



# FARM TO SCHOOL: A TOOL FOR SUCCESS WITH THE NEW NUTRITION STANDARDS

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### NOURISHING KIDS AND COMMUNITIES

The National Farm to School Network sprouted from the desire to support community-based food systems, strengthen family farms, and improve student health. Funded in part by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Network coordinates, promotes and expands the Farm to School movement at the state, regional and national levels. The Network is a project of the Tides Center.

**W**hen children returned to school this fall, lunch options looked a little different. Starting in 2012, new nutrition standards for school meals (changed for the first time since 1995) are being implemented across the country. The new guidelines (see summary below) reflect the most current scientific knowledge and analysis in support of children's wellbeing and are based on recommendations from the Institute of Medicine.

Farm to School activities inherently complement the new nutrition standards by helping increase student interest in new foods and fostering a deeper understanding of the origin of food and the importance of good nutrition, all of which can increase participation in school meal programs. This resource highlights Farm to School activities and resources that can help ease the transition to the new standards and foster support for school meal programs.

### What is Farm to School?

Farm to School connects schools, farms and communities with the objectives of serving healthy meals in school cafeterias; improving student nutrition; educating children about health, nutrition, agriculture and food systems; helping children learn where their food comes from through educational opportunities, such as creating school gardens and visiting farms; and supporting local and regional farmers.

### How can Farm to School activities support the new school meal pattern requirements?

#### 1. Taste tests feature healthy farm fresh products

Getting children to try a new food is often a big hurdle. The new school nutrition standards require serving more fruits and vegetables, and some schools are reporting an increase in fruit and vegetable waste in trashcans. Taste testing can be an effective way of introducing new foods to children. Farm to School programs incorporate taste testing as a way of introducing delicious, healthy, farm-fresh products to children. For schools working with a food service management company, try requesting a list of local foods they can provide. Some resources to help with a taste testing activity include:

#### VT-FEED: A Guide for Taste Testing Local Food in School

[www.vtfeed.org/materials/guide-taste-testing-local-foods-schools](http://www.vtfeed.org/materials/guide-taste-testing-local-foods-schools)

#### Farm to School Taste Tests in School Cafeterias

(from Growing Minds, a project of ASAP)

[www.growing-minds.org/farm-to-school-taste-tests/](http://www.growing-minds.org/farm-to-school-taste-tests/)

#### 2. Connect changes in the cafeteria with learning in the classroom

The three C's of Farm to School are cafeteria, classroom and community. By reinforcing healthy eating, and positive school meal changes in all of these venues – the change is better understood, and ultimately better supported by students, parents, teachers, administrators and other community members. Farm to School classroom activities that support healthy

## WHY FARM TO SCHOOL?

### HEALTH: Kids Win

All kids deserve access to nutritious, high quality food. One-third of U.S. children are obese or overweight, and only 2% of children get the recommended serving of fruits and vegetables each day. Schools with a Farm to School program have seen increases in children's participation in the school meals program and consumption of fruits and vegetables.

**AGRICULTURE: Farmers Win** Farm to School supports farming families by increasing market opportunities for farmers, fishers, ranchers, food processors and food manufacturers. Farm to School programs can open up the expansive school food market to local farmers.

**ECONOMY: Communities Win** Farm to School strengthens the community. Farm to School programs create opportunities for developing meaningful community relationships between schools, parents and local farmers. Money spent on local food in schools stays within the local economy.

### General Farm to School resources

#### National Farm to School Network

[www.farmtoschool.org](http://www.farmtoschool.org)

#### USDA Farm to School

[www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/f2s/](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/f2s/)

cafeteria changes can take the form of nutrition and agriculture education lessons and/or chefs and farmers in the classroom. Outside of the classroom, think about a farm tour or a tour through the school kitchen, both of which help build children's understanding of where their food comes from. Farm to School educational activities can also serve as a marketing tool to encourage children to try and enjoy school lunch and reduce waste. Go to the following links for ideas and resources for connecting cafeteria, classroom and community:

#### National Farm to School Network Website

[www.farmtoschool.org](http://www.farmtoschool.org)

#### Harvest of the Month – from Network for a Healthy California

[www.harvestofthemonth.cdph.ca.gov/](http://www.harvestofthemonth.cdph.ca.gov/)

#### Farm Based Education Association

[www.farmbasededucation.org/](http://www.farmbasededucation.org/)

### 3. School gardens reinforce children's knowledge of and connection to the delicious colorful vegetables (dark greens, reds, oranges!) served in school meal programs

Schools across the country are incorporating school gardens as experiential classrooms. Food service staff, teachers and garden volunteers can work together to coordinate the foods being grown in the garden, featured in the cafeteria and discussed in the classroom to reinforce the changes required by the new nutrition standards.



Taste tests featuring healthy, local products are a proven method for getting students to try and like new foods.

