

Wisconsin Farm to School: Toolkit for School Nutrition Programs



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The **Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (CIAS)** is a research center for sustainable agriculture in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, University of Wisconsin-Madison. CIAS brings together university faculty, producers, policy makers and others to conduct research, education and outreach projects at the intersection of farming practices, farm profitability, the environment and rural vitality. For more information, visit www.cias.wisc.edu or call 608-262-5200.

The **Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS)**, Division of Public Health, Chronic Disease Prevention Unit, works to lead strategic public health efforts to prevent and control obesity and chronic disease through policy, environmental and systems changes that support regular physical activity and good nutrition. For more information, visit www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/physical-activity/.

The **Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP)** Division of Agricultural Development works to grow Wisconsin agriculture and related commerce. Wisconsin's \$59 billion agriculture and food sector accounts for 10 percent of the jobs in the state. For more information, visit www.datcp.wi.gov.

The **Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI)** School Nutrition Team works to ensure a strong nutritional foundation that supports learning and development for all students through statewide leadership, guidance, partnership and advocacy. For more information, please visit <https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition>.

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Overview

About this toolkit

Welcome to the *Wisconsin Farm to School: Toolkit for School Nutrition Programs*. Farm to school encourages healthy lifestyles in children and helps support local economies. Whether you are just starting off or looking to expand your program, this toolkit will provide you with resources to aid in your success.

This toolkit is an interactive resource. You can access all of the tools by clicking on them, and you may then print them if desired. The body of the toolkit may also be printed as one document (minus tools) if a hard copy is a useful reference. You may use the entire toolkit or select certain sections or tools, in an à la carte fashion.

Please note there is a separate *Wisconsin Farm to School: Toolkit for Producers* at www.cias.wisc.edu/toolkits.

Wisconsin producers have varying capacities and needs for both production and sales. Understanding their needs and being able to clearly communicate your own are keys to a successful program.



Portage County students cut up broccoli

What is Wisconsin Farm to School?

Wisconsin Farm to School encourages healthy lifestyles in children and supports local economies. In Wisconsin, farm to school programs connect schools with locally and regionally grown and produced products. Comprehensive farm to school programs combine local or regional procurement efforts, nutrition and agricultural education, and student engagement activities such as school gardening in order to provide students with the broadest benefits.

Farm to school programs provide a variety of benefits to students, school nutrition programs, teachers, parents, farmers and communities. These are outlined in the **benefits of farm to school** tool. Student impacts include strengthened knowledge about and attitudes toward agriculture, food, nutrition and the environment. Farm

*On average, farm to school programs—during implementation—have been shown to **increase school lunch participation** by nine percent. For some school nutrition directors, farm to school has become the backbone of their programs' popularity and an ongoing financial success.**

“Farm to school is an opportunity handed to us on a silver platter. Wisconsin is a fertile and productive state, and farm to school is a win-win. We are feeding our kids better, helping the Wisconsin economy and building better communities.”

—Kymm Mutch, former Nutrition Director, Milwaukee Public Schools

*Joshi, A and Azuma, AM, 2009. “Bearing Fruit: Farm to School Program Evaluation Resources and Recommendations.” Center for Food and Justice, Urban and Environmental Policy Institute, Occidental College.

Children Win

- Fresh fruits, vegetables and other healthy foods help fight childhood obesity.
- Pairing healthy eating with agriculture and nutrition education encourages kids to develop healthy habits.
- Good nutrition fosters healthy growth and development.

Farmers and Communities Win

- Schools provide local farmers with new or expanded markets.
- Money stays in the local economy.
- The variety of local crops produced can increase, creating opportunities for community economic development.

Schools Win

- Overall, schools report a 3 to 16% increase in meal participation when farm-fresh food is served, thus bringing in more funds.
- Local farm prices tend to fluctuate less than prices from distant markets.
- Local produce can cost less than highly processed produce currently delivered to schools.

to school can also boost student participation in school meal programs, increase consumption of fruits and vegetables and increase market opportunities for farmers, ranchers, food processors and food manufacturers.



Benefits of farm to school

Wisconsin Farm to School goals:

- Promote children's health by providing fresh, minimally processed foods in schools and supporting the development of healthy eating habits
- Strengthen children's and communities' knowledge about and attitudes toward agriculture, food, nutrition and the environment
- Strengthen local economies by expanding markets for Wisconsin's agricultural producers and food entrepreneurs

Wisconsin Farm to School values:

- An individual's lifelong well-being depends on healthy eating habits
- All children should have access to fresh, minimally processed food as part of a nutritionally balanced school meal program
- Wisconsin farms that serve local markets make essential contributions to a diverse food system
- Schools and nutrition professionals are important partners in supporting community well-being, local economies and environmental stewardship through their food and nutrition education programs and purchasing practices

Overview

In Wisconsin, farm to school is shown to: ...

- Improve attitudes toward fruits and vegetables in 3rd-5th grade students
- Increase exposure to fruits and vegetables
- Raise knowledge scores on agriculture and nutrition concepts
- Boost the proportion of students who put a fruit or vegetable on their lunch tray
- Increase fruit consumption (self-reported) in a single school year among students with the lowest intake

Bontrager Yoder A, Liebhart J, McCarty DJ, Meinen A, Schoeller D, Vargas C, LaRowe TL. "Farm to School Elementary Programming Increases Access to Fruits and Vegetables and Increases Their Consumption Among Those with Low Intake." (Under review, *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*.)

Schools are typically motivated to buy food from local farmers in order to:

- Support local farms and economies
- Access a wider variety of foods
- Encourage students' healthy eating habits through agriculture and nutrition education
- Receive fresh, high-quality product
- Increase meal participation by offering food "with a farmer's face on it"
- Take advantage of opportunities to partner with producers for promotional and educational activities
- Increase students' knowledge of how and where their food is produced by learning about the farms that provide it

Farm to school is happening all over Wisconsin. Visit this interactive **Wisconsin Farm to School baseline map** to find out what farm to school related activities are happening, as reported by schools across the state.



[Wisconsin Farm to School baseline map](#)

Get started

Schools are allowed, and encouraged, to purchase a wide variety of foods from local producers. The **Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction memo regarding local purchasing for schools** lays out the guidelines for local purchasing.

