



## Have Illinois Children Been Left Behind? Model Farm-to-School Programs Correlated with Illinois

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## Executive Summary

From locally purchased salad bar ingredients in California, to field trips to dairy farms in Vermont, farm-to-school programs are gaining credibility and earning well-deserved attention. Congressmen in both the House of Representatives and Senate have sponsored bills to provide funds of up to \$100,000 per school district to create farm-to-school programs, further propagating that educating the nation's youth on where their food comes from, and providing locally-sourced products as part of regular school meals, are national responsibilities related to concerns of health, justice, the economy and education.

Despite the growing prevalence of farm-to-school projects, estimated by the National Farm to School Program to be 1,117 programs reaching 10,871 schools nation-wide, Illinois, and in particular Chicago, lacks a dedicated commitment to establishing a district, city or state-wide agenda.<sup>1</sup> The need for programming that can connect schools with local farms with the objective of serving healthy meals in school cafeterias, thereby improving student nutrition, is eminent. According to the latest obesity research, 60.7% of Illinois youth are overweight or obese, and Chicago's youth are on average 5% more at risk compared to the rest of the state.<sup>2</sup>

By examining multiple case studies from various states, one can identify common variables amongst successful programs. The variables examined in this report and correlated with Illinois' efforts include policy/legislation, start-up funding, government support, marketing and communications, such as "Buy Fresh, Buy Local" campaigns, and partnerships with Universities. In addition, the mechanisms for purchasing locally (wholesale distributor, direct purchasing, cooperative, and contract growing), are also considered. Lastly, a variable labeled "Curricular," classifying programs that offer educational-based initiatives such as gardening, nutrition education in the classroom and/or farm field trips, amongst other offerings, is considered.

The most successful programs have been classified as those that source a majority of their food locally, beyond occasional salad bar offerings or just fruits and vegetables. Since procurement is the most challenging and desired objective of farm-to-school programs, those programs that offer a full range of produce, dairy and protein sources from local farms, combined with the educational offerings, are those that have been deemed the most successful. Length of operation time, scope (number of schools/districts) and economic impact have also been considered in determining which case studies are truly defined as model programs.

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.farmtoschool.org](http://www.farmtoschool.org); National Farm to School is , a collaborative initiative of Center for Food & Justice (CFJ), a division of the Urban and Environmental Policy Institute at Occidental College and the Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC).

<sup>2</sup> "F as in Fat: How Obesity Policies Are Failing in America" by Trust for America's Health, August 2007; Mason M, Meleedy-Rey P, Kaufer Christoffel K, Longjohn M, Garcia MP, Ashlaw C. "Prevalence of overweight and risk of overweight among 3- to 5-year-old Chicago children, 2002-2003". *J Sch Health* 2006; 76(3): 104-110.; Ogden CL, Carroll MD, Curtin LR, McDowell MA, Tabak CJ, Flegal KM. "Prevalence of overweight and obesity in the United States, 1999-2004". *JAMA* 2006; 295(13):1549-1555

## Current Federal Support

Federal government support, or at least tacit approval, already exists for farm-to-school programs. Efforts were made starting in 1994 by the USDA in partnership with the Department of Defense Personnel Support Center (DoD/DPSC), in which DoD delivered fresh produce to children taking part in the National School Lunch Program.

In partnership with Food and Nutritional Services (FNS) and USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), DoD began buying and delivering fresh fruits and vegetables to schools in eight states in the 1994-95 school year; by the 1996-97 school year the project, termed DoD Fresh, had expanded to 32 states. The funds for the program come from the Department of Defense Fair Share Entitlement dollars allocated in the 2002 Farm Bill, which is being reauthorized this year and advocates urge the continuation of the Fresh program and its funding through DoD.

According to personnel within the Food Service and Warehousing department of Chicago Public Schools, the entire district of Chicago, servicing over 435,000 students in 617 schools, opted out of participating in the DoD Fresh program for fear of perishability, and wasted fresh produce. Thus Chicago public school children often receive canned fruits and vegetables since their fresh counterparts are more costly.

In response to Section 4303 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, the Child Nutrition Division of the USDA researched and distributed a guide in 2005 to state agency nutrition directors and regional directors to encourage them to purchase locally produced foods, "to the maximum extent practicable".<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, new bills proposed by the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress include promotion of "increasing the availability of locally and regionally-produced food" and the creation of a USDA School Food Fresh Program that procures fruits and vegetables that "reflects local preferences and supports local agriculture," and specifically makes it the responsibility of the Secretary to "enter into agreements with local and regional distributors to supply eligible products to schools and service institutions."<sup>4</sup>

Yet for each of the three bills introduced to Congress this year that reflect support for farm-to-school and local food systems, representation and support from Illinois is lacking.

### Local Efforts: Chicago, Illinois

Despite efforts led by local organizations, such as Seven Generations Ahead, Growing Power, and Healthy Schools Campaign, in collaboration with nationally recognized organizations such as the Center for Food and Justice, Occidental College, and the Community Food Security Coalition and including support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Joyce Foundation and others, Chicago still lacks a substantial farm-to-school program, specifically centered around securing and utilizing locally grown produce and locally-raised livestock for meat, dairy and eggs in school meals.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Guidance/Farm-to-School-Guidance\\_12-19-2005.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Guidance/Farm-to-School-Guidance_12-19-2005.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Current bills on docket supporting local foods and farm-to-school are **H.R. 2364** "Local Food and Farm support Act," **S.1031** "School Food Fresh Act of 2007," and **S.919** "Healthy Farms, Foods and Fuels Act of 2007."

