Overview

About this toolkit


A Madison student meets a chicken on a farm field trip

Welcome to the *Wisconsin Farm to School: Toolkit for Producers*. Farm to school encourages healthy lifestyles in children and helps support local economies. Whether you are just starting off or looking to expand your production for schools, 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 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 School Nutrition Programs* at **www.cias.wisc.edu/toolkits**.

School nutrition programs share many similarities, yet they all have unique needs. Understanding their needs and being able to clearly communicate your own are keys to a successful initiative.

What is Wisconsin Farm to School?

Wisconsin Farm to School encourages healthy lifestyles in children and helps support 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 activities such as school gardening and farm field trips.

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. Farmer benefits include increased market diversification and an average five percent increase in income from farm to school sales. Student impacts include strengthened knowledge about and attitudes toward agriculture, food, nutrition and the environment. Farm 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.

Tool **Benefits of farm to school**

Overview

Farm to school benefits reaped by farmers include:

- Expanded market opportunities and income potential
- New markets for surplus product or cosmetically imperfect product
- Market diversification to help manage risk
- Increased awareness of individual farms and the products they sell
- New audiences for agritourism and on-farm opportunities, such as field trips
- Enhanced relationships with consumers
- Increased demand for local food

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:

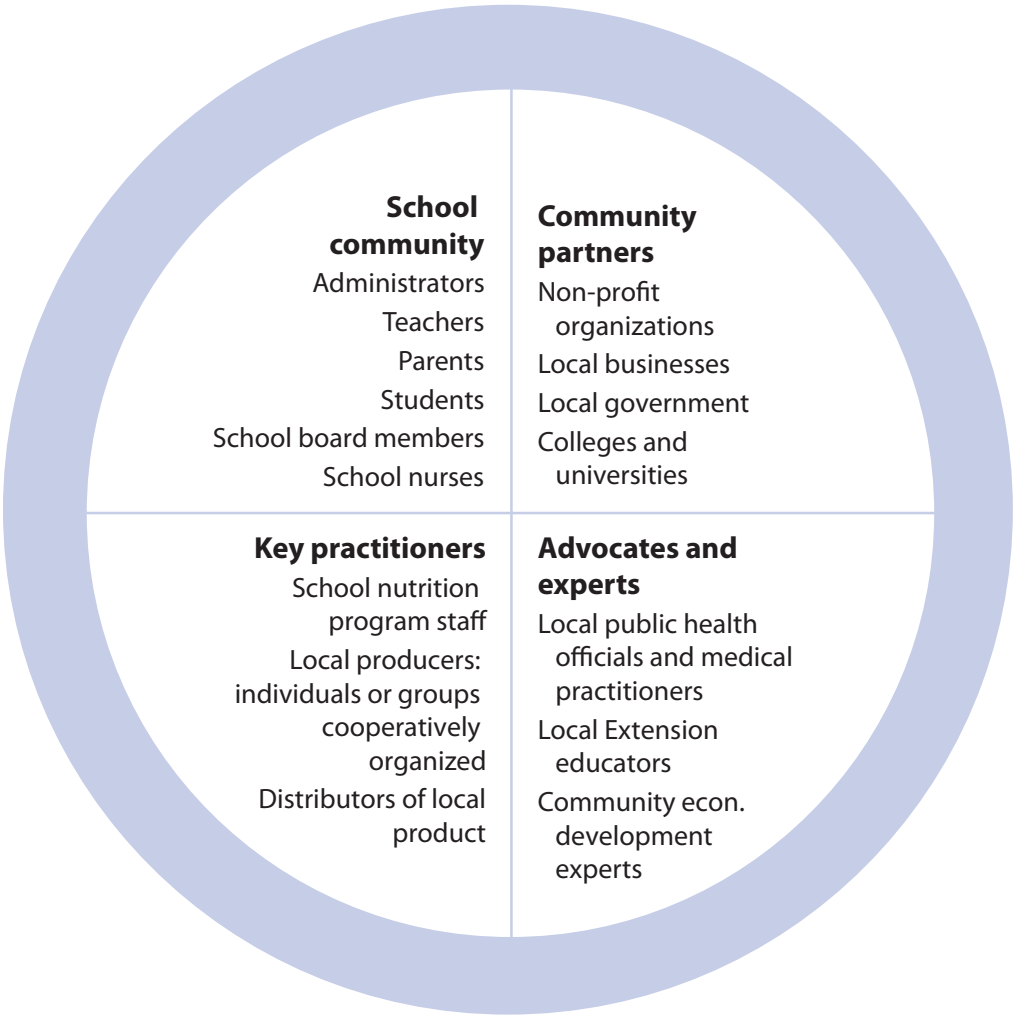
- An individual's lifelong well-being depends on healthy eating habits
- All children should have access to fresh, minimally processed food as part of a nutritionally balanced school meal program
- Wisconsin farms that serve local markets make essential contributions to a diverse food system
- Schools 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

"Now that my school customers know me and what I have to offer, they're easy to work with. I like knowing what to expect since they know what they will need far in advance. I also like knowing my produce is helping to feed kids in my community."

