

# ADDRESSING HUNGER AND NUTRITION

## A Tool Kit for Positive Results



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## Farm to Cafeteria

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Farm to Cafeteria (also called Farm to School) is a federal proposal designed to connect schools to local farms, with the goals of serving healthy meals in school cafeterias, improving student nutrition, providing health and nutrition education opportunities that will last a lifetime, and supporting local small farmers. Many of the ideas that contributed to creation of the Farm to Cafeteria legislation came from the experience and insight of community leaders who were working to establish local farm to cafeteria programs all over the country.

Funds for Farm to Cafeteria were authorized—but not appropriated—as part of the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 (Section 122, “Access to Local Foods and School Gardens”). The legislation authorized grants that would provide one-time funding of up to \$100,000 over three years for programs such as salad bars filled with local produce, seasonal items incorporated into lunch menus, school gardens and experimental agriculture education. The grant money could be used for food procurement, storage and cutting equipment, staff time and training, and educational and promotional materials.

Although this program has not yet been funded, approximately 400 school districts in 22 states or tribes currently have in place a Farm to Cafeteria program. These local programs have been initiated with alternative funding sources such as USDA Community Foods Project grants, and community and private organizations.

Another way that communities have established Farm to Cafeteria projects has been through the Department of Defense (DOD) Fresh Produce Program. An agreement between the USDA and DOD gives school districts in some states the opportunity to use the DOD’s Fresh Produce Program. School districts that choose to participate in this program can divert commodity entitlement dollars to purchase produce that is grown in the United States and can develop Farm to School projects with products from their state.

Current locally supported Farm to Cafeteria programs are administered by the school’s food service director, usually in partnership with state agencies such as the department of education and the department of agriculture.

Farm to Cafeteria grants, once appropriated, would be administered through the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) branch of the USDA.

### Eligibility

Any school, tribe or nonprofit organization that participates in the federal meal programs (lunch, breakfast or summer lunch) would be able to apply for the competitive grants.

In 2004, the USDA Community Food Project Grants awarded \$389,685 to create Farm to Cafeteria programs in California and Wisconsin.

The Olympia School District in Washington has documented increased participation rates of 13 percent and 16 percent in the two participating elementary schools during the first year of the organic choices salad bar. The increase in participation helped to offset the higher cost of the organic produce, resulting in a net increase of only \$5.50 per day to provide the salad bar in each pilot school.

### Program Issues and Challenges

#### *Lack of Funding*

The greatest barrier for schools to start a Farm to Cafeteria program is the lack of initial federal funding. At this time, not enough funding is available, even from alternative sources, to meet the current need and interest. Many schools lack the basic materials—such as knives, cutting boards and storage facilities—to prepare fresh fruits and vegetables. Most of the items needed to start a Farm to Cafeteria program are a one-time investment that can be purchased with start-up funds.

#### *Logistics*

In addition to acquiring the supplies needed to process fresh fruits and vegetables, the logistics of incorporating these foods also creates a challenge. Schools today are limited in both funds and staff time. Determining how to procure produce from local farmers and integrating these new foods into the lunch menu can be beyond a school’s capacity to implement.

#### *Children’s Familiarity with Vegetables*

Some schools are hesitant to start a Farm to Cafeteria program

due to a perception that the fresh fruits and vegetables may be wasted because they are unfamiliar to many of the children. However, an evaluation of the Ventura Unified School District's (California) salad bar program during the 2001-2002 school year demonstrated that students and staff chose the salad bar at lunch over the regular hot food option <http://www.farmtoschool.org/ca/ventura.htm>.

### Program Models and Promising Practices

**Combining Commodity and Local Foods in School Meals**  
Edmunds Elementary and Middle School, along with the L.C. Hunt Middle School, in Burlington, **Vermont**, started a Farm to Cafeteria program with grant money from Food Education Every Day (FEED), which combines commodity foods with locally produced foods. The children learn about local foods and develop recipes for items that will be served as a part of the school lunch. Engaging the children in developing the recipes not only introduces them to new foods but also to where those foods come from. More information can be found at [www.nofavt.org](http://www.nofavt.org).

### Sharing What They Learned

The **Washington** state Department of Agriculture published the *Farm-to-Cafeteria Connections Handbook* in 2003. This Handbook contains information about Farm to Cafeteria programs for farmers, food service professionals and community members. It provides locally relevant information, how-to ideas, and case studies of successful projects from across the country. Case studies include the Farmers' Market Salad Bar in the Santa Monica Malibu Unified School District and the New North Florida Cooperative that sells to five different school districts. This manual also contains information about incorporating locally grown produce into other institutional cafeterias such as hospitals and retirement homes. The *Farm-to-Cafeteria Connections Handbook* can be found at <http://agr.wa.gov/Marketing/SmallFarm/102-FarmToCafeteriaConnections-Web.pdf>.

### Working out the Logistics and Going Beyond the Lunch Room

In **California**, the Compton Unified School District's (CUSD) Farm to School program began in February 2004. The CUSD has 39 schools, and an average of 93.8 percent of students receive free or reduced price meals. Each day, students can choose either a hot entrée or the salad bar for lunch. The produce comes from Garden Patch, a group of local farmers, which delivers to CUSD's centralized warehouse where district staff pick up the produce and deliver the items to the individual schools. The Compton Nutrition Services provided the funds necessary to begin implementation of the farm to school project during the 2003-2004 school year. This program benefits from a strong commitment at the district and departmental level, the high participation in the salad bar program, funding from the California Nutrition Network (an agency within the California Department of Human Services), and careful management and purchasing decisions. Aside from farm to school, Compton is expanding its nutrition program to include many innovative programs. The district's goal is to have a school garden in every school that is receiving farm fresh produce. There has also been action taken to develop a large community school garden that could serve as an education center and food source for the district and the community.

More information about CUSD's farm to cafeteria program and a database that includes every school or school district that has an operational farm to school program can be found at [www.farmtoschool.org](http://www.farmtoschool.org).

### Resources

- USDA's Small Farms/School Meals Initiative: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/lunch/Downloadable/small.pdf>
- Information from the Community Food Security Coalition: [http://www.foodsecurity.org/farm\\_to\\_school.html](http://www.foodsecurity.org/farm_to_school.html).

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Definitions of commonly used hunger and nutrition terms can be found in NCSL's Hunger and Nutrition Partnership *Glossary of Hunger and Nutrition Terms* at <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/immig/Glossary.htm>.