

# FARM TO SCHOOL

Farm to school programs are a great way to teach nutrition while also fostering a healthy local community, local economy and local environment. Usually Farm to School projects include one or more of the following:

1. *Procurement*: where local foods are purchased and served in the school cafeteria
2. *Education*: where students participate and learn about agriculture, nutrition and food in the classroom
3. *School gardens*: where students can get hands on experience.



This section will go through why Farm to School programs are beneficial for both the school and broader community, how to start the process of a Farm to School program in your school, and end with an example of a successful Farm to School program.

These sources were compiled from:

The National Farm to School Network: [www.farmtoschool.org](http://www.farmtoschool.org)

VT FEED: [www.vtfeed.org](http://www.vtfeed.org)

USDA: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/fact-sheets>

# Reasons to Include Local Foods in Your Cafeteria

## ❖ Tastes better

Because produce does not have a long way to travel, produce is picked when it is ripe. Also, meat and dairy are likely to be produced on a small scale and not in large facilities.



## ❖ Better for you

The shorter the time period between farm and cafeteria the more nutrients stay in the food. Local farmers take pride in making sure that their food is delicious and safe.

## Kids WIN

Farm to school provides all kids access to nutritious, high quality, local food so they are ready to learn and grow. Farm to school activities enhance classroom education through hands-on learning related to food, health, agriculture and nutrition.

## ❖ Preserves diversity

Smaller, local, organic farmers focus on diversity, putting a rainbow in each plate.

## ❖ Supports local families

By selling directly to the consumer, farmers cut out the middleman, making their profit higher.



## ❖ Builds community

Buying local forms relationships and creates bonds between community members.

## Farmers WIN

Farm to school can serve as a significant financial opportunity for farmers, fishers, ranchers, food processors and food manufacturers by opening the door to an institutional market worth billions of dollars.

## ❖ Saves open space

Local farmers keep areas from being developed further.

### ❖ Benefits the environment and wildlife

Well-run farms preserve the earth's natural systems such as water resources and soil fertility.

### ❖ Investment in the future

By supporting farms now, it is a way to ensure that those farms survive and can ensure food security in the future.

### ❖ Improves public health

By teaching children about eating healthy, they can carry these healthy habits home and throughout life.

### ❖ Boost the economy

By buying local food and bringing it to school not only is money kept local but people are given jobs in farming, processes, preparing etc.

### ❖ Helps children learn

By feeding children good healthy food they can improve children's ability to focus.



### Communities WIN

Buying from local producers and processors reduces the carbon footprint of food transportation while stimulating the local economy. Education activities such as school gardens and composting programs create a healthy environmental around the school community.

# Getting Started...

## 1. Assess where you are and where you'd like to be (are your goals centered on):

- Buying of local foods to serve in the cafeteria?
- Founding a school garden?
- Working to add farms to school to the curriculum?

## 2. Form a team and collaborate

School food service staff, teachers, administrators, local farmers, students, parents and community organizations are all useful when forming a committee.

## 3. Establish one or two attainable goals to get started

- Identify menu items that could be sourced locally
- Find a farmer or distributor and connect
- Plan a local meal event
- Think about what your training needs are
- Brainstorm any other ideas...