Before diving into a farm to school program, it is important to assess your capacity to purchase locally grown product. Each school district varies in its ability to create local purchasing relationships. Assessing this ability is important for you and any new local vendors as you move forward. Use the **school nutrition director survey** to assess your current needs and capacity. Share this tool with any potential local vendors or community partners looking to work with you.



Wisconsin memo regarding local purchasing for schools



School nutrition director survey

Get your basic farm to school questions answered with our **frequently asked questions** tool. It includes information about food safety, insurance and more.



Wisconsin Farm to School frequently asked questions

Familiarize yourself with the **seasonal availability of Wisconsin foods** with this calendar. Farm to school is more than fruits and vegetables. Consider incorporating Wisconsin-grown grains, legumes, meats and dairy products like yogurt, milk and cheese into your school menu.



Seasonal availability of Wisconsin foods

Licensing and labeling requirements

It is important to know the regulations for purchasing locally grown products. The sale of most food products (other than whole, raw fresh fruits and vegetables) is regulated by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. The **licensing, labeling and regulation requirements in Wisconsin** tool offers a detailed look at state requirements by product and market. Schools fall under the “institution” category.

Get started



Licensing, labeling and regulation requirements in Wisconsin

State processing and licensing requirements for sales to schools

Food item sold to school	Wisconsin state requirements
Fresh produce, whole, uncut	None
Fresh produce, minimally processed (chopped, shredded...)	Must come from licensed facility
Dairy	Must come from licensed dairy plant
Meat	Must be processed at a USDA or Wisconsin state inspected facility
Honey	No license required (see detailed regulations for exceptions)
Maple syrup	Must be processed in licensed facility

Food safety

Food safety is an important consideration for all food purchases made by schools. School nutrition directors prioritize food safety and want assurance that vendors are reducing this risk. Many producers follow practices on their farms that maximize food safety. Examples include having a manure management plan, water cooling greens to remove field heat, using clean boxes for delivery and providing clear trace-back of product through labeling.

At this time there are no regulations on the sale of fresh fruits and vegetables. However, there may be changes coming soon due to the Food Safety Modernization Act. In the meantime, we recommend you work with farms that follow good agricultural practices. You can find more information about good agricultural practices, and what questions to ask farmers in the tool **buy local, buy safely: a guide for evaluating food safety practices at local produce farms**. The **buy local, buy safely checklist** provides a set of questions to ask farmers about their food safety practices.



Buy local, buy safely guide



Buy local, buy safely checklist



Mt. Horeb fourth graders sample heirloom tomatoes

Get started

There are many ways to assess the food safety practices of the producers you want to work with. This may be as straightforward as having growers provide answers to the buy local, buy safely checklist tool above, requesting they create an on-farm food safety plan (below) or ensuring a third-party audit such as Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) has taken place.

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) has compiled a **food safety website for farm to school** that provides information on state and federal regulations for individual farms, plus additional resources such as templates for assessing food safety risks: https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Growing_WI/FarmtoSchoolFoodSafety.aspx.

Initiate conversations about food safety with potential vendors so they clearly understand your needs. Some school nutrition directors are comfortable with the assurance gained from the buy local, buy safely checklist and a face-to-face conversation with a new vendor. Others want to see a new vendor's operation firsthand. The **on-farm food safety information for food service personnel** guide provides information on touring farms for food safety. There is no one correct approach to ensure food safety from seed to plate. Producers, school districts and distributors, when involved, must work together to ensure an informed food safety plan is in place, and works for all entities. The following **food safety success story** provides an example of one farm to school program's approach of building in expertise through a community partnership.



On-farm food safety information for food service personnel



Food safety success story

Community engagement

It is important to recognize that farm to school is not only the job of the school nutrition program, as it can sometimes be perceived. The benefits of farm to school are considerably richer and longer lasting when multiple school partners and advocates are involved. Diverse participation from school nutrition staff, administrators, teachers, nurses, parents, students and more is invaluable. These advocates can make all the difference in building programs that have ongoing community support and synergy. Ultimately, community engagement is a critical part of a sustainable farm to school program.



Students eat beets in the Seneca cafeteria

Get started

Advocates are motivated to invest their time and talents in farm to school programs for different reasons. For some, it is about the well-being of their children. For others, it is about support for local farms or the financial implications of the program. No matter what the reason, it is important to have a variety of people engaged in the process.

Farm to school activities that may be coordinated by community partners and other champions can include, but are not limited to:

- Local product research and procurement assistance
- Volunteer coordination
- Light food processing tasks
- Cafeteria or classroom taste tests
- Grant writing and administration
- School garden coordination or other hands-on educational activities
- Creation and dissemination of educational and outreach materials about a farm to school program
- Working with local media to stimulate coverage
- Scheduling and facilitating planning meetings
- Incorporating farm to school language in school wellness policies
- Presentations to school board members, parent-teacher associations, teachers, local organizations and other groups to broaden their awareness and support

Potential advocates from the community won't know the value of your farm to school program if they don't know about it! Present farm to school concepts to your school board, parent-teacher organization, staff and/or community groups to educate them and raise awareness about your program. The **farm to school 101 powerpoint and overview** will help in your outreach to key audiences. The **county health ranking and roadmap** website provides resources to help you engage your community: www.countyhealthrankings.org/roadmaps/action-center/work-together.