—Rufus Haucke, Owner and Farmer, Keewaydin Farms, Viola, WI

Overview

Community support for farm to school



Overview

Schools are motivated to purchase from local producers so they can:

- Support their local farms and economies
- Access a wide 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"
- Increase students' knowledge of how their food is produced through educational partnerships with producers

The benefits of farm to school are considerably richer and longer lasting when diverse community members and advocates are involved. Farm to school programs are all unique and there is no "one size fits all" recipe for success. It is important that both school nutrition directors and producers understand the many key support roles needed for a comprehensive approach to farm to school beyond food procurement. The graphic on page 3 provides a snapshot of the types of community members and experts who can help further farm to school efforts. Consider approaching individuals you believe may be interested in getting involved.

Students enjoy grass-fed beef burgers from a local farm

Farm to school activities that may be coordinated by community partners and other champions may 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

Overview

- Scheduling and facilitating planning meetings
- Presentations to school board members, parent-teacher associations, teachers and other groups to broaden their awareness and support

Farm to school has been growing in Wisconsin for years and is happening statewide. Visit the interactive **Wisconsin Farm to School baseline map** to find out what kinds of farm to school activities are happening, as reported by schools across the state. The **Wisconsin Farm to School website** provides a clearinghouse of current information on all aspects of farm to school. Familiarize yourself with the resources and services provided through this site.

Wisconsin Farm to School baseline map

Wisconsin Farm to School website (coming soon)

In the UW-Madison College of Agricultural and Life Sciences *Grow* magazine article **"The Locavore School,"** the history of the Wisconsin farm to school movement leads into lessons learned and strategies used by schools and communities in the state to build sustainable programs. The **Crawford County success story** shows that farm to school programming has fostered broader community engagement in regional food efforts. Finally, hear from **Lapacek's Orchard** about how farm to school has impacted their business and helped contribute to increased sales: **www.youtube.com/watch?v=EIwHuqdGRik**.

The Locavore School

Crawford County success story

THE BENEFITS OF FARM TO SCHOOL

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NOURISHING KIDS AND COMMUNITIES
The National Farm to School Network sprouted from the desire to support community-based food systems, strengthen family farms, and improve student health. Funded in part by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Network coordinates, promotes and expands the Farm to School movement at the state, regional and national levels. The Network is a project of the Tides Center.

Farm to School Benefits

Farm to School connects schools (K-12) and early care education settings (often sub-categorized as Farm to Preschool) with local food producers with the objectives of serving local, healthy food in school cafeterias; improving student nutrition; providing agriculture, health and nutrition education opportunities; and supporting local and regional farmers.

Schools and early care centers with Farm to School programs participate in activities such as purchasing locally and regionally grown food; featuring farm-fresh foods on their menus; incorporating nutrition and agriculture-based curriculum; and providing students experiential learning opportunities through farm visits, school gardens, taste-tests, composting and more.

The number of Farm to School programs in the United States has rapidly increased in number, from fewer than ten in 1997 to an estimated 12,500 programs in 2012. The positive impacts of Farm to School programs on various sectors have also been documented over the years.

Farm to School programs provide a variety of benefits to students, parents, schools, communities and farmers. A brief summary of these include strengthening children's and community members' knowledge about and attitudes toward agriculture, food, nutrition, and the environment; increasing student participation in school meal programs; increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables; increasing market opportunities for farmers, fishers, ranchers, food processors and food manufacturers; and supporting economic development across numerous sectors. Examples of these benefits are outlined on the next page.

HEALTH: Kids Win

All kids deserve access to nutritious, high quality food. One-third of U.S. children are obese or overweight, and only 2% of children get the recommended serving of fruits and vegetables each day. Schools with a Farm to School program have seen increases in children's participation in the school meals program and consumption of fruits and vegetables.

AGRICULTURE: Farmers Win

Farm to School supports farming families by increasing market opportunities for farmers, fishers, ranchers, food processors and food manufacturers. Farm to School programs can open up the expansive school food market to local farmers.

ECONOMY: Communities Win

Farm to School strengthens the community. Farm to School programs create opportunities for developing meaningful community relationships between schools, parents and local farmers. Money spent on local food in schools stays within the local economy.

Student Health and Achievement

Improvements in student behaviors increase incrementally with more years of Farm to School programming in K-12, indicating that these programs may have gradual, yet sustained positive impact on student health behaviors.[1-2] Children in the 0-5 years age group are increasingly spending most of their waking day at early care settings. These sites are where many children are consuming most of their daily calories, and they serve as the primary learning environment during this critically important time when healthy food preferences are developed.[3-7] Specific benefits include:

- Improvement in K-12 eating behaviors, including choosing healthier options in cafeteria; consuming more fruits and vegetables through Farm to School meals (+0.99 to +1.3 servings / day) and at home; consuming less of unhealthy foods and sodas; reducing screen time; and increasing physical activity.[1,8-23]
- Increase in knowledge and awareness about gardening, agriculture, healthy eating, local foods and seasonality (in early care and K-12 settings).[12-14,20,24-28]
- Demonstrated willingness to try out new foods and healthier options (in early care and K-12 settings).[8,14-16,24,26,28]
- Enhanced overall academic achievement in K-12; provides children with understanding of agriculture and the environment; improves life skills, self-esteem, social skills and behavior.[13,29-31]