<sup>5</sup> Other related components, such as school gardens, agriculture-based field trips, integrated nutrition curriculum and waste reduction/composting at schools have been implemented and observed at the local

The obstacles on the ground level (school sites) are clear: operational and budgetary<sup>6</sup>, however multiple states have been able to at least partially overcome such difficulties through government fiscal support and efforts led by local advocacy groups. At a more sophisticated glance, the barriers are a reflection of the U.S. food system, controlled by agribusiness and lobbyists. Illinois is no exception. Research done in 2003 by the *Red Tomato* organization, funded by a group of national and local foundations and agencies, called the Illinois Food and Community Funders Group, confirmed what multiple stakeholders in local food systems already knew: Illinois lacks the necessary post-production, processing and distribution systems to support a strong local food movement, in particular one with the necessary infrastructure to service institutions such as schools.<sup>7</sup>

In 2006 Mayor Daley commissioned a Regional Food System Task Force and their results, presented in a document entitled “*Eat Local, Live Healthy*,” and adopted by the Chicago Planning Commission on June 21, 2007, reported similar constraints as the *Red Tomato* findings yet confirmed the city’s commitment to “refocus our food system to provide healthy, local food and local jobs related to the growing and processing of that food.”<sup>8</sup>

As Chicago takes the next step towards implementation of a city-wide effort to build a local food system, involvement of institutional food service, (schools, hospitals and prisons) must be considered for a high-volume, sustainable program. Despite recognizing the importance of school gardens and healthy foods in schools, the 2007 “*Eat Local, Live Healthy*” report neglected to address the economic value of connecting local farmers to schools, in particular by denoting institutions as high-volume consumers, thereby stabilizing the agricultural economy in the South and supporting local processors and distributors in the North.

## **The Importance of Local Agriculture**

Arguments for farm-to-school programs often overlap with reasons to support the local food system, however many studies, including the abovementioned “*Eat Local, Live Healthy*” report produced by the City of Chicago fail to make the connection between local food systems and public institutions, and instead focus on farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), restaurants and retail stores. A local food system anchored in schools could serve multiple purposes, namely strengthening the local food system through high-volume, consistent purchasing and provide youth with a nutritious, healthy meal. Specific reasons for supporting a local food system include:

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level in Chicago and Illinois, in particular through individual efforts, LSC initiatives or grant-based funding.

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Guidance/Farm-to-School-Guidance\\_12-19-2005.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Guidance/Farm-to-School-Guidance_12-19-2005.pdf) outlines such obstacles including crop seasonality, value-added processing, transportation and delivery, ability to meet demand, storage, menu adaptability, food safety, equipment and labor needs, cost of food, increased cost of labor to prepare fresh foods.

<sup>7</sup> “The Red Tomato Report” a.k.a “Feeding Ourselves: Strategies for a New Illinois Food System” found at the Chicago Community Trust’s website <http://www.cct.org>

<sup>8</sup> “Chicago, Eat Local, Live Healthy” produced and published by City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development November 2006, adopted by the Chicago Plan Commission on June 21, 2007.

- **Local Economic Growth**

Though Illinois is one of the top agricultural producers in the United States, it also ranks amongst the highest in exports: \$3.13 billion per year. Of agricultural products produced in state, only 0.15% is sold directly to consumers, a potential value of \$12 million per year.<sup>9</sup>

- **Environmental Conservation**

As the negative consequences of human-caused climate change become more apparent, dramatic shifts in transportation and food production must accompany efforts to curb these adverse effects. In our current industrial food system, our food travels 1500-2000 miles on average before it reaches our plates. The production and transportation of food contributes an estimated 603 million tons of carbon emissions per year.<sup>10</sup>

- **Food Security**

Having access to locally produced food is one way to help secure a more just and stable food system. With an increasingly global food market, as much as half of the produce shipped is lost due to spoilage. Local food systems eliminate waste, and more effectively connect people with food.<sup>11</sup>

- **Health and Taste**

Food that does not have to be shipped long distance is fresher and more nutritious. It is said that during a 5-10 day transit time, 30-50% of nutrients are lost.<sup>12</sup>

- **Family Farms and Rural Cooperation**

Help build ties between downstate and Chicago. Small and medium sized farms (less than 1000 acres) are disappearing rapidly, thereby eliminating jobs, reducing social infrastructure, and the local tax base.<sup>13</sup>

As rural economies falter, and loose vibrancy, local food direct sales could provide an economic linkage to Chicago, fostering greater cooperation and trade. In Illinois 91% of farms produce corn or soy, and 50% of farms are over 1,000 acres.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Rozyne, M. (2004). Feeding Ourselves: A New Strategy for an Illinois Food System. The Red Tomato Report. <http://www.redtomato.org/news.html>

<sup>10</sup> The Food and Climate Research Center; [www.fcrn.org.uk](http://www.fcrn.org.uk)

<sup>11</sup> The Community Food Security Coalition's North American Urban Agriculture Committee, (2003). Urban Agriculture and community Food Security in the United States: Farming from the City Center to the Urban Fringe. [http://www.foodsecurity.org/ua\\_publications.html](http://www.foodsecurity.org/ua_publications.html)

<sup>12</sup> Bellows, A. (2004). Health Benefits of Urban Agriculture. The Community Food Security Coalition. [http://www.foodsecurity.org/ua\\_publications.html](http://www.foodsecurity.org/ua_publications.html)

<sup>13</sup> Willard Cochrane, "A Food and Agricultural Policy for the 21st Century", unpublished paper, 1999; Fred Kirschenmann, Steve Stevenson, Fred Buttel, Tom Lyson, and Mike Duffy, "Why Worry About the Agriculture of the Middle?: A White Paper for the Agriculture of the Middle."

<sup>14</sup> Peterson, W., Walker, J. (2007). Illinois Agriculture 1964-2007 Based on Census of Agriculture Data. Department of Agribusiness Economics, Southern Illinois University. <http://www.siu.edu/~ruraldev/publications/ILagriculture64-07.pdf>

- **Promoting Green Space**

Increased demand for local foods and sustainable agriculture preserves farmland, and provides green space in communities. It is found that properties with green space and urban farms within 1500 feet increase in value from 1.8 – 3 % of the property value.<sup>15</sup>

### **Farm-to-School Case Studies**

Many states have implemented successful and noteworthy programs that Illinois and Chicago can look to for guidance, support and best practices.

