



Executive Summary

The 'Farm to School' initiative connects schools with regional or local farms in order to serve healthy meals using locally produced foods. The Washington State Farm to School team conducted a survey about Farm to School activities in the state to learn more about local efforts, identify areas of need and opportunity, and prioritize actions.

Methods and Sample:

- Food service directors from the 295 school districts in Washington State and other entities that participated in the National School Lunch and National School Breakfast programs in 2009/2010 were invited to participate in an on-line survey in 2011.
- A total of 82 surveys were completed. Respondents represented diverse and geographically distributed school districts.
- The 39-question survey asked about current practices, capacity to overcome barriers, and need for technical assistance.

Main Findings:

- Farm to School efforts are underway across the state; there is strong interest in doing more; these efforts are not usually integrated into district policies.
- All of the 22 districts that had experience purchasing food locally stated they would continue to purchase locally.
- Four of the top 10 fruits and vegetables purchased by schools (apples, pears, potatoes, grapes) are also among Washington's top 10 commodity crops.
- Schools may lack kitchen facilities to process fresh produce; those with larger percent free and reduced price lunch eligibility are more likely to have this capacity.
- Larger school districts require a large volume of produce, which is a barrier to sourcing foods locally.
- The top three Farm to School training interests are:
 - Learning about the availability of farm products in the region
 - Seasonal recipes and menu planning
 - Budgeting and cost management

Recommended State-level Actions to Support Farm to School in Washington:

- *For Food Service:* Promote use of central kitchens or other processing facilities; train foodservice staff on food preparation and safety.
- *For School Communities:* Provide resources and training to teachers, administrators, parents and farmers to extend the benefits of Farm to School beyond the cafeteria; support integration of the program into school wellness policies by coordinating with state wellness policy training efforts and offering model policies.
- *For Farmers:* Develop matchmaking tools and networking opportunities to connect schools and farmers.
- *For the Farm to School Program:* Build state leadership for interagency coordination, program evaluation, and marketing.

Washington State is well positioned to grow its Farm to School Program.