Tool

“Farm to school 101” powerpoint



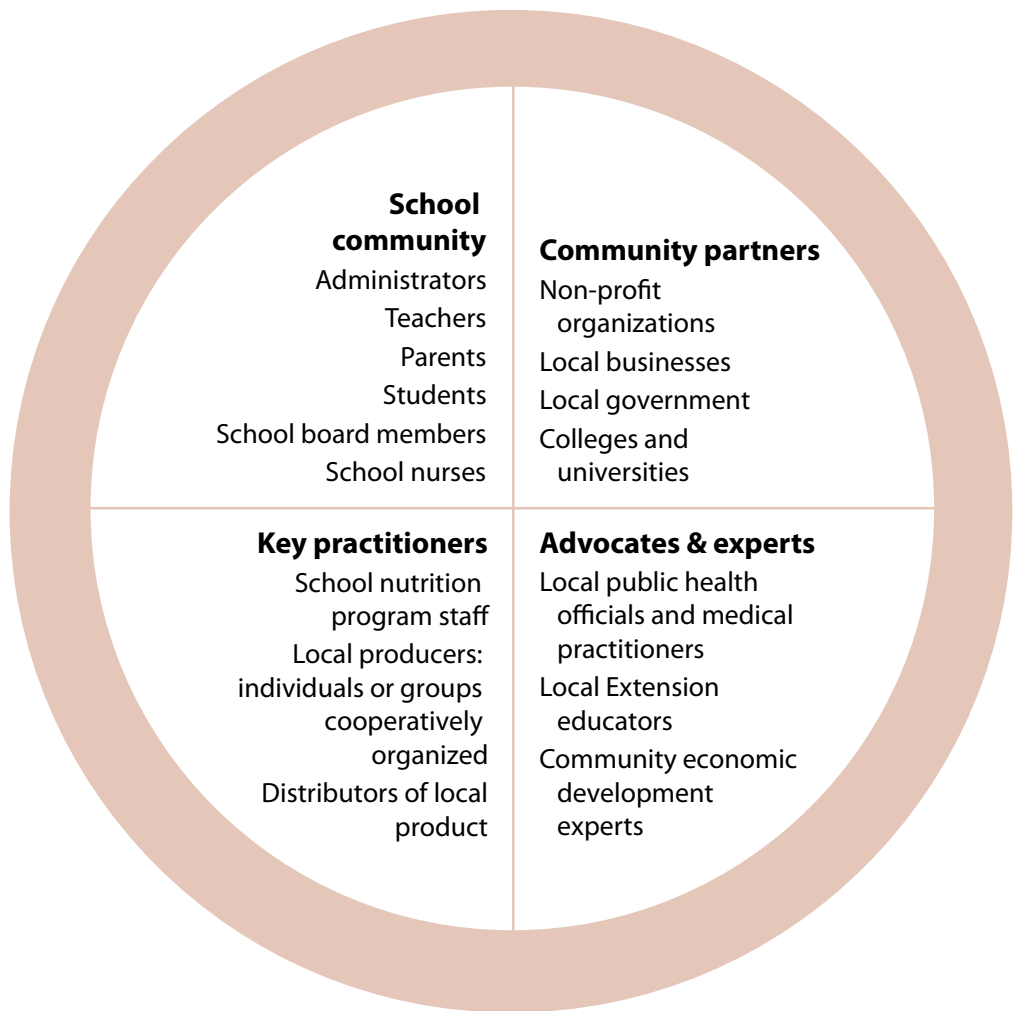
Tool

Wisconsin Farm to School overview



Bayfield County students work in the school garden

Community support for farm to school



Locate and purchase local foods

The task of identifying local producers who can meet your needs may be challenging. Assistance with this task and other outreach may be available by contacting organizations listed in the “Additional Resources” section at the end of the toolkit. The following steps can simplify the process of finding and purchasing local product:

- 1) Identify potential product sources
- 2) Invite potential vendors to submit bids
- 3) Review information
- 4) Meet with vendor(s) to negotiate details



Madison student enjoys a snack from a local farm

Identify potential product sources

Each of the following product sources—school gardens, local producers, producer groups and distributors—is considered an ‘approved source’ for school meal programs. As discussed in the previous section, state regulations and food safety concerns need to be addressed with any potential vendor.

Also, keep in mind that schools can source and buy local foods together. This practice is called cooperative purchasing. This can create ordering efficiencies and potentially lower costs through increased buying power. See page 18 under the Incorporate Local Foods section for Wood County’s success story with their Harvest of the Month collaboration.

Local producers—While there is no one-stop shop where you can identify all the producers in your area, there is a range of resources and strategies you or someone else can use to create a list of potential vendors. This task offers an opportunity to bring in a volunteer, request assistance from your local University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension agent, or seek help from others familiar with local food in your area.

Here are some possible ways to locate farms and producer groups in your area:

Farmers’ markets and Community Supported Agriculture farms are great places to identify and directly contact potential vendors. Most markets have a manager who can help you identify growers selling the product you’re looking for. Information about farmers’ markets and CSA farms can be found at www.wifarmersmarkets.org and www.csacoalition.org.

Locate and purchase local foods

Farm Fresh Atlases provide listings of Wisconsin producers and farmers' markets by region. These are available in print as well as online, free of charge: www.farmfreshatlas.org.

University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension has offices in each county that can help you locate producers in your area and possibly even provide you with a list. Contacts for your county can be found at www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/.

Local Harvest provides a searchable map identifying farms and markets in your area: www.localharvest.org.

The Institutional Food Market Coalition provides local food purchasing information for institutions, including schools, and provides listings of Wisconsin producers: www.ifmwi.org.

Food hubs, farmer cooperatives and produce auctions—These entities aggregate local product from small- and medium-sized producers in order to provide growers with access to larger scale markets such as food service operations. The USDA's working list of food hubs lists local food aggregators in Wisconsin and other states: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/local-food-directories/foodhubs>.

Distributors—Many food distributors are increasing their Wisconsin-grown offerings, so ask your distributor what they have available. Let your distributor know the types of local products you would like to purchase from them in the future. When purchasing local foods through a distributor, remember to request information such as specific farm names and locations so you can promote the local farms along with the local food you serve.

Department of Defense Fresh Program (DoD Fresh)—All schools participating in the National School Lunch Program are eligible to order fresh produce through the federally operated DoD Fresh Program. This is an economical option for schools to utilize federal entitlement dollars to increase fresh produce



Ratatouille at Mt. Horeb school kitchen

Locate and purchase local foods

in their meal programs. The DoD Fresh Program is supportive of farm to school efforts and strives to provide locally and regionally grown products. For details of how to participate, along with ordering procedures and timelines, go to <https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/usda/dod-fresh>. The **USDA fact sheet using DOD Fresh to purchase local produce** provides more information on how this program supports local purchasing.



USDA fact sheet: using DoD Fresh to purchase local produce

School Gardens—Food grown in a school garden or through a school’s agriculture education program can be donated and/or sold to the school nutrition program. If food is sold to the school nutrition program, it must be priced competitively. The **USDA school garden Q&A memo** addresses many common questions regarding the use of food from school gardens and how school nutrition programs can support school gardens.