#### **Connecticut**

The **Hartford Food System** developed its **Project Farm Fresh Start** in 1998. What began as a special research program, supported by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture, expanded into a full program that both increased the purchasing of locally grown produce by the Hartford school system's food service division, and encouraged young people to make high quality, nutritious food a regular part of their diet through partnerships with teachers to design a month-long food education experience. Major support for the Farm Fresh Start came from Northeast SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education) and a USDA grant program. The Hartford Public School Food Service has an operating budget of \$8 million and services 705 elementary school students, 962 middle school and 1262 high school students. The district has purchased thousands of pounds of local produce; for example, from September 6 to November 15, 1996 the three pilot Farm Fresh Start schools purchased approximately 19,800 pounds of Connecticut-grown fruits and vegetables; this amount represented 80% of their total cost of produce purchased in the eleven-week period. Distribution occurred through a local food wholesaler that acted as a middleman between farmers and schools and helped facilitate produce being provided in desired value-added form (cut, peeled, shredded, etc.).

#### **New Hampshire**

The University of New Hampshire in Durham facilitates a farm-to-school program called **Get Smart. Eat Local**, formed recently as an initiative to connect farmers with school food service purchasers. A small farm called Hermon Pond is providing produce to 27 schools, comprising 15,000 students across the state. The distributor Saunders Fruit Co. delivers to the schools. Already since the start of the school year – October 7, 2007, Heron Pond has grossed \$25,000 from the farm-to-school program.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Been, V (2006). The Effect of Community Gardens on Neighboring Property Values. *Social Science Research Network, New York University School of Law*.  
[http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=889113](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=889113)

<sup>16</sup> Plumb, Taryn "Food for thought: NH farm sells schools its just-picked produce" *The Boston Globe*, October 7, 2007

## Maine

A program of the Maine Sustainable Agriculture Society, **Farm Fresh Connection (FFC)** connects local agriculture production with public institutions by working with menu-planners, chefs and food buyers, and by sourcing and delivering. The project was launched in 2003 with a \$30,000 commitment from a local venture philanthropic organization followed by a USDA Value-Added Development grant of \$108,000. FFC works with about 60 farmers providing vegetables, fruits, livestock products and dairy. In 2003, sales totaled \$53,000 and in 2004 grew to \$151,000, all money that flowed back into the local economy.

## Oregon

Oregon points to Portland's Abernethy School as a model for its farm-to-school initiative with the school garden, an innovate chef cooking from scratch in the cafeteria and support from the curriculum. Recently the state took two huge steps forward with the creation of a government-paid position of a "farm-to-school" coordinator within Oregon's Department of Agriculture,<sup>17</sup> and by forming a coalition comprised of public health, small farms, food service providers, education, agriculture and food processor representatives to look at Food Policy. Lastly, the National Farm to School Network awarded a grant of \$148,000 to EcoTrust, a local non-profit dedicated to sustainability, to serve as the Regional Lead Agency for farm-to-school efforts in the West.

## California

**Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District (SMMUSD)** is known for being the nation's first farm-to-school effort. Led by Rodney Taylor, School Food Service Director, the 15-school program saw increased participation from students immediately when it switched the salad bar to locally grown vegetables and lettuces organized by direct purchasing from farmers and farmers markets. The district spends approximately \$42,000 annually of local product from nine to ten farmers.

**Ventura Unified's** Sandy VanHouten-Curwood, director of Child Nutrition Services started the **Healthy Schools Project**. The program features three components: farm to school salad bars, nutrition education and garden-based learning. VanHouten-Curwood describes these components as "local, sustainable produce featured in the cafeterias, garden-based learning tied to core-curriculum and state standards, [and] classroom nutrition education which features cooking in the classroom and harvest of the month." She says other environmental topics such as recycling and vericomposting are covered as well. Selected components were introduced in 2000-01; now, all 25 schools in the district participate. Ventura Unified, for example, now spends more than \$100,000 with local farmers each school year. The Gold Coast Growers Collaborative, a coalition of small family farms, serves all 25 schools in VUSD as well as the five elementary schools in Ojai.

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<sup>17</sup> Mamula, Patty "Activists seek fresh fixings for students" Capital Press, September 7, 2007

**Food For Thought, Ojai's Healthy Schools Program**, includes five integrated elements: salad bar, nutrition education, agricultural literacy, recycling and garden-based learning. The salad bar, offered once a week, utilizes as much local, seasonal fresh food as possible. At Topa Topa Elementary, for instance, garden clubs have formed with 50-70 kids joining. Members work in the school garden at recess and after school; they conduct their own farmer's market at the end of the school year.

Initially, Food for Thought subsidized the schools, buying the salad bar equipment, for instance, and delivering produce. A good deal of the funding for staff salaries and operation costs comes from events they host, like the upcoming Locally Grown 2. This year, with a grant from an anonymous donor, they will begin a new component on solid waste, helping students analyze the waste they produce.

California was ahead of the game in 2001 when it passed **SB 19 "The Pupil Nutrition, Health and Achievement Act"** which awarded \$5.5 million in grants and technical support to schools and districts to develop policies related to nutrition. Legislators are now working on mandating that every school district build gardens on-site at every school. California is also known as the state hosting the most frequently cited inspiration for school gardens, **The Edible School Yard**, founded by Alice Waters in Berkeley. Waters worked with Ann Cooper to head a **School Lunch Initiative** within **Berkeley** to serve fresh, local foods to all students.