## 4. Learn from others

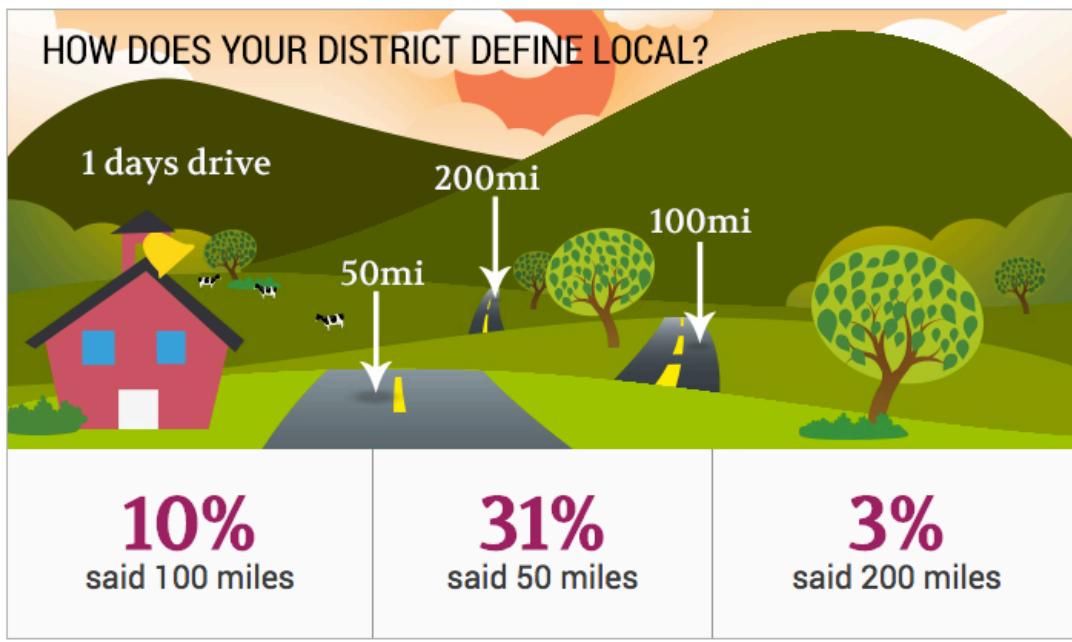
## 5. Promote farm to school in your school and community

- Signage – cafeterias, bulletin boards etc.
- Newsletters
- School website, local media etc.
- School events/PTA etc.

More info at:  
[www.farmtoschool.org](http://www.farmtoschool.org)

# So what is Local Anyways?

## New York defines local



*Local* or *regional* products are products within the areas or distance that your school has defined as local or regional.

- The guidelines for defining what is “local” or “regional” can be decided school by school, but defining what is “local” or “regional” is important: different products can have different requirement for local or regional status.
- Things to keep in mind when determining *local* or *regional* status is seasonality and what is possible to buy from distributors, farmers’ markets, CSAs etc.



# Mechanisms for Purchasing Food Locally

More and more schools in Vermont are purchasing local foods from local farmers. They do this through a variety of methods that may affect how you get foods for your taste tests. For a complete description of these, see the *VT FEED Guide for Using Local Food in Schools*.

## Wholesale Distributors

When purchasing from a distributor, request local food products whenever possible and the names of the farms from which they purchase; it makes distributors more aware of customer demand.

## Direct Purchasing

Some schools purchase bulk food products at wholesale prices directly from farmers. Food service staff call farmers directly, or a farmer may contact the food service director. Here are some direct purchasing options:

### CSA PROGRAM (COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE)

CSA subscribers receive regular shares of a farm's harvest after paying in early spring a farmer's up-front for yearly operating costs. Some schools 'buy-down' from the list of produce the farm provides. As a subscriber, a school may also be a part of the harvesting on the farm, which is an opportunity for hands-on education.

### CONTRACT GROWING

In some school districts, farmers and the school food service director plan together each winter to identify foods the food program can use for the coming school year. Contract growing can save your program money because if farmers can secure a market for their products ahead of time, you could negotiate a better cost per pound.



### Getting Local Food Delivered

Delivery arrangements are often a unique collaboration between farms and schools. Some options to consider:

- Farmers may choose to work with a school district that utilizes a central food service facility in order to deliver to one site rather than to multiple schools.
- Growers may add destinations to an established delivery route. For example, a farmer may be able to deliver to schools on the same day she goes to the farmer's market or delivers to restaurants.
- If several farms are delivering to a school district, they can collaborate by bringing their products to one farm and have that farmer do the deliveries for all of them.



Ferrisburgh Central School students' work in the school gardens that provide produce for the lunch program (photo courtesy of Ferrisburgh Central School)

## **MARKETING COOPERATIVE**

Some farmers work together to share in the distribution, marketing, processing, selling or billing of their products. Buying from a cooperative of farms makes it easier for farmers to get their products to your food program and easier for you to call just one number.

## **DISTRICT PURCHASING COOPERATIVE**

School districts that hire or find a part-time local purchasing coordinator (such as a motivated parent with business experience) are able to find significant savings by arranging for sale prices on behalf of their school.

## ***Donated and School-Grown Food***

### **GROW A ROW FOR SCHOOL**

Students plant a particular crop at a farm they visit in the spring. The following fall, the class harvests the crop and brings it to the school to be stored or processed and frozen for later use.

### **GROW A ROW AT HOME**

Some innovative food service programs agree to receive produce donations all fall from local families. Family food donations to schools were the foundation of school lunches prior to the start of the USDA program.

