While many programs center on isolated components of agriculture or child nutrition, Farm to School offers comprehensive strategies to improve the health of kids and communities. The National Farm to School Network focuses on children’s health and education as well as on the economic health of local farmers and strengthening ties in communities.

**What is Farm to School?**

Farm to School is broadly defined as a program that connects schools (K-12) and local farms with the objectives of serving healthy meals in school cafeterias, improving student nutrition, providing agriculture, health and nutrition education opportunities, and supporting local and regional farmers. Farm to School at its core is about establishing relationships between local foods and school children by way of including, but not limited to: local products in school meals and local food related curriculum development and experiential learning opportunities through school gardens, farm tours, farmer in the classroom sessions, chefs in the classroom, culinary education, educational sessions for parents and community members, and visits to farmers’ markets.

**Farm to School in Action**

Programs exist in all 50 states—here are four examples:

**Community collaboration equals Farm to School success in Oregon**

Working with community organizations can help build strong, sustainable Farm to School programs. During the 2008-09 school year, Springfield School District in Oregon worked with the Willamette Farm and Food Coalition (WFFC) to implement a Farm to School program at three of their elementary schools. They integrated educational activities including Harvest of the Month in the cafeterias, farm field trips, garden sessions, nutrition lessons, tasting tables and harvest days. All activities were coordinated and overseen by the WFFC Farm to School coordinator. As a result, their students are enjoying more healthy farm-fresh foods and have a greater understanding of where their food comes from.

**Getting local, farm fresh food into New York school meals**

At the Bay Shore Union Free School District, Janet Sklar, Director of School Nutrition Services, has been hard at work getting locally grown food into Long Island Schools. This program has been the catalyst for Farm to School success in the entire region. With Sklar leading the effort, 45 Long Island school districts formed a cooperative that started purchasing local produce last fall. Approximately 18,000 pounds of locally grown potatoes have been incorporated into about 72,000 school meals served in 20 different school districts in the area so far.

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Getting Started
Farm to School offers multiple strategies to improve the health of children and communities. But getting started can be a daunting endeavor. This list provides some first simple steps to develop a lasting Farm to School program in your community.

1 **Assess where you are and where you’d like to be.** Are your goals centered on:
   - Procurement of local foods to be served in school?
   - Establishing a school garden?
   - Integration of Farm to School within the curriculum?
   - All of the above?

2 **Form a team and collaborate.** School food service staff, teachers, administrators, local farmers, students, parents and community organizations each have an important role in establishing a sustainable Farm to School program.

3 **Establish one or two attainable goals to get started.** Some ideas include:
   - Identify menu items that you would like to transition to local products.
   - Find a farmer or distributor to connect you to local items.
   - Plan a local meal event.
   - Determine training needs to assist food service staff with incorporating farm fresh items in meals.
   - Bring a school garden planning team together.
   - Identify curricular opportunities to connect to a school garden.
   - Bring a chef into the classroom.
   - Plan a farm field trip or host a tasting event featuring local produce.

4 **Learn from others.** If you are running into an obstacle there is someone out there who has run into it before. Some places to connect and learn from others include:
   - The National Farm to School Network (www.farmtoschool.org). Find abundant resources and contact information for people in your state and region who are working on Farm to School.
   - Your state’s School Nutrition Association. Learn how others in your state are approaching Farm to School in their school/district.
   - Connect with the Child Nutrition Program at your state agency (typically your Department of Education or Department of Agriculture).

5 **Promote Farm to School in your school and community.**
   - Signage in the cafeteria
   - Bulletin boards throughout the school
   - School newsletters (print and electronic)

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Fish to School makes sense for Alaska
Farm to School isn’t just for landlubbers. The Sitka Conservation Society in Alaska is taking the movement out to sea with their Fish to Schools program, which launched last fall after winning two small grants and building key partnerships with local fishermen, processors and cafeteria managers. Three schools now participate in the Fish to Schools program with twice-monthly entrees featuring rockfish and salmon. As with most successful Farm to School programs, there’s also an education component through which students have met local fishermen and learned about both traditional and commercial processes, not to mention conservation and cooking. The kids are hooked. Last month as many as 32 percent of students who ate school lunch chose fish as their entree when it was offered, up from 20 percent in January. Besides boosting the economy and the profile of Alaska’s native foods, the program provides an essential boost in nutrition by offering an item that some students wouldn’t otherwise have access to.

School gardens as experiential classrooms in New Jersey
In New Jersey, students at Haddonfield School District enjoy the fruits of their labor ... literally. Haddonfield has a fully operational school garden in one elementary school and they are getting ready to break ground on two others. The schools also offer salads bars where students can eat food right out of their garden. “It is amazing to see their faces with such pride and enjoyment,” says Haddonfield Food Service Director Dana Gollotto. The district also does tastings with the children to encourage intake of new fruits and vegetables. A few of the interesting items they tasted this year include mashed sweet potatoes; eggplant sticks; and raw, purple cauliflower. To further students’ understanding of agriculture, the district invited Farmer John from Ambrogi Produce to speak to the elementary school children about Farm to School and what it means to them. During the presentation students tasted fresh apples just picked from a local farm.