Food Service Costs, Revenue, Interest

Purchases from local sources increase as the Farm to School program matures, with potential local sourcing of up to 50% of all produce purchases in season.[8-10,14,16-17,19,32-36] Other benefits in K-12 settings include:

- Increase in student meal participation from of 3% to 16% (average +9%) due to Farm to School programming, generating increased revenue through school meal programs.[9-10,14-15,17-19,36]
- Improvements in food service operations, such as increased cafeteria offerings of fruits and vegetables; development of new seasonal recipes, and changes in cafeteria waste management policies.[9-10,15,17-19,35-37]
- Improved food service staff motivation and morale; increased knowledge and interest in local food preparation, seasonal recipes, and interacting with teachers to strengthen classroom-cafeteria connections.[8,16,38]

Benefits for Farmers

- Average 5% increase in income from Farm to School sales for individual farmers.[8-10,14,16-17,32,34,36]
- Increased market diversification, positive relationships with school district, parents and community; farmers contracted to plant crops for schools; opportunities to explore processing and preservation methods for institutional markets; establishment of grower collaboratives or cooperatives to supply institutional markets.[35-36]

Community and Economy

- Increased community awareness and interest about purchasing local foods, and foods served in school cafeterias.[8,16]
- Increased economic activity. Each dollar invested into Farm to School stimulates an additional $2.16 of local economic activity.[39]
- Strengthened connections within the state's food economy.[39]
- Improved household food security.[39]
- Creation and maintenance of jobs; for every job created by school districts purchasing local foods, additional economic activity would create another 1.67 jobs.[39]

The National Farm to School Network has compiled abundant resources on this topic and others and contact information for people in your state and region who are working on Farm to School programs. Find more information and join our network: www.farmtoschool.org

Teachers

- Positive changes in teachers' diets and lifestyles; positive attitudes about integrating farm to school related information in curriculum.[8,12-16,32,40]

Parents

- Increased ability and interest in incorporating healthier foods in family diets and guiding children in early care and K-12 age groups to make healthier choices, positive changes in shopping patterns reflecting healthy and local foods.[8,13-14,16,20,25,27-28]
- Increased knowledge in early care parents of farmers' markets in the area. [28]
- Increase in early care children asking their families to make healthier purchases.[28]

Summary of Farm to School Benefits*

Students	
Fruit and vegetable consumption	Increased +0.99 to +1.3 servings/ day
Physical activity	Reduced screen time and increased physical activity
Food-system awareness	Increased knowledge regarding: gardening, agriculture, healthy food, local food, seasonality
Food choices	Willingness to try new and healthy food; choosing healthier options in the cafeteria and at home
Academic achievement	Overall improvement (K-12)
Behavior	Improved life skills, self-esteem and social skills
Schools	
Meal participation	Increased from of 3% to 16% (average +9%)
Local Sourcing	Up to 50% of all produce purchases in season
Improved cafeteria operations	Increased offerings of fruits and vegetables, new seasonal recipes, new waste management policies
Food service staff	Improved morale, increased knowledge
Teachers	Positive diet and lifestyle changes
Farmers	
Income	Average 5% increase
Markets	Increased diversification and new opportunities
Community	
Economy	$2.16 economic activity generated for every $1 spent
Job creation	Each new Farm to School job contributes to the creation of additional 1.67 jobs
Households	Increased food security and positive diet changes

*Refer to text for citations

The National Farm to School Network collects and compiles information and data on Farm to School programs and benefits. If you have information to share, please send it to info@farmtoschool.org