## **Florida**

In 1995, farmers formed the **New North Florida Marketing Cooperative** (NNFMC) and sold produce to 13 schools in Gadsden county. By 2001, the co-op increased sales to 15 schools districts in Florida, Georgia and Alabama, serving over 300,000 students local products. NNFMC specialized in fresh, washed, chopped and bagged greens that were not available through regular distributors and were purchased in high volumes by schools. The success of the co-op was supported with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA Agriculture Marketing Service and Florida A & M University.

The farmers focus on three or four main items on a seasonal basis and sell to schools year-round. The items are incorporated into menu planning, as a side dish or with fresh fruit as dessert. Products sold to schools have included collards greens, leafy greens, field peas, Muscatine grapes, turnip greens, strawberries, blackberries, and watermelon. Equipment purchases of a sink and a cutting machine to automate the job of cutting and processing greens enabled the Cooperative to provide value-added products.

The Cooperative initially received financial assistance, mainly for the purchase of infrastructure and equipment, with a \$4,000 grant from the USDA Agriculture Marketing Service and a \$3,000 loan from the West Florida Resource Conservation and Development Council. Although grant monies were used in the initial stage of this program, approximately ninety percent of the funding for the Cooperative's

marketing efforts comes from direct marketing sales, which contributes to the sustainability of the farm-to-school program. The Cooperative has developed a niche market and consequently is able to negotiate a price that is fair to the school district and profitable for the growers.

The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, through the USDA Child Feeding Program and the US Department of Defense (DoD) allows the Cooperative to produce and market fresh fruits and vegetables to area school districts. The DoD provides payment flow as part of the DoD Fresh program.

Furthermore, the Florida Agriculture and Mechanical University (FAMU) provides assistance through its Small Farmer Outreach Technical Assistance Project directed by Ms. Vonda Richardson. Another important link in the farm to school partnership includes county school district representatives. For example, Ms. J'Amy K. Peterson, Director of School Food Services for Gadsden County, coordinated the effort to put fresh fruits and vegetables on school lunches for her county.

### **North Carolina**

The **North Carolina Department of Defense Farm to School Program** was formed through a partnership between the Department of Defense and the Markets and Food Distribution Division of the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services in 1997. The program began by testing the market for Red and Golden Delicious apples grown in Western North Carolina. After the success in Western North Carolina, the North Carolina Department of Defense Farm to School Program was expanded throughout the State. All school districts in North Carolina have the ability to be part of the North Carolina Farm to School Program and in 2004 about sixty school districts took advantage of this opportunity. The North Carolina General Assembly passed legislation to provide fifty schools with \$1,000 grants to make purchases from NC farmers, and secondly, the USDA hosted a Town Hall Meeting in North Carolina in January of 1998, which brought together potential partners in food service projects. The United States Department of Defense (DoD), with its existing sophisticated procurement system, handles all of the financial transactions and billing between the schools and the farmers. In general, the North Carolina model is unique because of its heavy reliance on the federal government, however it points to the critical role that public agencies can play in facilitating crucial components of a farm-to-school approach. According to Ken Wimonth, a DoD produce buyer who helped set up the NC program as well as MI and AL “farmers can adjust when and what they plant in order to better match school calendars.”<sup>18</sup>

### **New York**

Since 2002 when NY Governor George Pataki signed legislation establishing a Farm-To-School Program to facilitate and promote the purchase of NY state farm

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<sup>18</sup> Oklahoma Food Policy Council A joint project of the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry, and Drake University in partnership with the USDA Risk Management Agency “The Oklahoma Farm-to-School report” 2003.

products by schools, New York has been committed to sourcing locally and getting as much local product into schools. The **Cornell University Farm-to-School** program organizes efforts between the NYS School Food Service Association, NY Farms!, NYS Assembly Task Force on Food, Farm & Nutrition Policy and the NYS Department of Agriculture & markets and the Department of Education

## **Iowa**

In the fall of 1999, Iowa State University (ISU) Extension, ISU Department of Hotel, Restaurant and Institution Management, and Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Practical Farmers of Iowa worked collaboratively on a project funded by ISU Extension with a Value Added Agriculture Grant. As part of the Central Iowa farm to school project in fall 2002, Candy Anderson, food service director of the **South Hamilton School District**, began purchasing produce through both a produce network and a local orchard called Story Book Orchards in Story City. Story Book Orchards delivers apples to the school district. Prices from both sources are competitive, however, the network is unable to deliver to the food service operation because of insurance issues. Because of this inability, during the 2003-2004 school year the director picked-up the fresh produce from the produce network. The extra effort was believed to be worth it because the students were introduced to new, tasty foods.

In Northeast Iowa, the three major organizers (Merl Steines and Michael Nash, farmers with the **GROWN Locally cooperative**, and Joan Lubke, the Food Service Director at the Decorah Community School District) helped four schools in the Decorah Community School District, including one elementary school, one middle school and one high school, to receive farm fresh items. The Decorah Community School District uses locally grown products in innovative ways; farm fresh produce is used for a salad bar and as a la carte items. Crops that are the most popular with students are: apples, cucumbers, lettuces, carrots, broccoli, and cauliflower. The majority of the 15 farmers in the GROWN Locally cooperative sell items to the schools. The farmers coordinate both the production of the crops as well as the distribution to schools and other institutions. Deliveries are made to the schools by the cooperative one-day per week. One invoice is presented from the cooperative to the Decorah Community School District and the De Sales Catholic School, and then when payment is received, GROWN Locally distributes the funds to each individual farmer.