USDA school garden Q & A memo

How much to buy?

Once you’ve decided which foods to purchase, you need to determine the volume required. You may know this already or have the information in your recipe. If not, the **servings to pounds calculator** created by the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry Farm to School Program can help you determine how much food to purchase. This calculator takes waste into account and determines your price per serving based on the cost of the food. The **USDA food buying guide for child nutrition programs** provides pounds to servings conversions for raw and cooked produce. The **pecks to pounds** tool from the Maryland Department of Agriculture converts commonly used farm measurements—such as bushels and crates—into approximate net weight for a variety of fruits and vegetables.



Heirloom tomato tasting

Locate and purchase local foods



Servings to pounds calculator



Food buying guide for child nutrition programs



Pecks to pounds

The procurement process

The procurement process is a set of procedures for purchasing goods or services. This process usually involves multiple steps to identify a needed product or service, draft specifications and a solicitation document, solicit pricing, and buy, receive and pay for the product. Depending on the method, procurement can require a few simple steps or many complex steps. Regardless, procurement processes are intended to ensure that open and fair competition is maintained throughout all business transactions.

Schools use either an *informal* or a *formal* procurement method when purchasing food from vendors. The informal procurement method may be used if the cost of the food falls under the small purchase threshold. This threshold for Wisconsin schools using USDA funds is \$150,000, although some school districts may set a lower threshold. The formal procurement method is required for any purchase with an estimated value equal to or greater than the small purchase threshold.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction provides an overview and **comparison of different procurement methods**. The majority of local food procurement by Wisconsin schools, purchases under \$150,000, fall under the category of Small Purchases and Micro-Purchases. Both of these processes can be straightforward and easy to track.

Once an informal or formal procurement method is selected, a required set of steps is followed to purchase the product. In order to ensure that open competition is maintained, federal and state regulations stress the need to obtain at least three quotes from different vendors before awarding the sale. In all procurement scenarios, remember the phrase “three bids and a buy,” meaning you must receive and document at least three quotes, either formal or informal. The **informal procurement method checklist**, included in the **three bids and a buy** tool, helps ensure all required steps are addressed.

Locate and purchase local foods



Tool

Comparison of procurement methods



Tool

Informal procurement method: three bids and a buy

Use the **solicitation tracking document** to communicate product specifications and explain the bid submission process.



Tool

Solicitation tracking document

Whether soliciting formal or informal bids, the following tools can help. Use the **sample vendor letter** to outline what you're looking for and explain the bid submission process. Use the **farm business questionnaire** to collect information from growers such as food safety procedures, ordering and delivery logistics and other details you will need. Growers can also be asked to communicate their products and prices on the **product availability and pricing form**.



Tool

Sample vendor letter



Tool

Farm business questionnaire



Tool

Product availability and pricing form

For more information on a formal bidding process for purchases over \$150,000, see the **Sealed Bid** and **Competitive Proposal** sections of the DPI Procurement Method website at <https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/procurement/methods>.



New Richmond student tries new foods

Locate and purchase local foods

Geographic preference in procurement by schools

A process known as geographic preference was established in the 2008 Farm Bill through an amendment to the National School Lunch Act. Institutions receiving funds through the Child Nutrition Programs may apply a geographic preference when procuring unprocessed locally grown or locally raised agricultural products. Geographic preference is normally used with the formal procurement method or when a school is procuring the services of a prime vendor. For more information on how to apply geographic preference, go to <https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/procurement/produce/geographic-preference>.

Meet with vendor(s) to negotiate details

When you have identified the vendor(s) with whom you would like to work, set up a meeting to negotiate details such as delivery schedule and invoicing. Use the **new vendor meeting checklist** to ensure you cover all important details.



New vendor meeting checklist

Clarify details such as packaging, price and delivery with vendors in writing. Use this **sample purchasing agreement** as a guide.



Sample purchasing agreement

Read the following success story on how Manitowoc County was able to develop strong relationships with local farmers for their farm to school program.



Wisconsin Farm to School Success Story: Ensuring Meaningful Participation in Farm to School

Incorporate local foods

There are a variety of ways to incorporate local foods into your meal programs. Local foods can be included in your school breakfast or lunch, and used either as a side item or a ‘center of the plate’ item. Many local foods are well suited for fresh fruit, vegetable or salad bars. Serving locally grown fruits and vegetables is a natural fit if your school participates in the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program. Summer meal programs benefit from the incorporation of local foods, too. Local foods may be served outside of reimbursable meal programs; for instance, they can be featured in educational taste tests and sampling.

Strategies for incorporating local foods into your school’s meal plan must be practical and may require creativity. Adding local foods incrementally will allow trial and error without unnecessary risk and will help you work toward changes that may be more sustainable in the long run. We recommend you start slowly the first year by substituting locally grown items, when available, for one or two products you typically use in existing menu items or salad bars. The next step is to incorporate a new local food product or menu item. It’s better to start small and succeed than to make many changes too quickly.

*Get creative with **recipe development**— ask staff to bring in their favorite recipes, or hold a contest with prize incentives for staff, students or people in the community! This is a win-win: gather recipe ideas AND build involvement and enthusiasm for your program. See page 21 for more information about cooking contests.*

Explore menu options

Many schools have found creative ways to integrate local items while working within their budget and labor constraints. Replacing unprocessed fruits or vegetables such as apples or potatoes with locally sourced substitutes likely entails a manageable degree of change and effort. Minimally processed, locally sourced products like carrot sticks or broccoli florets—if they are available in your area—can be substituted for existing menu items.

Other options for integrating local foods may require more staff training and adjustment time. Light, on-site processing such as chopping veggie sticks or roasting potatoes requires up-front effort. But examples from other schools show that, once systems are in place, overall labor hours may not necessarily increase.

On-site processing may require new equipment and staff training. The **list of recommended kitchen equipment for light processing** suggests tools that may increase your efficiency.