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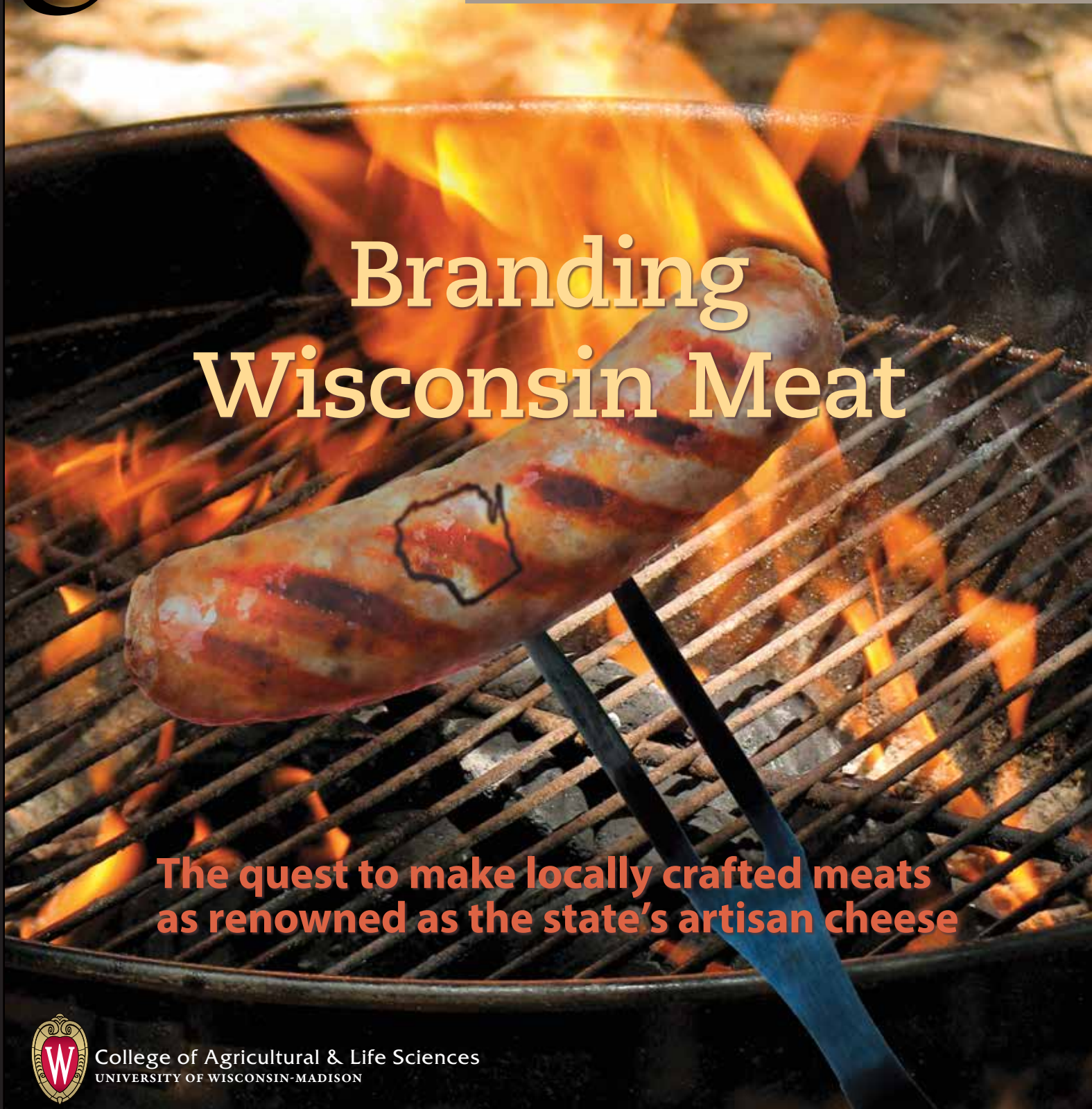
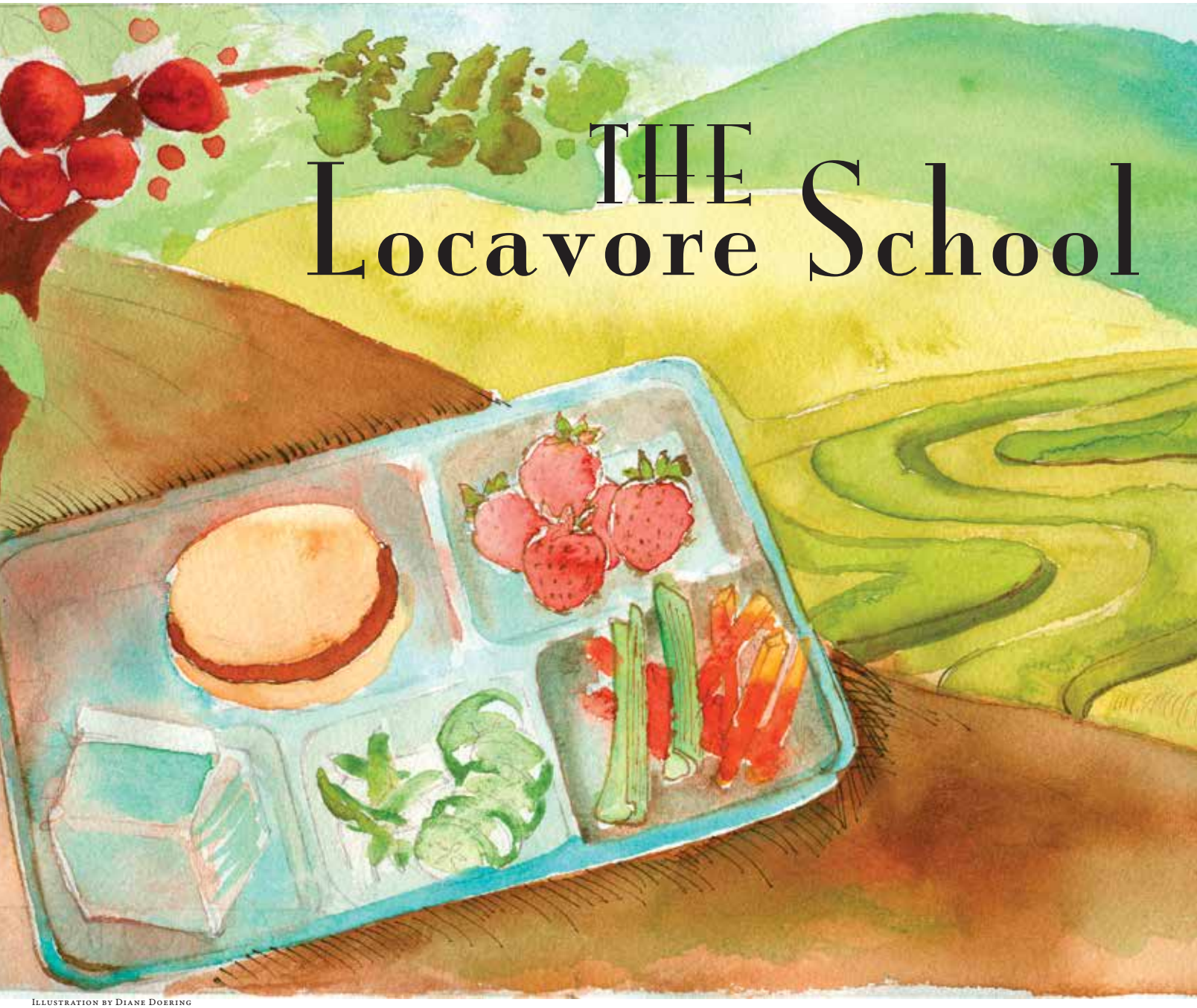