The University of Northern Iowa and its Center for Energy and Environmental Education (CEEE) has also been committed to sourcing locally within institutional food settings. In 1997, with a grant from the Leopold Center, a group called **The Local Food Project** began working the three institutional food buyers to assist them in buying a greater portion of their food from nearby local farms and processors. By 2003, 14 institutions spent more than \$1 million buying locally. By 2006, they assisted 12 restaurants, 1 college, 1 hospital, 5 retirement homes, 7 grocery stores and 1 elementary school purchase locally.<sup>19</sup> The University's CEEE also published a

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.uni.edu/ceee/foodproject/hist.htm>

report on the savings of purchasing whole livestock from local farmers as compared to purchasing through a traditional conventional supplier,<sup>20</sup>

### **Wisconsin**

**Wisconsin Homegrown Lunch (WHL)** is a community-based initiative working with the Madison Metropolitan School District Food Service to enhance the existing meal programs by introducing fresh, nutritious, locally produced foods to students. As a joint project of the Research, Education, Action and Policy (REAP) Food Group and the University of Wisconsin's Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems, Wisconsin Homegrown Lunch began working with Lincoln, Chavez, and Shorewood elementary schools in the fall of 2002. Ever since this time, WHL staff has collaborated with the Madison Metropolitan School District Food Service Department to identify barriers and opportunities for purchasing and preparing local, fresh products.

The Madison Area Community Supported Agriculture Coalition (MACSAC) helped to identify farmers interested in providing agriculture and food education to the WHL pilot schools. The three farmers, who hosted field trips to their farms and have spent many hours in the classrooms and at local events, continue to develop relationships with each school community.

While the program has won a very high level of interest and cooperation from schools in Madison, difficulties in physical and institutional constraints are prevalent. In response, Wisconsin Homegrown Lunch is exploring ways to help farmers create foodservice-ready product through some minimal processing, such as making ready-to-deliver carrot coins, diced onions, and broccoli florets.

### **Vermont**

**Vermont FEED (Food Education Every Day)** works with numerous local agencies and non-profits to provide local foods to schools. Perhaps the most thorough and well executed model in the United States, in particular in Burlington, the state's largest city, the VT FEED model covers not only food service, but also curriculum and gardens in a holistic approach to wellness. Their model is the "3 C's": Classroom, Cafeteria and Community. Vermont is served by a DoD office located in Avon, MA, which develops the contracts for supply fresh produce to New England states.

Vermont has excelled at bringing together teachers, parents, food service staff, students, school administrators, farmers and community members to embrace school-wide food system change and has done so perhaps in part because it is a small state with a significant rural farm economy, but also because of support through legislation.

Vermont passed the **Farm to School Act (Act 145)** in the 2006 legislative session, encouraging the growth of programs throughout the state. Also known as HB 456,

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<sup>20</sup> Gomes, Jason and Enshayan, Makyar "Documenting the costs and benefits of whole animal local meat purchases by three northeast Iowa institutions" March 2005.

this bill provides aid and incentives to local school districts to “maximize use of fresh locally grown, produced and processed food; educate students about healthy eating habits through nutrition education, including using hands-on techniques to make connections between farming and the foods that students consume.”<sup>21</sup>

## Reflection - Lessons Learned

- **Promotions, Taste-Testing and Field Trips**

Many schools and school districts recognize the difficulties that changes can impose on school food service staff, so in an effort to start with small steps, they organize special promotions, such as offering one locally sourced product a week, or organized tastings or field trips to expose youth to fresh products and their source.

Small steps can lead to big difference, however, many schools stop efforts after the pilot project, or Health month or taste-test is over. If small strategies are implemented they should be coupled with over-arching systemic strategic thinking in order to make genuine progress. Otherwise special projects/events will continue to be named “special” instead of universal and/or standard.

- **Barriers and Limitations**

By studying various models and case studies throughout the nation and world, Illinois can gain tremendous knowledge on best practices, however one must also recognize that what works within one state or city school district, may not work in another.

### 1. Food Service Structures Differ

Chicago is the third largest school district in the nation and is unique compared to New York and Los Angeles (the first and second largest, respectively) because the district contracts with a food service management company; New York, conversely, is self-operating, and LA is separated into eight smaller unified districts instead of having one large district agency oversee the entire food service operation.

Then there are smaller districts and individual school projects such as those led by Alison Forrest, kitchen manager and school cook at Brewster Pierce Elementary School in Huntington, VT. Forrest serves homemade meals and carefully chooses fresh produce, often organic, from farmer’s markets and direct from farms. Once a week she goes into selected classrooms to let students taste new foods before introducing them at lunchtime.<sup>22</sup>

Personal stories such as the above are common amongst successful farm-to-school programs within small states and small school districts, but could such efforts be replicated within LA, New York or Chicago? The answer is probably not. Especially in Chicago where the Food Service Director literally manages the 600+ schools and is responsible for making sure every one of

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<sup>21</sup> [www.leg.state.vt.us](http://www.leg.state.vt.us)

<sup>22</sup> “Vermont Farm to School: A guide for Using Local Foods in Schools” VT FEED January 2007.

the 435,000 students receives meals that abide by the USDA nutritional standards, and are served on time, every school day. That single individual is not able to shop at farmers' markets for every school, nor would it be possible for the union-paid lunchroom manager to shop at a market.

Could the food service management company purchase locally grown/raised goods? That answer is yes, however with declining budgets for food and increasing costs of food, these large companies often rely on the majority of USDA entitlements, and the least expensive foodstuffs available in the most efficient form possible, which is often value-added and processed.

## **2. The Food System and the “Value Chain”**

The majority of challenges to implementing farm-to-school procurement practices are related to the structure of our food system: 1) supply, 2) consistency, 3) specifications 4) delivery, 5) processing, 6) cost. Not all farmers can meet institutional prices nor the demand as many small to mid-sized farmers are not used to high volume orders. Likewise they may lack post-harvest handling techniques and may not be used to dealing with specifications that are required when servicing institutions, such as items being pre-washed – farmers in IA and FL did this and can be cited as examples. Furthermore, the challenge of getting the product fresh from the farm and to the school sites in a timely fashion is often present in start-up models; as noted through the case studies, most schools prefer to work with a wholesale distributor or a co-op rather than direct purchasing from the farmer for this reason.

