. Find out what schools would like to purchase and seek out local producers. Regularly communicate seasonal availability of local products.

Strategies to Incorporate Farm to Cafeteria Programs

- **Start Small:** During the growing season, replace foods that you already serve with the same product from local farmers. If you are already serving the food, why not make sure it is grown in Idaho?
- **Work through your existing distributors:** Ask if they offer any local products and encourage them to do so or to do more. Many food distributors already offer a variety of locally grown foods; you may just have to ask for them.
- **Salad Bars:** Showcase local foods in a salad bar as an alternative entrée choice or in combination with other entrees. One advantage of a salad bar is that local foods can be incorporated when available. Use colorful signs to market the local foods.
- **Teacher Nutrition Education:** Serve local foods in the cafeteria that are featured in nutrition education curriculum in the classroom or school garden.
- **Main Dish Items:** Incorporate local foods in your favorite lunch entrees. For example, add color and crunch to pizza using green peppers, zucchini, etc., or use a locally produced whole wheat tortilla for your wraps.
- **Side Fruit/Vegetables:** Serve locally produced fruits or vegetables as a side dish for lunch or in your Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program as a snack.
- **Breakfast:** Locally produced fruits, such as apples, pears, berries or melons, can be served with hot and cold cereal or as a topping on pancakes and waffles.
- **Advertise:** Let your customers know what you are doing by labeling foods that come from local farms both in the cafeteria and on menus.
- **Special Events:**
 - Host a Healthy Harvest event in the cafeteria, showcasing many different locally produced foods at one event, or showcase one locally grown product each month.
 - Introduce different foods to students and educate them about what foods are produced locally. Partner with teachers, healthcare or agriculture groups which can provide resources and assist with marketing the event.
 - Make the cafeteria the fun place to have lunch! Invite a farmer to participate in the taste test and ask him or her to talk with your students about how the food is grown. Highlight a locally grown product on your menus once a month or celebrate Idaho foods with a one week menu in the spring or fall that takes advantage of the harvest.



Planning Ahead to Assure a Successful Farm to School Program

In order to ensure your program is successful, you must plan ahead and recognize possible barriers that you may be facing. Implementing a Farm to School Program throughout the school year requires some extra planning, but the benefits outweigh the barriers.

Some Things to Consider When Starting a Farm To School Program:

- Product availability: Use foods in season, at the peak of flavor and lowest cost. Offer fresh whenever possible. Realize that many foods are not available year-round.
- Staffing and equipment: Is there adequate refrigeration/freezer space? Do you have sufficient counter space, sinks and preparation equipment? Can employees prepare in the time available? Schedule employees' time so their particular skills can be used to the best advantage.
- Use the Food Buying Guide to plan adequate portion sizes – remember that the “as purchased” weight or volume is greater than the “as consumed” volume.
- Know your customers: Be sure to get input from students and staff when designing cycle menus.
- Build flexibility into your menu so that you can take advantage of local, seasonal foods and be able to adapt if substitutions are necessary due to weather, crop failure, oversupply or other circumstance.



Before you embark on your Farm to School program, consider the following. **These issues do not preclude you from having a program, but must be addressed prior to program implementation to ensure long-term success of your Farm to School efforts.**

- Availability of local foods
- Kitchen facilities and equipment
- Staff cooking skills
- Labor costs and availability
- Storage facilities
- Minimum orders required from produce firms
- Institutional quality controls or food safety standards
- Price points
- Food contracts
- Managing multiple farm accounts
- Rapid payment collection cycles



Can you only get local foods in the spring and fall?

No. While an abundance of fresh fruits and vegetables are available in Idaho in the summer and fall, there are many local foods available all year long.

Following are just a few examples of foods you might include in your year-round farm to school menu.

January

- Whole grain bread products
- Whole grain tortillas
- Processed meats (hot dogs, ham, etc)
- Trout
- Potatoes
- Onions
- Dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt)
- Frozen Green Garbanzo Beans
- Dried Beans
- Apples*

February

- Whole grain bread products
- Whole grain tortillas
- Processed meats (hot dogs, ham, etc)
- Trout
- Potatoes
- Onions
- Dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt)
- Frozen Green Garbanzo Beans
- Dried Beans
- Apples*

March

- Whole grain bread products
- Whole grain tortillas
- Processed meats (hot dogs, ham, etc)
- Trout
- Potatoes
- Onions
- Dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt)
- Frozen Green Garbanzo Beans
- Dried Beans
- Apples*

April

- Whole grain bread products
- Whole grain tortillas
- Processed meats (hot dogs, ham, etc)
- Trout
- Potatoes
- Dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt)
- Frozen Green Garbanzo Beans
- Dried Beans
- Apples*
- Asparagus

May

- Whole grain bread products
- Whole grain tortillas
- Processed meats (hot dogs, ham, etc)
- Trout
- Potatoes
- Dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt)
- Frozen Green Garbanzo Beans
- Dried Beans
- Asparagus
- Early Greens
- Radishes

June

- Whole grain bread products
- Whole grain tortillas
- Processed meats (hot dogs, ham, etc)
- Trout
- Potatoes
- Dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt)
- Frozen Green Garbanzo Beans
- Dried Beans
- Greens

Spinach
Strawberries
Lettuce
Radishes
Cherries (late in the month)
Green peas/snow/sugar snap
Rhubarb

July

Whole grain bread products
Whole grain tortillas
Processed meats (hot dogs, ham, etc)
Trout
Potatoes
Dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt)
Frozen Green Garbanzo Beans
Dried Beans
Tomatoes
Fresh Herbs
Lettuce
Radishes
Green Beans
Cucumbers
Green/snow/sugar snap peas
Zucchini squash
Cherries
Rhubarb
Apricots
Raspberries
Strawberries

August

Whole grain bread products
Whole grain tortillas
Processed meats (hot dogs, ham, etc)
Trout
Potatoes
Dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt)
Frozen Green Garbanzo Beans
Dried Beans
Onions
Fresh Herbs
Radishes
Green Beans
Cucumbers
Carrots

Green/snow/sugar snap peas
Sweet Corn
Tomatoes
Zucchini squash
Rhubarb
Apricots
Apples
Blueberries
Nectarines
Peaches
Plums/Pluots
Raspberries

September

Whole grain bread products
Whole grain tortillas
Processed meats (hot dogs, ham, etc)
Trout
Potatoes
Dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt)
Frozen Green Garbanzo Beans
Dried Beans
Onions
Fresh Herbs
Green Beans
Cucumbers
Carrots
Sweet Corn
Squash
Tomatoes
Zucchini squash
Apples
Blueberries
Grapes
Melons
Nectarines
Peaches
Pears
Plums/Pluots
Raspberries

October

Whole grain bread products
Whole grain tortillas
Processed meats (hot dogs, ham, etc)
Trout

Potatoes
Dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt)
Frozen Green Garbanzo Beans
Dried Beans
Onions
Fresh Herbs
Carrots
Squash
Apples
Grapes
Melons
Peaches
Pears
Pumpkins

November

Whole grain bread products
Whole grain tortillas
Processed meats (hot dogs, ham, etc)
Trout
Potatoes
Carrots
Onions
Dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt)
Frozen Green Garbanzo Beans
Dried Beans
Apples
Pears
Pumpkins
Winter Squash

December

Whole grain bread products
Whole grain tortillas
Processed meats (hot dogs, ham, etc)
Trout
Potatoes
Onions
Dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt)
Frozen Green Garbanzo Beans
Dried Beans
Apples*
Winter Squash*

*Depending on crop size/storage