Branding Wisconsin Meat

The quest to make locally crafted meats as renowned as the state's artisan cheese

College of Agricultural & Life Sciences
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

FARM-FRESH SCHOOL LUNCHES • BIODIVERSITY IN CHINA • MEET THE REAL BUCKY



THE Locavore School

Illustration by Diane Doering

A program with deep roots at CALS helps school districts around Wisconsin serve fruits, vegetables and other goods from local farmers—and introduces children to the joys and benefits of healthy eating.

By Joan Fischer

The setting seems unlikely, but Sara Tedeschi discovered one of her life's passions in a noisy Madison elementary school lunchroom, where she helped as a parent volunteer.

Tedeschi was already working at CALS' Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (CIAS) on a program called Farm to College, which sought to increase purchasing of locally grown foods by Wisconsin colleges and universities. But looking around her children's cafeteria, she saw another arena for improvement.

Kids were being served plastic-sealed lunches in the form of "hot packs" and "cold packs" featuring meal components delivered largely through national distribution companies or the USDA commodities program. Hot packs contained items to be heated up—a meat patty and french fries, for example—in a school kitchen so minimally equipped that no real cooking could take place there, a typical set-up in many school buildings. Cold packs contained accompanying items—a bun and ketchup for the burger, for example, and a serving of a raw fruit or vegetable such as carrots.

"There were no choices or self-serving that would allow children to take ownership of what they ate," recalls Tedeschi. It also squandered "a potential learning moment," she says, for teaching children all kinds of things about food—what makes a good portion size, the pleasures of colors and textures, what nutrients are found in different foods and why they're good for you—in a hands-on way that could set kids on a course of healthier eating for life.

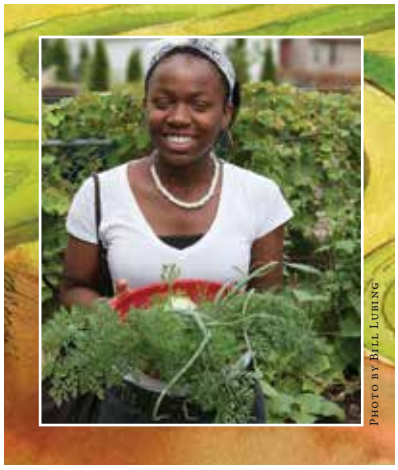


PHOTO BY BILL LUEBKE

This middle school student loves vegetables she helped grow in her school's summer garden program.

That was in 2001. And Tedeschi and her fellow parents weren't the only ones who wanted to make some changes. In lunchrooms around Wisconsin and, indeed, the nation, parents and professionals in nutrition, agriculture, food service, health care and education were starting to envision and create improvements. Their efforts emerged alongside growing interest in strengthening local food economies and concern about the consequences of poor diets such as the rise in childhood obesity, particularly in areas with limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

Their grassroots initiatives became known as "Farm to School," programs that connect schools with local or regional growers in order to serve their produce in school cafeterias, often drawing many other types of food businesses—food processors, manufacturers, distributors and related operations—into the process. Farm to School also encompasses educational activities such as school gardens, field trips to farms, food tastings and cooking classes with local chefs and farmers, all focused on growing, preparing and eating healthy food.

Resources serving Farm to School sprang up as interest grew. Today they include the nonprofit National Farm to School Network (NFSN), a USDA program and numerous grant opportunities at federal, state and local levels. According to NFSN, Farm to School programs now operate in more than 10,000 schools in all 50 states.

From the beginning the movement had a vibrant presence in Wisconsin. When Tedeschi had her "cafeteria moment," she shared her ideas at CIAS, most notably with her mentor, Jack Kloppenburg, a CALS professor of community and environmental

Middle school children in a summer program with Casey Bilyeu, of Madison School & Community Recreation, try to identify their veggies from taste alone. Below, Madison elementary school kids tend a garden with REAP Food Group's AmeriCorps staffer Tamara Baker.

sociology who had long been working to strengthen ties between urban communities and area food growers. He and Tedeschi received federal and other funding to launch "Wisconsin Homegrown Lunch," essentially Wisconsin's first Farm to School program, with Tedeschi serving as coordinator. The program was carried out in partnership with REAP Food Group, a Madison-based nonprofit that Kloppenburg helped found and that remains a Farm to School leader in southcentral Wisconsin.

