



EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES STATE AGENCIES CAN USE TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEMS

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THROUGHOUT THE U.S., farm to school initiatives are taking root and thriving at local, regional, and statewide levels. According to the **USDA Farm to School Census**, during the 2014-2015 school year, over 5,200 school districts comprised of more than 42,000 schools were buying local food and teaching children about agriculture. Many state agencies are at the forefront of this work, leading their state’s farm to school planning and goal setting. Indeed, state agencies such as Departments of Education, Departments of Agriculture, and Departments of Health can play unique roles in establishing and supporting these community food systems efforts. Below are a few effective strategies USDA recommends state agencies implement to support farm to school initiatives in their states.

Coordinate Statewide Networking and Goal Setting

State agencies are strategic stakeholders in farm to school initiatives as they offer vital connections to the many groups and organizations engaging in farm to school across the state. By facilitating a collective vision; coordinating statewide goal setting and strategic planning; and tracking state progress, agencies understand the wide breadth of activities and partnerships occurring and can identify stakeholders who are not yet at the table or part of networks.

USDA’s Farm to School Census helps state agencies track their state’s progress by recognizing school districts that are already participating in farm to school activities and those that are not. Furthermore, state agencies are valuable partners for non-profit groups, cooperative extension programs, and other stakeholders engaged in farm to school initiatives. Many state agency professionals host regular conference calls or webinars; disseminate technical resources and updates; and facilitate local, regional, and statewide networking initiatives to support practitioners in the field.

The South Carolina Department of Agriculture established a partnership between GrowFood Carolina and South Carolina Department of Education to develop local food procurement resources for a pilot farm to freezer project. Thanks to the partnership, frozen blueberries are now available for schools beyond the traditional growing season.

Host Local and Statewide Trainings

State agencies identify needs among stakeholder groups and host statewide conferences and events. Training events can include a wide variety of audiences including educators, farmers and producers, school nutrition professionals, and non-profit and cooperative extension professionals. Trainings can focus on delivering technical assistance to help schools purchase local foods; build and maintain school gardens; and integrate agriculture, nutrition, and health education into school curricula.





For example, in Nevada, the Department of Agriculture provided Good Agriculture Practices (GAP) training and on-site group mock audit demonstrations for schools and farmers, ensuring both groups understood the certification process. In 2015, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture delivered 15 on-site workshops on maintaining and connecting school gardens to curriculum standards. State agencies such as the Washington State Department of Agriculture and the Wyoming Department of Education have also hosted regional and statewide conferences to engage new stakeholders and provide technical assistance on supply chain connections and procurement. Agencies also incorporate community foods systems information into annual summer and child care trainings to expand local offerings beyond the school day.

Develop and Share Resource Materials

State agencies develop resources such as state procurement guides, farm to school curricula, school garden guidance, and local food promotional materials. For example, in Washington DC, the District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education created **training videos** to ensure consistent volunteer and service corps execution of Harvest of the Month taste tests across multiple schools. In Kansas, the State Department of Education created a farm to school toolkit DVD focused on food safety, nutrition education, and procurement. State agencies also create websites or devote portions of their websites to disseminate farm to school related resources and information. For instance, West Virginia's Departments of Agriculture and Education collaborated with partners to create the **Grow.Educate.Sell website** that connects farm to school practitioners across the state.

In Alabama, the Department of Agriculture and Industries and the State Department of Education partnered with other organizations to develop a **farm to school website** that surveys farmers and enables schools to find farmers who match their procurement needs.

Celebrate Farm to School

State agencies help celebrate the state's farm to school efforts by recognizing progress and sharing success stories. State agencies are often key to highlighting farm to school work and lead celebrations during National Farm to School Month in October. State agencies can also spearhead a farm to school week (such as **Maryland's Homegrown School Lunch Week**) or a weekly farm to school day. Connecticut's Departments of Education and Agriculture jointly organize **Connecticut-Grown for Connecticut Kids Week**, a legislatively mandated promotional week that annually highlights Connecticut agriculture through school meal and classroom programs. Additionally, state agencies can create or support statewide award programs. For example, Georgia's Departments of Education, Agriculture, and Public Health partner with Georgia Organics to recognize schools and districts championing farm to school with the **Golden Radish Award**. In Virginia, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services invites schools to receive farm to school promotional materials and recognition through its **Virginia Grown** program.





