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EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES STATE AGENCIES CAN USE TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEMS

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THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES, farm to school initiatives are taking root and thriving at local, regional, and statewide levels. 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 system efforts. Below are a few effective strategies USDA recommends State agencies implement to support farm to school initiatives.

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 (farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov) helps State agencies track their State's progress by identifying school districts that are already participating in farm to school activities and those that are not participating in these activities. 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.

South Carolina Farm to Institution is a collaborative partnership between the South Carolina Department of Agriculture, Department of Health and Environmental Control, Department of Education, Department of Social Services, and Clemson University. The South Carolina Farm to Institution helps food service staff to increase the number of farmers providing locally grown products into schools, child care centers, food banks, hospitals, military installations, and other businesses. Learn more about the South Carolina Farm to Institution Projects (www.scfarmtoschool.com/initiatives/farm-to-institute-projects).

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, non-profits, 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.



The **Arizona Department of Education's Health and Nutrition Services Division** hosted a professional development training for its internal Child Nutrition Program staff. The purpose of the training was to increase the Division's farm to school knowledge and technical assistance to Arizona schools. Child Nutrition Program staff visited a processing facility utilizing local products and toured a local farm that supplies schools Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Programs and produces product for the USDA DoD Fresh Program. Attendees learned about Arizona agriculture, farm to school, and ways to support Child Nutrition Program operators in making local a reality.

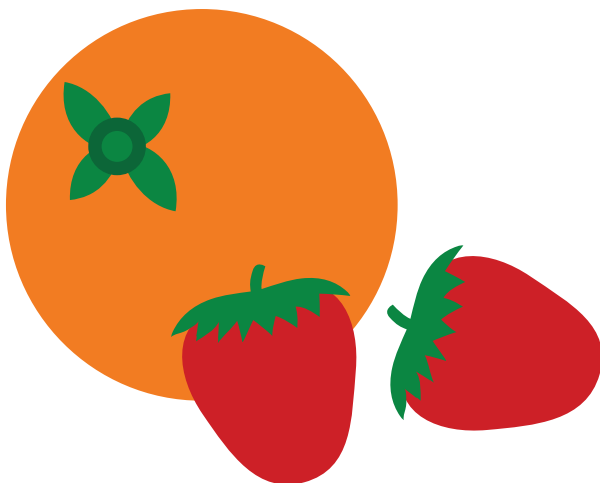
Develop and Share Resource Materials

State agencies develop resources such as State procurement guides, farm to school curricula, school garden guidance, and local food promotional materials. For example, the **District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education** created training videos (www.osse.dc.gov/multimedia/learn-cook-april-harvest-month-recipe-sauteed-asparagus-peas) 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.

In Alabama, the Department of Agriculture and Industries and the State Department of Education partnered with other organizations to develop an **Alabama Farm to School website** (<https://agi.alabama.gov/fts>) to connect school districts with local farmers. Child Nutrition operators are able to find local farmers who match their procurement needs.

Celebrate Farm to School

State agencies help celebrate 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**, (www.mda.maryland.gov/farm_to_school/Pages/farm_to_school.aspx) or a weekly farm to school day. **Connecticut's Departments of Education and Agriculture** jointly organize **Connecticut-Grown for Connecticut Kids Week** (<https://www.ctfarmtoschool.org/ct-grown-for-ct-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. 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.





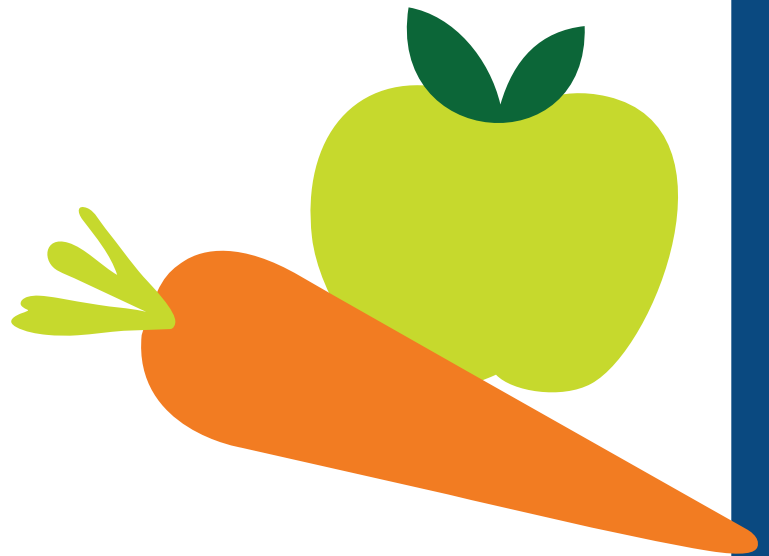
Utilize State Administrative Expense Funds

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. State-level efforts that may be funded with SAE funds include creation of training and guidance materials; farm to school and school garden coordinators; trainings and conferences; and regional farm to school initiatives. **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** (www.fns.usda.gov/qas-regarding-use-sae-funds-and-sa-funds-farm-school-related-expenses).

The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) uses SAE funds to support a Farm to School Coordinator position in its agency. The position's responsibilities are split between farm to school and administering the Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Snack Program. This allows NDE to play a leadership role in providing technical assistance to school districts across the State, building relationships with partner agencies and organizations, and administering Nebraska's two main promotional programs – Nebraska Thursdays and Nebraska Harvest of the Month.

Connect with the USDA Food and Nutrition Service's Farm to School Program

State agencies are eligible to apply for **USDA Farm to School Grants** (www.fns.usda.gov/f2s/farm-school-grant-program), 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 81 State agencies in 41 States and the Virgin Islands with a little over \$6 million 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. USDA strongly encourages State agencies to apply for funding. State agencies can also connect with their **USDA Farm to School Regional Specialists** (www.fns.usda.gov/f2s/usda-farm-school-staff) who can support training efforts, act as a guest speaker, and direct you to more specific farm to school resources.





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, they can begin with a few small steps:

1. Check out USDA's Farm to School Census

(farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov)

- 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** (www.fns.usda.gov/fns-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 Child and Adult Food Care Program (CACFP) 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 CACFP sponsor trainings.

5. Connect with your region's **USDA Regional Specialists**

(www.fns.usda.gov/f2s/usda-farm-school-staff) to learn more.



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For more information and to sign up for The Dirt, the e-letter from the Patrick Leahy Farm to School Program, visit www.fns.usda.gov/f2s/e-letter-archive.

Questions? Email us at SM.FN.FarmToSchool@usda.gov.