The Wisconsin program had a wide influence and helped ignite other Farm to School initiatives nationwide. CIAS remains a leader in the field, providing technical assistance and resources throughout the state and region. Activities include working with the state Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) on a Farm to School AmeriCorps program that provides staff for eight Farm to School sites around the state; serving as host of the Great Lakes Region Farm to School Network, one of eight regional groups comprising the national network; and advising on Wisconsin's first Farm to School legislation, passed in 2009, which among other things calls for a new staff position at DATCP to foster development of Farm to School. And CIAS last year convened the first statewide Farm to School summit in Wisconsin to serve the growing demand for information, networking and assistance.

Wisconsin Farm to School

programs are blooming in school districts large and small. Chilton, a district of nearly 1,200 students in Calumet County, has set the gold standard for what Farm to School can be by incorporating not only fruits and vegetables but also meat and dairy from area farms into a healthful, varied menu of scratch-cooked meals. Middleton–Cross Plains, a district feeding 6,250 children, during the fall features a local item on the menu almost daily and, with such long-storage items as apples and potatoes, maintains a regular appearance of local foods throughout the school year.

The message: Successful Farm to School programs come in all shapes and sizes, depending on each school district's needs and resources. And it's a good thing that Farm to School can be so varied, because the challenges school districts face feeding vast numbers of children day in and day out—the context in which any Farm to School program must function—are immense.

Photo by Bill Lubing

Consider the following:

• The Madison Metropolitan School District feeds kids some 20,000 meals a day, a logistical feat involving receiving deliveries from several large food service vendors and sending five refrigerated trucks out to schools twice a day, in addition to doing a considerable amount of food prep and cooking at a central commissary. But even districts much smaller than Madison wrangle with the complications of serving hundreds or thousands of meals each day.

• Just over 40 percent of Wisconsin schoolchildren (some 355,150 kids) qualify for a free or reduced-price lunch, up more than 10 percent from 2005, according to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. For many of these children, schools may offer the only balanced meals they get all day.

• Schools are on tight budgets. They are reimbursed for meals under the National School Lunch Program, but that usually does not cover all costs—and schools must always seek the best deals in order to qualify for reimbursement.

Given those circumstances, larger districts in particular rely on national food service companies and "hot packs/cold packs" for a reason: They feed huge numbers of children reliably and affordably. Local products certainly can be a much bigger part of the mix than they are at present, but at least for now they can't fill the bill entirely.

Beyond scale and budget, Farm to School advocates face other challenges:

• Even minimal food processing—washing, peeling, cutting—is extremely labor-intensive. And many schools, as noted, are not equipped for cooking; they don't have full working kitchens and instead rely on a central commissary for the district.

• Regulations and guidelines can be tough to navigate. For example, some districts require that any grower

Photo by Bill Lubing

selling to schools be certified through the USDA Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), which is intended to ensure food safety but imposes requirements that many smaller, diversified growers find difficult to meet.

• Growers and school food buyers are still learning to communicate with each other, whether about matters as apparently simple as getting their measurements to jibe (pecks or pounds?) or as complex as understanding how the variables of a growing season may affect a lunch program.

Yet all these challenges haven't put the kibosh on Farm to School; rather, they've infused Farm to School with versatility and creativity in meeting them. Amid the wide range of Farm to School programs, a number of markers for success have emerged and serve as pearls of wisdom for anyone contemplating introducing Farm to School:

Engage your district's school nutrition or food service director. These hardworking and mostly unsung professionals live where the rubber meets the road in implementing Farm to School. "That's the department that has a responsibility for making this happen," notes CALS food science instructor and administrative dietitian Monica Theis. "They're the ones that have the opportunity to make it happen and need to do all the work behind it."

Start small. "Baby steps are best," advises Michelle Denk, food service director for the Mount Horeb Area School District, which feeds about 1,600 students. "Try doing a Harvest of the Month—a program highlighting and serving a locally grown fruit or vegetable during that period—or just purchasing one locally grown item and going from there," she says. Denk started small and now runs a program in which local food purchases make up about 6 percent of her budget—a share she hopes to increase in coming years.

Susan Peterman, school nutrition coordinator for the Middleton–Cross Plains Area School District, runs a vibrant Farm to School program and serves as chair of the state advisory council to the governor for Farm to School. For Peterman, it all started with apples.

CIAS had a grant to connect school districts to local apple growers. Lapacek's Orchard in DeForest couldn't find a market for their grade B apples, which are smaller than the grade As prized by supermarkets.

"But for K–5 children, that apple is perfect," says Peterman. "We've partnered with Lapacek's for six seasons now, and my students have the opportunity to taste 28 different varieties of apples between the start of school and the middle of January."