List of recommended kitchen equipment for light processing

Incorporate local foods

New recipes that include local ingredients may require cooking from scratch. Menu items cooked from scratch with local ingredients might include pasta and pizza sauces, roasted chicken wrap sandwiches with grated, local vegetables, coleslaw, soups and chili. This option requires the most planning and development, but may result in delicious, nutritious additions to your menu that you and your staff will take pride in. The Chop! Chop! culinary skills videos will show you how to use and menu Wisconsin-grown produce (www.cias.wisc.edu/chopchop). The Institute of Child Nutrition also produced Culinary Techniques for Healthy School Meals: www.nfsmi.org/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=266. The **list of recommended kitchen equipment for from-scratch cooking** suggests tools to make your work more efficient.



List of recommended kitchen equipment for from-scratch cooking

Visit these websites for tried and tested recipes:

Home Grown: Menus of Wisconsin <https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/national-school-lunch-program/menu-planning/cycle-menu/home-grown>

Chop! Chop! Resource Guide <https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/team-nutrition/pdf/Chop%20Chop%20Resource%20Guide%202016%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

The Lunch Box: scalable recipes with nutritional analysis
www.thelunchbox.org/recipes-menus

Massachusetts Farm to School Cookbook: school-friendly recipes
www.massfarmtoschool.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/farm_to_school_cookbook.pdf

New School Cuisine: Nutritious and Seasonal Recipes for School Cooks by School Cooks <https://healthymeals.fns.usda.gov/state-sharing-center/vermont/new-school-cuisine-cookbook>

Oklahoma Kidchen Expedition www.kidchenexpedition.com/cookbook/

“Incorporating farm to school into our program has actually been a fun and invigorating addition to my job over the past three years. I am proud of what we have accomplished. The most rewarding part is seeing the kids catch on and enjoy the healthy, local foods we can offer. We are all benefitting.”

— Nutrition program staff member, Chilton, WI

Incorporate local foods

Consider incorporating a salad or fresh fruit and vegetable bar to easily serve seasonal produce while avoiding the challenge of announcing a specific product in advance on lunch menus. Fresh fruit and vegetable bars provide menu flexibility. Local, seasonal product can be highlighted when available, while fresh produce can be offered year round. Students can freely choose healthful items at a produce bar, providing them with both nutritional and education benefits.

Based on the experience of participating schools, a fresh fruit and vegetable bar can be an efficient, cost effective aid in meeting nutritional requirements, and central to a farm to school program. In fact, salad bars can provide all components of a reimbursable meal, excluding milk, if properly managed. The following **field guide to salad bars** provides an overview and how-to information on starting and maintaining a variety of bars featuring fresh and local produce. The **fresh fruit and vegetable bar: production log** can be used to effectively plan and track costs and consumption patterns in your salad bar. **Let's move salad bars to schools** links schools with funding for salad bar equipment. More information can be found at saladbars2schools.org.



Students and chef at Holmen's Sand Lake Elementary



Field guide to salad bars in schools



Fresh fruit and vegetable bars: production log

Community partners and funding can support acquisition of salad bars, even for large school districts. Read the **salad bar success story** to find out how REAP Food Group worked with the Madison Metropolitan School District to build a salad bar program over time.



Wisconsin Farm to School Success Story: Madison Metropolitan School District Garden Bars

Incorporate local foods

Processing and freezing local produce on site

Some schools process local produce on site, either in school kitchens or at central processing facilities. Processing lets schools take advantage of the abundance and affordability of local items when they are in season, and freezing provides access to local products throughout the school year. The “**Chefs move to schools**” video highlights the Viroqua school district’s success with processing, freezing and preparing local produce within their budget, and linking educational efforts with their farm to school program: www.youtube.com/watch?v=JJBFxIjwC2E.

Harvest of the Month

Although it may require more advance planning than a salad bar, a Harvest of the Month program is a way to simultaneously structure your procurement of local product, promote local foods and educate kids about fruits and vegetables—and the farms that grow them. Harvest of the Month generally highlights one local product a month, utilizing it in one or multiple ways. As schools become familiar with local items, Harvest of the Month can include more than one item per month. The **Harvest of the Month sample calendars** provide examples of how schools can plan products a year in advance as a strategy to set procurement, menu and educational goals.

Take it slow! Harvest of the Month can start simply with an educational sampling or taste testing of one local product each month. You can then incorporate the Harvest of the Month item into a meal program one or more times each month. Promote Harvest of the Month in newsletters and school menus, and provide complimentary classroom education activities for teachers. Harvest of the Month is a start-up strategy that can be launched at an individual school and grow to reach an entire district, as described in the **Wood County Harvest of the Month success story and calendar**.

For more information on Harvest of the Month promotional strategies, see page 20. Additionally, Harvest of the Month resources are available at <http://harvestofthemonth.cdph.ca.gov>.



Tool

[Harvest of the Month sample calendar](#)



Tool

[Wood County Harvest of the Month calendar](#)



Tool

[Wood County Harvest of the Month success story](#)

Incorporate local foods

Work with staff

Training employees to handle fresh produce or other local food fits within the parameters of their job descriptions and is one way to engage them in the process of building a farm to school program. Encouraging staff to take ownership and pride in their work will support your farm to school efforts and all aspects of your school's nutrition program. Each staff member can assist with program development and problem solving to achieve your farm to school goals. In general, involving staff throughout the process of developing a farm to school initiative, rather than just including them in its implementation, will increase their investment and improve your odds of a successful, sustainable program. Tips for involving staff:

- Train staff to “work smart,” utilizing their time efficiently. Match skill levels to jobs
- Work out production schedules for local items. Know and respect the limits of your staff (and yourself) when considering labor and time management.
- Provide training and encouragement when making production changes.
- Develop master recipes with staff input to guarantee labor costs for entrees, side dishes and scratch items.
- Monitor progress of the program, including labor hours, on a weekly basis.

*During implementation, farm to school programs report an **increase of fresh fruit and vegetable consumption of 25 to 84 percent.** **



Onalaska kitchen staff serving a local roasted root vegetable blend

*Joshi and Azuma, 2009

Promote your program



Miss Onalaska helps promote an elementary school's local foods tasting day

Make sure others know about your farm to school efforts. Informing your school's students, parents and staff, and the broader community, about your farm to school program will keep current supporters engaged, energize new advocates and increase the popularity of local menu items. Here are a few possible opportunities to communicate and promote farm to school with your audiences:

Create your own promotional materials. Take lots of pictures! Promote your program to your school community, and the broader community, with photos of happy kids eating Wisconsin-grown foods. Make flyers, share stories in the school newsletter or post images to social media.