### **SCHOOL PRODUCTION GARDENS**

School gardens are a good way of providing vegetables and herbs for school kitchens, classroom taste tests and ongoing nutrition education. Some schools are growing larger quantities of selected vegetables for storage or processing, so that produce can be served throughout the school year. Be sure to practice safe harvesting and handling procedures.

## Keene Central Cafeteria – Transformed



In 2007 Julie Holbrook was hired as the KCS nutrition manager. Over the next few years she made huge changes in the way the cafeteria bought, cooked, and served food. Holbrook says that her largest accomplishment is the switch to cooking completely from scratch. These whole, unprocessed ingredients are largely bought from local CSA farms such as Essex Farm, Gunnison Orchard, Ben Wever

Farm, Juniper Hill Farm, Harves Hill Farm. She has also expanded the school garden. Since then, Julie has been recognized locally and nationally for her work and today she advises other schools, such as Schroon Lake Central School, in making similar changes.

Andy Flynn, in his article “Keene a Leader in the Food Revolution,” summarizes, “by June of that year [2007], she was using butter instead of margarine, shell eggs instead of processed eggs, and fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables instead of canned fruits and vegetables<sup>1</sup>. By September 2007, she was using tomatoes, greens, peas, squash and kale from the school gardens for meals. By June 2008, staffers were making most of the school’s food from scratch. A year later they were making all the bread products from scratch, including pizza dough. By September 2010, all beef was being bought from local farms, there was no flavored milk and the school became a CSA member of Essex Farm.”



Julie hides the nutrition in foods such as her famous black bean brownies or home made tomato soup. The goal behind Holbrook’s food plan is that students can get much of their needed daily nutrition at school so that parents do not have to worry.

<sup>1</sup> Andy Flynn. “Keene a Leader in the Food Revolution” *Lake Placid News*.

<http://www.lakeplacidnews.com/page/content.detail/id/522617/EDIBLE-EDUCATION--Keene-a-leader-in-the-food-revolution.html?nav=5005>

## **Q & A with Julie Holbrook:**

### **1) When did you start working at KCS? Why?**

“I started working in January of 2007. [...] I have not documented exactly when we did everything, but within a few years we were making meals completely from scratch, making most of our bread products, and in 2010, we started only serving local grass fed beef and also started our CSA share for our eggs and vegetables. This past year we started making most of our snacks ala carte so that we could be compliant with the new snack regulations.”

### **2) What has been your role at KCS? How has your job expanded since you started?**

“I am the food service director, cook/manager when I started. The first summer I took on the school garden and expanded it and we built a geodesic greenhouse, [among other things...]. In 2012, I took on Schroon Lake Central School as their food service director and basically replicated what we do in Keene.”

### **3) What are the biggest changes that you have made? How have people responded?**

“I guess the biggest change is cooking completely from scratch. We have gotten a lot of support of what we do. Pretty much every year we have families that move into the area tell us a part of their decision to come to our school had a bit to do with the food that we serve the students.”

### **4) What were the biggest challenges that you faced? Would these be different with a larger (or smaller) school?**

“The biggest challenges were convincing the Board of Education that we needed more labor hours to do what we do. Cooking from scratch is much cheaper, so much in fact, that you can afford the extra labor. But, you have to prove yourself! It would be the same with a bigger school and is so much harder because when you are just reheating food, you do not need much labor, so the adjustment is on such a larger scale that it is so much more difficult, including the fact that most do not have the equipment either.”

### **5) What advice would you give to other schools that are trying to start a similar program?**

“Baby steps...Baby steps...Start with one recipe and let it gain momentum. You also have to convince the people in the kitchen how important it is. Administration often is a big stumbling block.”

### **6) What has been the most rewarding part?**

“Feeding children well! Knowing that parents do not have to stress about feeding them [the children] when they are exhausted at the end of the day, or at least [they know] that they have had a good start on nutrition for the day. The very best is when students start making the connection between how they feel physically, emotionally and energy wise with the food they are eating.”

### **7) What are some useful tips for performing a successful taste test in school?**

“Because our school is so small, we often just introduce something by serving it to everyone for lunch and then take feedback and suggestions on how to improve it. I guess that is my suggestion. When you taste test it is really important to get good feedback and follow up on it and let the students know how much you care about making them happy!”