Some helpful school garden resources include:

#### Starting and Maintaining a School Garden

(from the National Farm to School Network)

[www.farmtoschool.org/files/publications\\_471.pdf](http://www.farmtoschool.org/files/publications_471.pdf)

#### Getting Started: A Guide for Creating School Gardens

(from the Center for Ecoliteracy)

[www.ecoliteracy.org/change/school-gardens](http://www.ecoliteracy.org/change/school-gardens)

### 4. Salad Bars are a great tool for introducing a variety of foods

Salad bars are a natural place to present many of the healthy changes to school meals—they offer fresh fruits and vegetables, presented in an appealing manner. Take the opportunity to incorporate local, seasonal items within your salad bar options. Feature a seasonal "Item of the Week" on your salad bar and provide signage and/or a bulletin board display on this featured item. Connect with local farmers to explore what they are growing that can be featured on the salad bar. A wonderful salad bar resource is:

#### Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools

[saladbars2schools.org/](http://saladbars2schools.org/)

### 5. Connect with local sources to meet calorie and sodium limits

Identify new local sources of products that meet your needs. Many local producers and processors are part of the community and are willing and eager partners. Make the most of this opportunity to work closely with local vendors to formulate products that meet both your needs and satisfy the new requirements for fruits, vegetables (fresh, frozen, dried or canned), whole grains, non-fat or low-fat dairy or meat. For example some schools have worked with local dairies to procure non-fat chocolate milk that meets the new calorie, sugar and size requirements.

## The Science Behind the New School Meal Standards

- One in three American children are overweight or obese, putting them at risk for preventable chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease. Bold solutions are needed to cease this rising tide of obesity. School meals are an important food access point for children across the United States and play a critical role in helping children establish lifelong healthy eating habits.
- Nutrition standards for school meals have not been updated since 1995. The new standards reflect the most up-to-date knowledge on health and nutrition and are based on both the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the recommendations of nutrition experts at the Institute of Medicine.
- Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA) requires the US Department of Agriculture to update the nutrition standards.

## 6. Promote your efforts! Farm to School builds support for and participation in school meal programs

Don't let your efforts to serve healthy, farm fresh food go unnoticed. Market the wonderful changes to your program:

- Place signage throughout the cafeteria and in the serving line - identify and brag about your local farm partners.
- Highlight local/regional foods on your menus.
- Communicate about healthy changes through school newsletters, website, blogs and bulletin boards.

## Summary of Changes in Meal Pattern Standards for School Breakfast

Food Group	Before	After
<b>Fruit</b>	½ cup per day (vegetable substitution allowed)	1 cup per day (vegetable substitution allowed) beginning school year 2014-15.
<b>Grains and Meat/Meat Alternative</b>	2 grains, or 2 meat/meat alternates of 1 of each per day	Daily minimum and weekly ranges for grains: Grades K-5: 1oz eq min daily (7-10 oz weekly) Grades 6-8: 1 oz eq min daily (8-10 oz weekly) Grades 9-12: 1 oz eq min daily (9-10 oz weekly)  Beginning school year 2013-14. May substitute M/MA for grains after the minimum daily grain requirement is met.
<b>Whole Grains</b>	Encouraged	At least half of the grains must be whole grain-rich beginning July 1, 2013.  Beginning July 1, 2014 all grains must be whole grain rich.
<b>Milk</b>	1 cup Variety of fat contents allowed; flavor not restricted.	1 cup  Must be fat free (unflavored/flavored) or 1% low fat (unflavored)

## Summary of Changes in Meal Pattern Standards for School Lunch

	Before	After
<b>Fruits</b>	1/2 - 3/4 cup per day (fruit and vegetable combined)	1/2-1 cup per day
<b>Vegetables</b>		3/4-1 cup per day (with weekly amounts of specific types)
<b>Meat/Meat Alternative</b>	1.5 -2 oz eq (daily minimum)	Grades K-5: at least 1 oz per day, 8-10 oz eq per week Grades 6-8: at least 1 oz per day, 9-10 oz eq per week Grades 9-12: at least 2 oz per day, 10-12 oz eq per week
<b>Grains</b>	At least 1 serving per day, and 8 servings per week across all grades.	Daily minimums and weekly ranges: Grades K-5: 1 oz per day, 7-10 oz eq per week Grades 6-8: 1 oz per day, 8-10 oz eq per week Grades 9-12: 2 oz per day, 10-12 oz eq per week
<b>Whole Grains</b>	Encouraged, but not required	At least half of grains served should be whole grain-rich by beginning July 1, 2012. Beginning July 1, 2014, all grains must be whole grain rich.
<b>Milk</b>	1 cup per day A variety of fat contents allowed;	1 cup per day of low fat (1% fat) or nonfat milk Only nonfat milk can be flavored
<b>Calorie Maximums</b>	No maximums	Grades K-5: 650 calories Grades 6-8: 700 calories Grades 9-12: 850 calories
<b>Sodium</b>	Reduce, no set targets.	Target for 2014-15 school year: Grades K-5: less than 1230 mg per lunch Grades 6-8: less than 1360mg per lunch Grades 9-12: less than 1420 mg per lunch
<b>Fat</b>	Saturated Fat: <10% of calories Trans Fat: no limits	Saturated Fat: <10% of calories Trans Fat: 0g

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture ([www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/governance/legislation/comparison.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/governance/legislation/comparison.pdf))

The National Farm to School Network has compiled many resources on this topic and others along with contact information for people in your state and region who are working on Farm to School programs. Join our network and find more information: [www.farmtoschool.org](http://www.farmtoschool.org)