From the start Peterman paid recognition to Lapacek's Orchard on school menus that kids carry in their backpacks to more than 6,000 households. So not only did Frank Lapacek sell his apples, he got free advertising that drew families out to his orchard for all kinds of fun (and profitable) activities, including a pumpkin patch and fruit-picking.

Develop something doable. Can't do lunches for an entire district? Identify something more manageable. Madison's REAP offers a weekly snack program at 10 elementary schools that introduces some 4,500 children to the joys of fruits and vegetables, including such initial nose-wrinklers as kohlrabi. Sourcing locally straight through the winter means offering kids things like sweet potatoes and spinach as well.

"We process with industrial french fry cutters, so they make the carrots and sweet potatoes and kohlrabi into these uniform, perfect little sticks—which makes them appealing to the kids as well," says REAP Farm to School manager Sarah Elliott. "The kohlrabi is really crunchy and juicy. It has a great texture, which is why I think the kids like it so much."

But it's the accompanying education that makes the difference, Elliott feels. The schools receive a USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable grant due to their high percentages of free and reduced lunch recipients. Three times a week the kids get a raw fruit or vegetable snack; once a

Photo by Mike Eicher/preventionspeaks.org

week it's from REAP, which sends AmeriCorp staffers to offer tasty lessons along with it.

"Just giving the kids carrots isn't always enough," Elliott says. "We have these smiling, enthusiastic people getting them excited and offering fun facts about the nutrition and history of the vegetable or information, with pictures, about the farmer who grew it." And it helps that kids are not offered a choice, Elliott notes; it's the vegetable or no snack at all, which is incentive enough to try it, and maybe come to like it.

REAP exemplifies, too, the use of creative partnerships to overcome obstacles. Processing 26,000 pounds of produce a year is a challenge. For years REAP did all the washing, cutting and packaging with a crew of some 30 volunteers every Sunday, using a kitchen lent to them by RP's, a local pasta producer. Last year they acquired a whole new labor force by partnering with the Catholic Multicultural Center in south Madison in a program providing hard-to-employ persons with food service skills. And the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) kicks in by distributing snacks to schools once they've been processed.

REAP and MMSD also hold several "Fall Farm Days" featuring local produce in lunches at four elementary schools. And this year they're pilot testing "garden bars," salad bars featuring local veggies and fruit, at a handful of elementary schools.

Think big. As nutrition director for Chilton and Hilbert schools, Diane Chapeta transformed lunches by heading a North East Wisconsin Farm to School initiative that grew to involve 47 schools and a cadre of beef and pork producers, fruit and vegetable farmers and dairy and meat processors.

Now she's onto something even bigger. She recently joined the newly founded Fifth Season Cooperative as operations manager. "I saw an opportunity to create infrastructure that would move regional food to institutions on a much larger scale through the existing system," says Chapeta.

Based in Viroqua, Fifth Season is building up a membership that comprises a complete supply chain for offering schools locally and regionally grown foods. Services will include aggregating produce from growers of all sizes, processing, sales and distribution—exactly the level of scaling up that's needed for local growers to go from bit to major players in school cafeterias. Members already include such giants as Organic Valley/CROPP and Reinhart FoodService, the nation's third-largest food service distributor.

Farmers and chefs are your stars. Kids in Madison know Farmer Rufus Haucke (Keewaydin Farms), Farmer Judy Hageman (Snug Haven) and Chef Tory Miller (L'Etoile, Graze). Kids in Holmen know Chef Thomas Sacksteder (Gundersen Lutheran Hospital). Kids in Middleton know Beekeeper Eugene Woller (Gentle Breeze Honey), who sold honey to the district and then visited schools with his colleagues in full beekeeper regalia to hold tastings with kids and talk about their work. Their visits also served to enrich an accompanying science curriculum about bees.

Few things are more memorable for children than having a farmer or chef visit their schools for something as small as a classroom tasting or as grand as an all-school cooking event. Putting a face on the experience can make things click for kids: where food comes from, who grows it, how it's prepared.

For farmers and chefs it's just as gratifying. "The kids are so excited about having a farmer in the classroom, and that's the part I really love," says Haucke. "I'm always surprised at the reaction we get when we serve them our raw veggies. They absolutely love it."

Farmers are willing to put in the time even if the business isn't quite profitable for many of them just yet. Haucke works with four school districts and sold them about $7,000 worth of produce this past season—"A relatively small portion of our business, but it does continue to grow," he says, echoing several other farmers. Haucke made an investment in Farm to School by obtaining federal grant funding to build a processing kitchen. "Once that's fully operational, I think school sales could really take off and become a bigger part of what we do," he says.

If you offer it, will they eat it?

Midway through the fall 2012 semester, which debuted new National School Lunch Program guidelines mandating more fruits and vegetables—students must now put a fruit or vegetable on their tray every day in order for the school to be reimbursed—the news media ran stories about student opposition across the nation, including photos of cafeteria garbage cans heaped with rejected veggies and even a protest video ("We Are Hungry") with more than a million views on YouTube. (The USDA eventually responded by doing away with daily and weekly limits of meats and grains.)