## **3. Geographical Constraints**

What works in California is not going to work in Maine. In order for Illinois to successfully work local foods into the school meals year-round, purchases will need to be made over the summer months in preparation for the fall, and storage crops would need to be held throughout the winter. Canning and processing techniques such as freezing can be used to preserve locally-grown/raised foods throughout the year. Direct purchasing can increase in the spring again when lettuces and spring vegetables return. Overall, a coordinated effort for seasonality within menu planning must be applied and executed properly in order to keep costs down and achieve the desired results.

## **4. The Fear of Change**

One would think that the change in menu offerings would affect the children the most – wrong. Case studies have shown that children embrace the new offerings, especially when coupled with educational campaigns and integrated efforts like gardening and classroom activities. The change of menus, purchasing and distribution will be felt mostly by administration and food service personnel, and these critical players must not be overlooked when implementing a new program. Successful programs engage these personnel in fun trainings, discussions and major decisions so that there are no surprises to their day-to-day routine when the program rolls out.

## 5. Food Safety

Food safety considerations are a serious part of any farm business operation, small or large. At times, however, the assumption is made that produce from local farms is less safe than those items produced on an industrial scale due to the belief that the smaller operations do not have the infrastructure or resources. The assumption is based on misconceptions though. Basic food safety considerations and practices are in place on farms regardless of the scale. In actuality, products originating from large-scale operations generally move through more hands and over more miles thereby running an increased risk of contamination due to a breakdown somewhere in the long chain of distribution. Nevertheless, some school districts, including Chicago, regulate that suppliers need to carry liability insurance often totaling \$1 million in aggregate or more. Those producers that lack large insurance policies should be asked to join a co-op or supply to a wholesale distributor that carries such insurance and operates within a HAACP-certified facility.

### Case Study Variables

The above-mentioned and additional case studies across multiple states were reviewed and examined for common variables. The variables were divided into two general categories: Mechanism for Purchasing Locally and Requirements for Success. Chart 1.1, on page 18 shows the presence and/or observance of the variables within each state; noting that many states have multiple farm-to-school programs.

- **Mechanisms for Purchasing Locally**

School food service programs purchase products differently, although primarily through large food distributors and the USDA commodity program. When building systems to purchase more locally grown/raised product, there are multiple methods utilized, as indicated in the case studies above.

**1. Wholesale Distributors (WD)** – Distributors are the link to virtually every institutional food service operation and can be a valuable resource for farms that do not have transportation or storage infrastructure. Programs must often work with their distributors, however, to encourage them to showcase and carry local products. The most successful models have a well-recognized distributor in their region that specializes in local products. If you are ordering primarily from US Foods or Sysco, you may want to seek out other companies that are more willing to carry local goods.

As noted in Chart 1.1, wholesale distribution is the most common method of ordering by schools/school districts when sourcing locally as it is a well-organized system that schools trust they can depend on.

**2. Direct Purchasing (DP)** – Smaller districts and single school operations, in particular those that are self-operating and do not contract out to the food service management company, often will purchase directly from a farmer or

from a farmer's market in order to receive the freshest, just-picked product available.

Although this is the second most popular purchasing method of the case studies examined, one must recognize that this method is often impossible or shunned upon within large operations due to the lack of infrastructure and security. If the menu says "spinach" and there is no spinach at the market or from your farmer, many larger districts would not be happy if the purchaser decided to buy Swiss chard instead. Especially those programs under the USDA Children Nutrition Services programs (National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast, Afterschool Snack and Special Milk) since Federal audits could penalize food service directors for making a substitution on the menu, resulting in the discontinuation of USDA reimbursements.

**3. Marketing or District Purchasing Cooperative (COOP)** – Co-ops have proven successful in Florida, Iowa and Wisconsin. Farmers work together to share in the distribution, marketing, processing, selling and/or billing of their products for efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

#### **4. Contract Growing (CG)**

A rarely seen, but highly effective method of sourcing local product for schools can be achieved through contract growing. School districts and school food service staff pre-identify foods needed for the coming school year and work with farmers to grow the desired amounts for the agreed-upon price. Contract growing can save your program money because you can secure a better price for high volume production, although many farmers are weary of contracts and arrangements must be made carefully and facilitated or led by someone skilled at speaking properly with growers – more like friends and less like business partners.

Another model that has not been properly executed in the US but is worth discussion is a District Purchasing Cooperative in which a district or several districts would band together to hire a central purchasing director/coordinator to be a central broker and logistics controller for multiple schools.

- **Requirements for Success**

The most successful programs have been classified as those that source a majority of their food locally, beyond occasional salad bar offerings or just fruits and vegetables. Since procurement is the most challenging and desired objective of farm-to-school programs, those programs that offer a full range of produce, dairy and protein sources from local farms, combined with the curricular offerings, are those that have been deemed the most successful, which are California, Vermont, Florida, Maine and Iowa.

After examination of the various model programs across the nation, the following repeat variables appeared in the success stories:

### **1. State-Wide Legislation and Policy**

Of the 26 states examined, see Chart 1.1 for list, 14 had state legislation that directly affected and positively impacted the development of farm-to-school programs through proclamation of the benefits of purchasing locally (MA), to fiscal support through state funds (VT), to the formation of a special government position for Farm-to-School (OR). The power of such legislature is obvious and cannot be underestimated. The states with the most forward-thinking and noteworthy programs (CA, VT, FL, ME and IA) all have received statewide support through legislation.

### **2. Start-Up Funding**

Funds to support pilot programs can come from a variety of sources as seen in these case studies – the most common sources are government (DoD, USDA and state-level), foundations and through shared funding from partner organization, such as universities. In the five model states, all have received funding from either the USDA or DoD.