Post signs at the point of service and other lunchroom locations to inform students and staff of new foods and the farms where they are grown. The **sample flyer** shows just how simple promotional materials can be. Use the **template flyer** by inserting photos of the farm and food you're buying. Be sure to include a few interesting facts about that food. You can also show where the farm is located on the map.



Tool

Sample flyer—Where does your food come from?



Tool

Template flyer—Where does your food come from?

Send letters to staff and parents encouraging them to engage students in conversations about their food and where it comes from. Parents and teachers can reinforce your educational messages and extend your farm to school program outside of the cafeteria.



Tool

Sample promotion letter for staff and parents

Communicate your farm to school program through menus. Menus can be used effectively to promote local foods and special cafeteria activities associated with farm to school programs, such as tastings, but can also help to build in needed flexibility when purchasing locally. Many schools will simply write “seasonal vegetable” on their menus, giving themselves options to use what’s in season from local growers.

If you are using Harvest of the Month, make sure the specific month’s item is highlighted on the menu. Simple **sample school menus promoting local food or harvest of the month** are included as a tool below. Highlight Harvest of the Month in cafeteria posters or other point-of-service signage, or create take-home materials to reach as many students and parents as possible. Consider including community

Promote your program

partners like grocery stores, retailers and restaurants as promotional partners in your Harvest of the Month campaign. School and community partners can hold concurrent promotional events or share educational materials like recipes, fun facts or farm information.

The Wisconsin DPI offers a seasonal menu planning resource: <https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/national-school-lunch-program/menu-planning/cycle-menu/home-grown>.

Minnesota's farm to school website has many promotional materials available for free as well as information on a range of foods that could be highlighted through Harvest of the Month: www.extension.umn.edu/food/farm-to-school/.



Tool

Sample school menus promoting local food and/or Harvest of the Month

Publish farm to school information in newsletters, on your school's website and through local media outlets. Submit a letter to the editor or a press release to your local newspaper. Read **Throw a Winning Pitch** at www.farmtoschool.org/Resources/Media%20Tip%20Sheet.pdf for advocacy resources you can use when working with the media.

Plan healthy school lunch cooking contests. Involve students in recipe development with healthy school lunch cooking contests. These contests challenge students to come up with school meals that meet USDA nutrition requirements, fit the school district's budget, incorporate local product and taste great. The winning menu can be incorporated into the school menu rotation.

The Viroqua Area School District's Harvest Challenge is one example of a healthy school lunch cooking contest: http://lacrossetribune.com/vernonbroadcaster/lifestyles/area-schools-participate-in-harvest-challenge/article_a4b25976-faad-50ca-a416-4a96191aea8e.htm. The **Youth Get Active with School Lunch success story** describes how participation in the Harvest Challenge and Cooking Up Change, a national healthy school meal cooking contest, was a life-changing experience for Vernon County students.



Tool

Wisconsin Farm to School Success Story: Youth Get Active with School Lunch

For more information on Cooking up Change, see www.healthyschoolscampaign.org/programs/cooking-up-change/.



Laurel High School (Viroqua) Harvest Challenge team

Educate students



Students learn about locally grown vegetables

Students are more likely to eat new items in the lunchroom if they first learn about the food and where it comes from. Turn your students into more adventurous eaters with comprehensive farm to school education activities both inside and outside the classroom! Use the following tools to help you, the teaching staff or other partners on your farm to school team get started.

There are many opportunities to educate students about the local food served in the cafeteria, and to expand their knowledge of where food comes from and how it's raised. Harvest of the Month is a great way to incorporate food into the cafeteria, classroom and community. A variety of curriculum resources for farm to school are listed below, and many of these lessons meet the Wisconsin Model Academic Standards, which are listed by academic area at <https://dpi.wi.gov/standards>. Specifically, many farm to school activities and lessons align with the **Wisconsin Model Academic Standards for Nutrition**.



Wisconsin Model Academic Standards for Nutrition

Taste testing is a valuable way to introduce students to new food items by providing them with small samples in the classroom or cafeteria. Taste testing can be incorporated into lessons or school meals, and it can provide students with an opportunity to evaluate new food items. Vermont FEED (Food Education Every Day) created a robust farm to school **guide to taste testing** that can help you get the most out of your classroom or lunchroom tasting experiences.

Vermont FEED's Guide to Taste Testing:

<http://vtfeed.org/resources/guide-taste-testing-local-foods-schools>

Composting in the classroom or in the lunchroom is an excellent way to educate students, reduce waste and create fertile soil for your school garden. Use the **school composting guide** to explore ideas for both classroom- and lunchroom-based methods.



School composting guide

Interested in starting or expanding a school garden? The **Got dirt? Youth garden toolkit** provides guidance on how to get started, along with many helpful examples of successful gardens. A companion online school garden curriculum training called **Cultivating childhood wellness through gardening** is now available online.

Educate students



Got dirt? Youth garden toolkit



Cultivating childhood wellness through gardening

Use the **Got veggies? Garden-based nutrition education curriculum** to inspire students to learn about and eat foods fresh from the garden. This curriculum is designed for kindergarten through second grade students.



Got veggies? Garden-based nutrition education curriculum (grades K-2)

Read how one farm to school program incorporated a garden into its curriculum and engaged students in experiential learning.



Wisconsin Farm to School Success Story: Thomas Jefferson Elementary School Garden (Wausau)

For older elementary students, the **Nutritious, Delicious, Wisconsin Curriculum** links the study of Wisconsin to the food grown and processed in our state.



Nutritious, Delicious, Wisconsin (grades 3-5, relevant to 4th grade Wisconsin studies)

Farm field trips are fantastic for engaging students. Field trips are a fun way to increase students' knowledge and excitement about fresh fruits and vegetables. Maximize your students' educational experience by using **the hayride: a resource for educational farm field trips**.



