



GROWING FARM TO SCHOOL IN NATIVE COMMUNITIES

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GROWING STRONGER TOGETHER

The National Farm to School Network is an information, advocacy and networking hub for communities working to bring local food sourcing and food and agriculture education into school systems and early care and education settings.

What is farm to school?

Farm to school activities connect students and communities to fresh local foods and the family farmers, ranchers and fishers that produce them. This is a new term for an ancient concept that embraces Indigenous knowledge and values in harmony with traditional Native lifeways, and has proven positive results on health, education and hunger.

The term “farm to school” covers a wide range of efforts, which focuses on three areas that encourage the purchase of local foods in school cafeterias (**procurement**); teach the next generation about our food heritage, health and nutrition (**education**); and connect students to hands-on learning and cultural enrichment (**school gardens**). Farm to school empowers children and families to make informed food choices while supporting economic development, food sovereignty and cultural revitalization.

Farm to school in Native Communities

There are 185 Native American schools serving more than 40,000 students across the country, and even more Native American students in the public school system. These schools are managed by three separate divisions under the U.S. Department of the Interior and the U.S. Department of Education. Thus, keep in mind that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to farm to school in Native communities. Focus on community assets and needs, and work from the ground up.

Getting started

Farm to school offers multiple strategies to improve the health of children and communities. Use these steps as a guide to develop a lasting farm to school program in your community. Keep in mind that homegrown solutions work best and self-sufficiency supports health.

1 Build a team: By using a community-based and multi-generational approach to programs, you will build a longer lasting team effort. Bring together local leaders, school educators and administrators and local producers to get them involved. Include everyone! Gather ideas and support from the community and your tribal decision makers. Discuss your common goals and decide on a starting place.

Why farm to school?

Farm to school provides opportunities to teach children about health and nutrition, along with reviving and preserving heirloom varieties of plants and livestock and strengthening the community. Here are more reasons to grow your farm to school efforts:

- A diet made up of traditional foods improves the overall health of Native peoples.*
- Highlighting traditional foods connects children to the land, their tribal history and creation stories.
- Farm to school celebrates Indigenous knowledge and strengthens cultural, spiritual and social connections.
- Hands-on learning in the garden supports physical well-being.
- Purchasing from traditional food growers supports cultural values and sparks community economic development.

KIDS WIN

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

FARMERS WIN

Farm to school activities can create new sales opportunities for farmers, fishers, ranchers, food processors and food manufacturers by opening the doors to large food buyers.

COMMUNITIES WIN

Farm to school benefits everyone from students, teachers and administrators to parents and farmers, providing opportunities to build family and community engagement. Buying from local producers and processors creates new jobs and strengthens the local economy.

This fact sheet was developed by Shining Waters Consulting through a 2015 Innovation Award from the National Farm to School Network, funded by the Newman's Own Foundation.

Photo credit: Cherokee Central Schools, Cherokee, NC

2 Map your assets: Work with your team to determine current resources that exist in the school food environment and identify the challenges you will face. This process can help you develop shared goals and uncover the best opportunities to get started.

- Understand the school food supply chain, including who is in charge at which points.
- Build relationships with local producers (farmers, ranchers and fishers) and seek out traditional foods from your region.
- Investigate tribal, local, state and federal regulations related to school food, including purchasing policies and vendors.
- Engage school cafeteria staff and leadership early in the planning process.
- Plan ahead for school kitchen equipment improvements needed to prepare meals from scratch.
- Determine if there is land and water available for a school garden and work with a local farmer to establish the site.
- Learn from your elders, ask questions and gain knowledge about agriculture and traditional foods.

3 Start small: Establish one or two attainable goals to get started, and grow from there. Your first successes will encourage more people to support you and to get involved.

- Incorporate fresh and traditional foods in school meals, community events or taste tests.
- Add salad bars offering healthy choices and local, traditional food products.
- Host a chef or Elder to demonstrate food preparation to students and staff.
- Invite students and the community to help plan and build a school garden or orchard.
- Utilize greenhouses and composting areas in the science and math curriculum.
- Support student leadership in projects such as seed saving, sprouting, market sales, aquaponics, foraging, container gardening and school pantry/sales.
- Honor elders by inviting them to share teachings with students and the community in gardens and at gatherings.

4 Sustain your efforts: As you start new farm to school activities, it's important to plan for future support, including seeking funding. Document your efforts as you go, as this will build the data you will need to create evaluations, educational materials, and sharing your story with numbers, quotes and photos. As program workers, tribal and school leaders change positions, being able to document the impact of your programs is even more important.

Technical assistance and resources

The National Farm to School Network and U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of Community Food Systems have extensive networks of state and regional farm to school experts ready to help communities grow their farm to school activities. Tribal nonprofits are also great resources on traditional foods and local food efforts.

Visit farmtoschool.org/nativecommunities for more information, resources and to join our network.

**Citations: Boyce, V.L., Swinburn, B.A. The traditional Pima Indian diet. Composition and adaptation for use in a dietary intervention study. J Diabetes Care. 1993 Jan; 16(1):369-71.*

Nurture community support

Community education and engagement will be ongoing and should be incorporated into your plan from the start.

- Gather quotes from everyone involved so you always have a new story to share and information showing a broad base of support.
- Document your work with photos and videos. Students love to help with technology – provide the tools for them to share the good news!
- Share recipes with families, invite tribal officials to cafeteria meals and share your harvest with the elder center. Make special note of local or traditional foods used.
- Support student interest groups – do they want to form an afterschool cooking club?
- Provide students garden journals to write about their experiences.
- Perform annual program evaluations asking the same questions each year to assess progress, and share updates with the tribal council and PTA.