### **3. Government Support (DoD, USDA, and/or other agencies)**

Government support, as indicated above, primarily consists of funding, most commonly from the Federal Government through the Department of Defense (DoD), the United States Dept. of Agriculture (USDA), National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention (CDC), Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE), Cooperative State Research Extension and Education Service (CSREES) and/or Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Rural Business and Cooperative Service (RBCS). Many of the case studies have participated in the DoD Fresh program, receiving fruits and vegetables at commodity prices. States like North Carolina and Alabama have benefited tremendously by this program not only because of the products received and reduced prices but also for the infrastructure and support the DoD provides.

The question that must be asked is why can't every state participate in this program? Perhaps it is a matter of not enough supply to go around. Corn, wheat, and soybeans account for about 88 percent of acreage for the eight major field crops over the projection period. Fruits and vegetables, classified as "specialty crops" or "horticultural products" by the USDA comprised a mere 11.3 million acres in 2005 compared to corn with 80 million acres, soy beans 72 million and wheat 55 million acres.<sup>23</sup>

Legislation such as S.1031 School Food Fresh Act of 2007, introduced by Senator Clinton on March 29, 2007 and referred to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, which specifically targets an increase in funding for "specialty food crops" could do much for catapulting efforts to grow more fruits and vegetables forward by direct support from the Federal government.

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/Baseline/crops.htm>

#### **4. Marketing and Communications**

Another element common in many of the successful model programs is an emphasis on marketing and communication in two realms: first, to the farmers, distributors and food service staff that are integral parts in executing such programs, and secondly a method of disseminating their message to students, parents, administrators and supporters. Often programs received assistance through University partnerships, city/district departmental support and through marketing-specific grants. This component should not be overlooked, since without effective communication all efforts to implement a farm-to-school and/or local foods initiative will be for lost due to lack of public awareness.

#### **5. Partnerships, in particular with Universities**

Vested stakeholders must be organized around efforts to implement a food systems change program. All of the success stories included collaboration from multiple groups, whether they were public or private – the most successful models incorporate both. One resource that seemed common amongst model programs was a local University. Universities can provide technical assistance, graduate students, evaluation and assessment professionals and are often cited as a source for funding since large foundations and the Federal government frequently fund University-supported programs, especially land-grant institutions.

#### **6. “Buy-Fresh, Buy Local” Campaign (BFBL)**

“Buy Fresh, Buy Local” is a nationally marketing campaign led by FoodRoutes of PA that has been proven successful on college campuses to education youth and empower stakeholders to demand for local products in the university dining halls. They also support farmer’s markets, CSAs and grocery stores that carry locally grown/raised products and are now coordinating efforts to create a campaign specifically targeted at farm-to-school. When correlating states that had the most remarkable farm-to-school models it was no surprise that they also had BFBL statewide chapters. Neither Maine nor Vermont have chapters, and interestingly MA, PA and NY are the only New England representation, which gives one reason to believe that the campaign is focused primarily on states with large urban areas and large populations of colleges and college graduates. Or perhaps Maine and Vermont naturally have the statewide culture that supports purchasing locally-grown/raised products and they do not need additional marketing efforts.

**Chart 1.1: Success Variables**

	State-wide legislation	DoD Funding	USDA Funding	Government Support	University Partnership	Marketing & communications	Buy Fresh, Buy Local	Co-op	Direct Purchasing	Wholesale Distributor	Contract Growing	Curricular	Produce/ Salad Bars	Meat/Poultry	Dairy
AL	X	X					X	X					X		
CA	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X		X		X	X
CO		X					X								
CT			X	X						X		X	X		
FL	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				X	X	X	
IL						X	X		X	X		X	X		
IA	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
KY		X		X	X			X		X					
LA		X					X								
MA	X			X	X		X		X	X			X		
ME			X	X					X	X			X	X	X
MI		X		X	X		X			X					
MO	X					X	X								
NC	X	X	X	X				X				X	X		
NH		X	X	X	X	X			X			X	X		
NM	X	X		X									X		
NJ		X	X		X		X		X	X			X		
NY	X	X	X	X	X		X								
OK	X	X	X	X								X	X		
OR	X			X		X			X			X	X		
PA	X						X					X			
TX		X	X	X						X			X		
VA	X						X								
VT	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
WA		X		X					X	X			X		
WI			X		X		X	X	X				X		

**Evaluation of Illinois**

Looking at the existing farm-to-school programs within IL, Fresh from the Farm (Seven Generations Ahead), Growing Power Garden Projects, Green Youth Farm, Prairie Crossing Charter School’s Farm to Table and Township High School District 211, one could conclude that Illinois has achieved much already.<sup>24</sup> Growing Power Garden Projects and the Green Youth Farm program of Chicago Botanic Garden are urban agriculture programs, which fall under the curricular category in the chart but do not spread into the food procurement for school meals arena. The programs at Prairie Crossing and in District 211, where the food service directors purchase food from farmers’ markets, are admirable, but do not apply to a large city district like Chicago, as indicated above.

<sup>24</sup> This are the projects listed on <http://www.farmtoschool.org/IL/programs.htm>

One model program worth noting is Seven Generations Ahead (SGA), a non-profit based in Oak Park, IL. SGA started a Fresh from the Farm (FFF) initiative in two Oak Park District 97 schools in 2004 to serve healthy lunches to students. Despite support from area farmer co-ops, SGA could not procure farm fresh foods and incorporate them into a major aspect of the school meal because the food service operator was unwilling to modify menus or change purchasing patterns to include locally grown products, and the schools lacked operational kitchens. By 2006, SGA had built support within the parent, teacher and school administration groups, engaging the district superintendent to create a pilot program in two elementary schools including “half whole wheat pitas, a variety of eight to ten veggies, chicken strips, and a homemade salad dressing along with a side of grapes or sliced apples.”<sup>25</sup> As seen in other programs across the nation, the ability to modify the entire menu on a consistent basis to include farm fresh and all-natural foods has again been proven to be difficult, and the operational success is limited to a couple schools within a medium-sized school district (4,973 students in Oak Park elementary schools). The FFF curriculum, similar to other farm-to-school programs, that brings in farmers as guest speakers and includes hands-on gardening as a method to connect youth with earth, has been implemented in 10 schools in Oak Park/River Forest and 3 in Chicago.