The hayride: a resource for educational farm field trips

In addition to the resources included in this toolkit, there are hundreds more websites, curriculum guides and lesson plans related to food and nutrition. We have combed through many of them to create this list of **food education resources** that build an appreciation of food and create connections between farms and schools.



Food education resources



Bayfield County students enjoy school garden produce

Evaluate your work

Evaluating your farm to school program can demonstrate impact, communicate the value of your work and help you more effectively target resources. Information on your program, activities and outcomes are invaluable when seeking support from policy makers, community funders or grant programs. Evaluation data can demonstrate both strengths and successes worthy of ongoing support, as well as areas requiring further attention. In addition, by evaluating your program, you are adding to the pool of collective farm to school data at the state and national levels that is increasingly critical for illustrating the positive outcomes of farm to school programming and addressing policy and funding needs.

For example, the most recent Wisconsin statewide evaluation effort demonstrated the following results:

- Farm to school increases knowledge and attitudes, as well as consumption, of fruits and vegetables among children by providing more access to fruit and vegetables through lunch meals.
- Improvements in student behavior tend to increase incrementally with more years of farm to school programming.
- The above implies that farm to school programs may have a gradual, yet sustaining, positive impact on student health behaviors.

Following is the full **Farm to school program evaluation report** coordinated through the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



Wisconsin Farm to School program evaluation report

What to evaluate:

The following criteria are commonly evaluated in farm to school programs:

1. Student knowledge and attitudes about fresh fruits/vegetables and other local foods
2. Student behaviors when consuming fresh fruits/vegetables and other local foods
3. Serving frequency and variety of fresh fruits/vegetables and other local foods
4. Local food purchases in volume and dollars
5. Student meal participation rates in connection with farm to school educational and engagement activities

Evaluate your work

6. Frequency/duration of educational activities in classrooms
7. Frequency/duration of student engagement activities, such as farm field trips, tastings, cooking demos or contests, etc.
8. Frequency/duration of school garden or greenhouse activities

While robust evaluation can demonstrate the educational, health, economic and community impacts of a farm to school program, a comprehensive evaluation program is no small undertaking. If you lack outside funding or support for evaluation activities, don't give up. You can still evaluate your program if you start small. Begin by establishing a baseline of information, and build your evaluation program each year. Consistency is key. It's important to continue to track the same measures over multiple years in order to show long-term impact. Once you have established successful evaluation practices for one or more indicators, then build in new evaluation components.

The following evaluation tools can be used in tandem or individually to help you collect and organize data illustrating various impacts of your farm to school program.

Student outcomes

Knowledge, attitudes and consumption behavior survey—This set of questionnaires is intended to assess students' knowledge about basic nutrition concepts, attitudes and perceptions toward fresh fruits and vegetables, general healthy eating habits and exposure to agricultural concepts. Each survey comes with a scoring guide to aid in the assessment process.



Knowledge, attitudes and consumption behavior survey

Height and weight measurements—One long-term, desired public health outcome for farm to school is to decrease the prevalence of overweight and obesity among all



Fresh fruit and vegetable bars help to reinforce student choices and healthy portion sizes.

Evaluate your work

age groups and within all socioeconomic groups. Farm to school has the potential to be part of the solution, by way of improving dietary habits. If your school has an interest in monitoring the student population as a whole (not at the individual level), measuring students' heights and weights, and calculating BMI z-scores or percentiles can be a long-term surveillance strategy for farm to school and other health-related programming.



Tool

Height and weight measurements



Mini nacho bar lunch at Chilton High School

Lunch tray photo observation—If your school has the capacity to take and analyze photos of lunch trays before and after a meal, the resulting data can be used to estimate amounts of fruits and vegetables and/or local foods consumed on that day. Results can also indicate daily waste patterns. Photo analysis as a tool requires significant person power, and schools need to determine if this approach is manageable.

Program activity

Monthly activity reports —This spreadsheet tracks farm to school activities, grouped according to the following program areas: procurement, classroom lessons, engagement activities and garden activities. This data can be used to describe a program's implementation level and analyze the relative importance of the program areas to observed student outcomes.



Tool

Monthly activity reports user guide



Tool

Monthly activity reports

Local purchasing tracking tool—This simple chart can be customized to record annual purchases of local foods including fruits, vegetables, meats, dairy, grains, etc.



Tool

Local purchasing tracking

Evaluate your work

Key participant attitudes

Teacher, parent, administrator and farmer interviews—This is a guide for interviewing key stakeholder groups generally involved in farm to school. Results can be used to better meet the needs of the people involved.



Key stakeholder interviews

Student focus groups—This guide aids in documenting the student experience with farm to school, and can inform the process of adjusting program areas to better reach students.



Student focus groups

Nationally, the USDA is tracking farm to school activities in each state. Watch for the **USDA Farm to School Census** and be sure to participate. The current USDA Farm to School Census results are available at <https://farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov/>.

In order to comprehensively evaluate farm to school programs, especially those with multiple activities occurring simultaneously, evaluation tasks must be shared across program areas and cannot be accomplished by the school nutrition staff alone. Nutrition staff, teachers, students, administrators, community partners and others can all collect information on a diverse, extensive program. The agencies and organizations listed in the Additional Resources section may be able to help you identify sources of financial and technical support for in-depth program evaluation.

Evaluation can be a critical part of sustaining farm to school programs. As you segue into the next section of this toolkit, consider how evaluation can help you build a sustainable program over time.

“Farm to school programs in Wisconsin are clearly showing positive impacts on students’ understanding of key nutritional and agricultural concepts, as well as increases in student consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. Positive impacts increase with the number of years a program exists within a school or community.”

Bontrager Yoder A, Liebhart J, McCarty DJ, Meinen A, Schoeller D, Vargas C, LaRowe TL. “Farm to School Elementary Programming Increases Access to Fruits and Vegetables and Increases Their Consumption Among Those with Low Intake.” Under review, *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*.

Build sustainability

Once you've established a farm to school program, how do you sustain its momentum and increase support for your work? Sustainability of farm to school programming is multifaceted. The sustainability of the program depends on the relationships and protocols you build into your nutrition and education programs, community engagement, policy changes at the school and district level, and fundraising. You can use the tools in this toolkit to institutionalize farm to school in your kitchens, lunchrooms, classrooms and gardens. These tools can help you build and maintain relationships with vendors, farmers, school staff and community members. Building community engagement into your work, both within your school and beyond its boundaries, can energize and sustain your program for years to come.