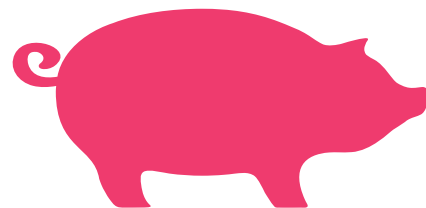
Utilize SAE Funds

State agencies can support farm to school by utilizing their State Administrative Expense (SAE) funds and/or applying for SAE reallocation funds. SAE funds are a nondiscretionary funding source available for costs incurred in the state-level administration of Child Nutrition Programs. SAE funds, both initially allocated and reallocated, can be used to support statewide farm to school efforts in alignment with the state agency's approved SAE plan. Efforts that may be funded with SAE funds include state level: creation of training and guidance materials; farm to school and school garden coordinators; trainings and conferences; and regional farm to school initiatives. To date, 19 states have utilized SAE funds for farm to school activities with six states dedicating their funds to farm to school coordinators or personnel time. Kentucky's Department of Agriculture received reallocation funding to expand its Chefs in Schools program, reaching all schools across the state participating in the National School Lunch Program with training on how to incorporate fresh, local foods into cafeteria menus. For more information on using SAE funds, state agencies should review FNS's memorandum, **SP 28-2015, Questions and Answers Regarding the Use of State Administrative Expense (SAE) Funds and State Administrative Funds (SAF) for Farm to School Related Expenses.**

Rhode Island's Department of Education used SAE funds to support a state agency farm to school coordinator position to: develop a volunteer network of local food ambassadors to conduct school cafeteria taste tests; raise community awareness and support for farm to school activities; and, increase students' exposure to and consumption of locally grown produce.

Connect with USDA Food and Nutrition Service's Office of Community Food Systems

State agencies are eligible to apply for **USDA Farm to School Grants**, which are awarded annually to fund state level training and support services for a variety of farm to school activities. To date, the USDA Farm to School Grant Program has funded 36 state agencies in 25 states and the Virgin Islands with nearly two million dollars to expand statewide initiatives including training and technical assistance, increasing capacity for incorporating local foods into school meals, and connecting school gardens and culinary activities to classroom curricula. State agencies can learn about previous examples of grant projects by visiting the **USDA Farm to School Grant Program awards website**. USDA strongly encourages state agencies to apply for funding. State agencies can also connect with their **USDA Farm to School Regional Lead**, who can support training efforts, act as a guest speaker, and direct you to more specific farm to school resources. For more information on the Farm to School Grant Program and a list of regions and each corresponding Regional Lead, visit **USDA's Office of Community Food System's website**.





State agencies are eligible for USDA Farm to School Support Service grants and Training grants.

Support Service grants are for working with schools or school districts to further develop and provide broad reaching support services to farm to school initiatives. Training grants are to support trainings that strengthen farm to school supply chains, or trainings that provide technical assistance in the area of local procurement, food safety, culinary education, and/or integration of agriculture-based curriculum.

Small Steps to Engage in Farm to School

There are numerous opportunities to be involved with farm to school and community food systems, as each state has its own diverse school, community, and agricultural landscapes. Many states are already supporting community food systems strategies in Child Nutrition Programs, from the School Breakfast Program to the Summer Food Service Program. For states interested in engaging in community food systems initiatives, you can begin with a few, small steps:

1. Check out **USDA's Farm to School Census**

- Identify any school districts or schools in your state already engaged with farm to school initiatives.
- Use your state's data to set statewide goals for the upcoming year.

2. Call a neighboring state and ask how they started supporting farm to school and community food systems. Use USDA's **State Contacts page** to find connections.
3. Identify other state or local agencies, non-profit or tribal organizations, or cooperative extension programs supporting community food systems. Connect to learn more about their goals and programs.
4. Engage in farm to preschool and farm to summer support.
 - Add farm to summer activities in your state's annual management and administrative plan (MAP).
 - Include community food systems information in annual summer and child care sponsor trainings.
5. Connect with your region's **USDA Regional Lead** to learn more.



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For more information, and to sign up for the bi-weekly e-letter from the Food and Nutrition Service's Office of Community Food Systems, please visit www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool. Questions? Email us at farmtoschool@fns.usda.gov.