The reaction came as no surprise to CALS nutritional sciences profes-

Schools in Chilton (left) set the gold standard by allowing children to serve themselves scratch-made meals featuring locally grown produce, meat and dairy.

sor Dale Schoeller: "There will be complaints after any change in school lunches. It's human nature."

And it's no reason to back down from a commitment to serving fruits and vegetables, notes Tara LaRowe PhD'05, a nutritionist with the UW–Madison School of Medicine and Public Health. "It takes a lot of exposures—as many as 10 or 12—for children to become familiar with the food and decide they're going to try it and possibly like it. So putting something on a lunch tray and seeing it end up in the trash after one day doesn't necessarily mean it was a failure and you shouldn't try it again. In fact, you should be trying it again."

Schoeller and LaRowe know more than most people about getting kids to eat their vegetables. They carried out a multiyear Farm to School impact assessment at public elementary schools as part of a study exploring various community health initiatives, including ways to prevent obesity in children. Their work was commissioned by the state Department of Health Services (DHS), which, citing recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), has identified Farm to School as "one of the most viable strategies for improving young people's access to fruits and vegetables."

Eating more fruits and vegetables—in addition to providing valuable nutrients—is thought to prevent obesity mostly by displacing high-calorie, less nutritious foods. "In the case of fruits, they're sweet, so maybe they can take the place of sugar-sweetened beverages, candy and desserts," says Schoeller. "And with vegetables, they're bulky—high in fiber, low in calories for their volume—so they should provide more satiety and fullness."

So what's the connection to Farm to School? Part of Schoeller's evaluation involved analyzing some 4,500 student lunch trays through "before and after" photos showing what kids had actually eaten. Yes, there was some waste. But the photo study and other data had some very positive findings for Farm to School. Children at schools with Farm to School programs consumed 40 percent more fruits and vegetables than kids at schools just starting Farm to School. Moreover, students in schools with several years of Farm to School programs were more likely to choose a greater variety of fruits and vegetables.

And Wisconsin kids need that help. Nearly a fourth of high school students are overweight or obese. "Many children consume diets in which more than 25 percent of their energy comes from sugar, and one in three high school students consumes fruit or vegetables less than once per day," notes Schoeller. "This diet pattern is associated with excess weight gain. A change in the diet pattern is needed, and one place to start that change is in school meal programs."

His study of Farm to School has made him a believer in the program not as a magic bullet but as part of a long-term strategy toward better eating habits.

"This is something that needs to be done more broadly and year after year," Schoeller says. "It's not like getting an inoculation—something that you do once and it lasts for years. It has to be constantly reinforced until it becomes an ingrained behavior."

Schoeller and his team have received funding to expand Farm to School studies as part of the Transform Wisconsin Fund, a five-year, $25 million grant from the CDC administered by the UW's Wisconsin Clearinghouse for Prevention Resources. Schoeller's team will broaden evaluations at their current sites and add up to 14 schools over the next two years.

And over at CIAS, Farm to School initiatives continue to grow. In one project CIAS is partnering in scale-up efforts being pioneered at Fifth Season. The center just received a $76,000 grant to get more Wisconsin-grown vegetables and potatoes into schools by bringing in Fifth Season and Maglio Readyfresh for processing and using industry giants Sysco and Reinhart for distribution.

That degree of systemic change is what Sara Tedeschi had hoped for when she embarked on Farm to School. If anyone had told her a dozen years ago where Farm to School would be today, she would have been very pleased, she says.

"We're working in a different world now in that we have partners in industry who understand what Farm to School is and want to help advance it," Tedeschi says. "They're no longer asking why we should do this—the question they're asking is how."

Nutritional sciences professor Dale Schoeller and his team did "before and after" evaluations of lunch trays to see what kids were eating (photos below). Among their findings: kids participating in Farm to School programs ate more fruits and vegetables.

> **"This is everything that's important to rural communities. "**
> *— Laura Brown*

Strengthening Rural Communities

Beyond school borders in Crawford County

The AmeriCorps farm to school program in Crawford County organizes farm field trips, plants and maintains school gardens, teaches children about the benefits of local food, and brings farmers into the classroom.

These activities have made a lasting impression on the students, and community support has grown steadily as children take their farm to school education home with them. The newfound awareness of local food and agriculture in Crawford County has spurred community organization.

Bringing the community together

Under the name *Driftless Wisconsin Grown*, a group of farmers, local residents and organizations gathers monthly to discuss ways to build and strengthen the local food economy. The group has already sponsored community events and has even started a new farmers market – the first in the area.

Supporting the local food economy

The farmers market has been a success and *Driftless Wisconsin Grown* has begun initial planning for a community kitchen space that could be rented and shared between local farmers, community members, and schools.

"We're reconnecting young people with agriculture, making community connections, and revitalizing our local economy," says Laura Brown, a local UW-Extension agent.

Why Farm to School in Wisconsin?

Good for kids' health

- Fresh fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods help fight obesity.

Good for farmers

- Schools provide local farmers with new or expanded markets.

Good for the community

- Local farmers are supported and money stays in the local economy.

Good for schools

- Overall, schools report a 3-16% increase in meal participation when farm-fresh food is served, thus bringing in more funds.

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