The categories marked for Illinois in Chart 1.1. does not include the last organization listed by the National Farm to School organization, which is the Organic School Project (see sidebar).

The success of a farm-to-school program in Chicago and in other districts throughout Illinois depends on filling in the gaps that are so apparent in the successful models stated above, in particular state-wide legislation, DoD and/or USDA program support, local government support and a partnerships with universities.

The purchasing methods that could assist local procurement in Chicago would be a co-op of farmers with committed, dedicated post-harvest handling and distribution to multiple stops within the city and continued efforts to work with wholesale distributors to carry locally grown/raised products. Another method that could work for Chicago and is being explored by the Organic School Project is contract growing with numerous farmers throughout the region, and even with urban agriculture farmers such as Growing Home, Growing

### **An Alternate Model for Chicago, Illinois: Organic School Project**

The **Organic School Project (OSP)** was founded in 2005 as a non-profit organization servicing three Chicago Public Schools with nutrition-based curriculum, gardening and wholesome foods. The OSP wellness services model is comprised of three components, **Grow. Teach. Feed.™**, with doctors evaluating results.

After one year of implementing programming, post data analysis indicated statistically significant improvements in nutrition knowledge, food preferences/behavior and intention/self efficacy.

OSP has demonstrated that children need to re-connect to their food source in order to embrace new foods and discover the connectivity of life through the food cycle, and this can be achieved in particular through simple gardening on or around school sites. When the garden is integrated into the curriculum, and is complimented by nutrition, mindfulness and environmental stewardship, children can then begin to make conscious choices about the foods they consume. Simultaneously OSP procures and serves **More Positive Foods™** in the school cafeteria. The term **More Positive Foods™** is used to characterize foods that are the least mechanically processed as possible, which leads us to serve all-natural and made from scratch foods, and strive for certified organic and locally grown/raised products.

<sup>25</sup> From [http://www.sevengenerationsahead.org/pilot\\_healthy\\_lunches.html](http://www.sevengenerationsahead.org/pilot_healthy_lunches.html), vi

Power and Windy City Harvest, a program of the Delta Institute.

The logistics and distribution piece is key in defining success within Chicago. In the 2004 *Red Tomato* report, Rochelle Davis, of the health advocacy group Healthy Schools Campaign stated “The Healthy Schools Campaign can’t figure out the distribution question—what’s needed is somebody to bring people together and focus resources on solving this problem. If it doesn’t happen soon, we’re going to lose all the momentum that we’ve built.”<sup>26</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Various farm-to-school and school meal initiatives exist throughout the nation. Common denominators amongst the most successful model, which the determining factor of success being district-wide systemic change, include start-up funding for a pilot program, state-wide legislation, local government support, Federal government support, a marketing and communications strategy and partnerships, primarily with a higher educational institution.

Simply providing wholesome choices will not solve such a complex system in crisis. Neither will simply providing nutrition education. The most successful models combine education with gardening followed by positive changes in the school cafeteria. Programming must be complemented by the service of fresh, locally sourced foods in order to re-establish the critical connection between the life cycle and health. Connecting children with the food they eat by growing it themselves, and educating about food as part of the regular science, math, history and humanities curricula can achieve great results in the cafeteria lunch line or at the salad bar.

Illinois is behind the trends in establishing a government supported farm-to-school program in an effort to decrease obesity while simultaneously supporting the local economy. Various organizations have been attempting to implement projects across northern Illinois, but to date, no widespread effort exists.

Illinois can learn from all farm-to-school case studies, both the model programs and those that are still in development and/or facing barriers. To simply replicate an existing program would be an error since geographical, cultural and structural differences can affect the ability of a large city, like Chicago, to seamlessly implement programming that ultimately leads to systemic change.

Chicago should look to create an innovative model, tying into the economic vitality of the city and eco-consciousness of the city’s Mayor, with partnerships from the agricultural community in the southern, central and western parts of the state. In doing so, Chicago can send a message to the rest of nation that a large-scale farm-to-school movement in an urban environment can flourish, and can impact the lives of today’s youth and future generations.

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<sup>26</sup> “Feeding Ourselves: Strategies for a New Illinois Food System” Red Tomato, 2004, available on the Chicago Community Trust website.

## **Additional Resources**

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Winston, Amy “Focus on Agriculture in Rural Maine Schools (FARMS): A Farm-to-School Project” December 2006.

Tropp, Debra, Olowolayemo, Dr. S. “How Local Farmers and School Food Service Buyers Are Building Alliances: Lessons Learned from the USDA Small Farms/School Meals Workshop” May 2000.

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<http://www.uni.edu/ceee/foodproject/hist.htm>, visited on October 3, 2007.

Feendtra, Gail and Kalb, Marion “Farm to School: Institutional Marketing” from [www.farmtoschool.org](http://www.farmtoschool.org)

Vermont FEED: Food Education Every Day “A Guide for Using Local Foods in Schools” Published January 2007 part of CSREES – USDA Community Food Projects Award #00-33800-9807.

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<http://www.foodroutes.org/farmtoschool.jsp>, visited on October 3, 2007

<http://farmtoschool.cce.cornell.edu/>, visited on October 3, 2007

<http://www.farmtoschool.org/states.php>, visited on October 10, 2007

<http://mlui.org/farms/pf.asp?key=4&sub=34&proj=95> and <http://mlui.org/farms/pf.asp?key=4&sub=34&proj=92> visited on October 10, 2007