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United States  
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Initiative for Future Agricultural Food Systems (IFAFS)

# From Farm to School: Improving Small Farm Viability and School Meals

by Stacy Kish, CSREES

**Improving the nutritional value of school meals is a growing priority among school systems across the United States. >>**

In an effort to provide a solution for school administrators, the USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) funded a coalition, which developed a new program called "From Farm to School: Improving Small Farm Viability and School Meals."

Farm to school programs connect schools with local farms to improve the nutrition of school meals, provide agriculture and health education, and support local farmers. The project

has been a powerful catalyst to start farm to school programs to address the diet-related child health issues while supporting small and medium-scale farmers. The program allows schools to buy and feature farm fresh foods, such as fruits and vegetables, eggs, honey, meat, and beans on their school lunch menus."

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Right: Lozano student tastes broccoli straight from the plant.

Credit: Anna Barnes



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>> continued from previous page



Above: School Garden.  
Credit: Lyra Harpin

The project initiated the collaborative framework that helped establish the National Farm to School Network with organizations in more than 38 states to support the expansion of regionally and locally appropriate farm to school models.

Anupama Joshi of the National Farm to School Program along with project partners tackled the issues of distribution, farmer capacity, and school implementation costs to successfully launch farm to school programs in California, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

The farm to school approach resulted in increased vegetable and fruit consumption by students. Program leaders noted that students consumed 100 to 162 percent of the USDA daily requirements for fruits and vegetables at two sites in California.

In the three pilot programs initiated in California, elementary schools purchased local and in-state products with increased sales over time. The Yolo County and Ventura County farmers participating in the program benefited directly from the sale to schools. One farmer noted that up to 40 percent of sales were attributed to a local school district. A survey of 370 New York school food service directors showed that 25 percent purchased directly from farmers and 72 percent purchased foods from farmers and vendors.

A nutrition-based curriculum was incorporated into the schools, educating students through farm visits, gardening and recycling

**IFAFS was authorized to establish a research, extension and education competitive grants program to address agricultural genomics, food safety, value-added products, biotechnology, rural resource management and farm efficiency and profitability.**

programs. In addition to providing a new market to increase farmers' revenue, the program connected farmers to their community through participation in programs designed to educate kids about local food and sustainable agriculture.

During the project period, the number of farm to school programs expanded from six pilot districts to more than 400 programs across the nation in 2004. Currently, more than 1,000 programs are operational in 38 states. Policy changes in the 2004 Child Nutrition and Women, Infants and Children Reauthorization Act have incorporated the provisions supportive of these programs. More than 16 states have passed legislation to support farm to school programs with pending bills.

The USDA's CSREES funded this research project through the Initiative for Future Agricultural and Food Systems (IFAFS) program. Through federal funding and leadership for research, education and extension programs, CSREES focuses on investing in science and solving critical issues impacting people's daily lives and the nation's future. For more information, visit [www.csrees.usda.gov](http://www.csrees.usda.gov). ■

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