Schools that participate in the federal school meal program are required to have a school wellness policy. Farm to school advocates can work with you and your school or district to incorporate the goals and values of Wisconsin Farm to School (shown on page 2) into your wellness policy. This can help ensure that the nutrition, education, community and economic components of a comprehensive farm to school program remain a priority in your district. The **Model wellness policy language for schools** produced by the Community Food Security Coalition provides further guidance on incorporating farm to school into school wellness policies. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction created a **Wisconsin wellness: putting policy into practice** tool to assist schools in developing successful wellness policies. The **Wisconsin school garden wellness policy tool** can help you integrate language specific to school gardens into your wellness policy.



**Promoting local purchasing and farm to school activities:
Model wellness policy language for schools**



Wisconsin Wellness: Putting Policy into Practice



Wisconsin school garden wellness policy tool

The **Wisconsin School Board Association's article** on local purchasing policies describes local purchasing efforts by schools and provides examples of purchasing policies adopted by some districts. The **advocating local policy change** tool serves as a guide to working with school partners to create change at the school or district level.

Build sustainability



Wisconsin School Board Association local purchasing policy article



Advocating local policy change

Fundraising is a valuable way to support and sustain farm to school programs. Although outside funding is not necessary to incorporate local food in the cafeteria, start a school garden or bring farm to school into the classroom, it can help accomplish these objectives. There are various ways to raise funds for farm to school including community fundraisers, special events, PTA/PTO fundraising, grants and in-kind donations from community partners. The **farm to school fundraising** document from the National Farm to School Network provides an overview of fundraising opportunities.



Funding Farm to School

In addition to supporting your efforts, fundraising can build community connections with your farm to school program. Think creatively about opportunities to simultaneously promote farm to school, raise funds and increase community access to local foods. REAP Food Group's **Taste of Wisconsin Fundraiser** is one example of a creative approach to raising money that engages the community: www.reapfoodgroup.org/farm-to-school/school-fundraiser.



Washburn elementary school garden

Additional resources



Portage county students celebrate vegetables

Connect with ongoing farm to school initiatives, technical assistance and other resources available through local, state and federal organizations. These organizations may have additional resources to strengthen your outreach to local schools and producers.

Join the Wisconsin Farm to School Newsletter to stay up to date on resources, events and activities in the state: <http://eepurl.com/cCMvPf>

Wisconsin Farm to School; Farm to School Toolkit for Producers: www.cias.wisc.edu/toolkits

UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems: www.cias.wisc.edu/category/farm-to-school/

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction farm to school information: <https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/f2s>

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection AmeriCorps Farm to School Program: https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Growing_WI/FarmToSchool.aspx

Wisconsin School Garden Network: www.communitygroundworks.org/what-we-do/wsgi

REAP Food Group: <http://www.reapfoodgroup.org/farm-to-school>

National Farm to School Network: www.farmtoschool.org

USDA Farm to School: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/farm-school>

The Lunchbox: Healthy Tools to Help All Schools: www.thelunchbox.org

The Institute of Child Nutrition: www.nfsmi.org

Acknowledgements

Authors

Vanessa Herald, Wisconsin Farm to School Program Outreach Specialist, UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems

Amanda Knitter, Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Division of Public Health, Bureau of Community Health Promotion

Sara Tedeschi, Wisconsin Farm to School Program Director, UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems

Doug Wubben, Farm to School Specialist, UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems

Editing by Cris Carusi and Ruth McNair, CIAS; publication design and layout by Ruth McNair

2014 Toolkit updates review committee:

Jennifer Blazek, Polk County Agriculture Agent, University of Wisconsin-Extension

Magdalen Dale, Highland Valley Farm and AmeriCorps Farm to School Community Outreach member for the Bayfield, Washburn, and Ashland school districts.

Teresa Engel, Buy Local, Buy Wisconsin, Economic Development Program, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

Sarah Elliott, Local and Regional Agriculture Program Supervisor, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

Sarah Foster, Project Assistant, UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems

Vanessa Herald, Wisconsin Farm to School Program Outreach Specialist, UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems

Amy Korth, Nutrition Education and School Breakfast Specialist, University of Wisconsin-Extension, Cooperative Extension

Cheryl Peil, Food and Nutrition Director, Elmbrook Public Schools

Katherine Pike, Nutrition Program Consultant, Department of Public Instruction

Elizabeth Severson, Nutrition Program Consultant, Department of Public Instruction

Sara Soka, Program Advisor, Transform WI, Wisconsin Clearinghouse for Prevention Resources, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Kelli Strader, Nutrition Coordinator, Wisconsin Division of Public Health

Sara Tedeschi, Wisconsin Farm to School Program Outreach Specialist, UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems

Acknowledgements

2011 Reviewers and contributors

Kathy Bass, Nutrition Program Consultant, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction School Nutrition Team

D. Andrew Bernhardt, Agricultural Innovation Center, UW Cooperative Extension

Karen Brummer, Supervisor of School Nutrition, School District of New Richmond

Jill Camber-Davidson, Nutrition Education Consultant, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Diane Chapeta, Operations Manager, Fifth Season Cooperative

Sarah Combs, Public Health Nutritionist, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction School Nutrition Team

Alicia Dill, Public Health Nutritionist, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction School Nutrition Team

Pam Harris, General Supervisor, Mukwonago Area School District

Vanessa Herald, Great Lakes Region Farm to School Network Coordinator, UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems

Diane Mayerfeld, Wisconsin State Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program Coordinator, UW Cooperative Extension

Amy Meinen, Nutrition Coordinator, Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Division of Public Health, Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity Program



Madison students pick spinach on a nearby farm

Susan Peterman, School Nutrition Director, Middleton Cross Plains Area School District

Joni Ralph, School Nutrition Director, La Crosse School District

Julie Shelton, Nutrition Program Consultant, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction School Nutrition Team

Camilla Vargas, AmeriCorps Farm to School Program Manager, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection