



A Regional Summit to Promote Sustainable Food Systems
Learn about Trends in Food Distribution, Promote Nutrition Education, and
Reduce Hunger in the Mid-Atlantic Region

Summary of 7th Annual Future of our Food and Farms Summit
Farms and Schools: Growing our Future

Summit Opening

On December 14th over 80 educators, food service personnel, food distributors, farmers, and nutrition advocates attended The Mid-Atlantic Food and Farm Coalition's 7th annual Future of our Food and Farms Summit, Farms and Schools: Growing Our Future. The summit was held at the Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex in Harrisburg, PA. The first half of the day was devoted to success stories from around the Northeast region.

Cheryl Cook, Deputy Secretary for Marketing and Economic Development, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture welcomed the attendees and gave an overview of the importance of farm to school efforts and the need to work collaboratively. The directors of successful farm to school programs from across the northeast shared their successes and lessons learned in implementing. Presenters included:

- Tim Zintz, Aramark at the University of Pennsylvania
- Kim Seeley, Milky Way Dairy Farm
- Bonnie Hallam, The Food Trust
- Abbie Nelson, Vermont FEED
- Doug Davis, Burlington School District

Patricia Birkenshaw, State Director of Child Nutrition Programs for the Division of Food And Nutrition, gave the keynote address to the conference attendees. Ms. Birkenshaw encouraged participants to take advantage of the existing infrastructure that can make these projects possible. Among her suggestions were to start with summer feeding programs that averted some of the constraints of seasonality in the northeast.

Working Groups

The afternoon was devoted to working groups identifying the possibilities for farm to school programs as well as the challenges and steps they would have to take to implement such programs. Facilitators for these sessions included:

- Allison Karpyn, The Food Trust
- Kate Adamick, Independent Consultant
- Anupama Joshi, Center for Food and Justice
- Kristen Markely, Community Food Security Coalition



A Regional Summit to Promote Sustainable Food Systems
Learn about Trends in Food Distribution, Promote Nutrition Education, and
Reduce Hunger in the Mid-Atlantic Region

Outcomes from these working groups generated the following questions and answers.

How can small or mid-sized farmers supply large institutions?

Farm co-ops, a system where farmers pool products to sell to larger clients is one way to supply institutions such as schools. Set reasonable goals. A school that is currently using only non-local foods will not be able to purchase entirely from local sources. Beginning with one product that is available can start a relationship between food service and farmers.

How can farmers market to schools?

Farmers can emphasize the superior quality of their product as well as the relatively low additional cost when the cost per student per year is calculated. For institutions that need to sell meals to make a profit, farmers can emphasize that using a better product has been shown to dramatically increase sales. For schools concerned with children eating nutritious meals, farmers can emphasize that the higher quality and better taste leads to more nutritious food getting into the mouths of children.

How can farm to school projects work around the constraints of seasonality?

There are a few ways to deal with the constraints of seasonality in the northeast. Start small. Looking for a product such as apples that are available for a good part of the year is one way to get started. Consider lightly processed foods, such as canned tomatoes. Products such as milk and cheese are available from local sources year round and may be a good way to begin a farm to school project.

How can individuals or organizations who are not producers or buyers get involved?

Supporters and intermediaries have an important role in the farm to school movement. Individuals and groups in this role must recognize that farmers and school food service directors are asked to work very hard with very few resources, and may at first be skeptical if someone appears to tell them how to do their jobs. A few ways to get started are: getting to know the people with whom you are trying to work; attend school board meetings; join your school's wellness committee; get involved with the PTO; learn all you can about what goes into farming and providing food for thousands of students.

How can food service directors use unprocessed foods that require more preparation without overwhelming their staff?

There are a few techniques that can help with the labor involved in using produce that comes in a different form than food service is used to. One approach is to balance high prep and low prep foods. If Tuesday is a meal using fresh vegetables that have to be cleaned, cut and cooked all on sight, Monday may have to be French fry day. Even within one meal, food service directors may want to balance high and low prep items. Also, let it be known what form you need ingredients to arrive in. Farmers, processors, and intermediaries may not be aware of the requirements of those doing the preparation and cooking.



A Regional Summit to Promote Sustainable Food Systems
Learn about Trends in Food Distribution, Promote Nutrition Education, and
Reduce Hunger in the Mid-Atlantic Region

How do I avoid disappointment?

Start small. Plan for something that you are reasonably sure can be successful and then celebrate that success with partners. For example, perhaps start with one meal, one product or one snack. Take pictures and celebrate the event. The next time you attempt a project, people will already have the success in the back of their minds.

How do I physically get all this farm produce to different schools in my district?

Some kind of distributor/middle person is pretty essential to making these programs successful and sustainable. This can be either a new or existing distribution system. If there is already a distributor who works with the school district, see if they would be willing to buy from some of the local farmers. Maybe one of the intermediaries can facilitate the consolidating of produce and the distribution.

Farm to School: Policy and Action

The smaller working groups presented their discussion to the larger group. Anupama Joshi and El Farrell, from the national farm to school movement, presented work being done on both the regional and national level. El can be the primary contact for people in the northeast who want to coordinate efforts and take advantage of existing information about farm to school programs. Her email address is El.Farrell@unh.edu.

In addition to connecting to the national farm to school movement, participants identified several key policy issues that would make farm to school projects more feasible. These included: increasing the reimbursement that schools receive for free and reduced student lunches; raising the price under which schools are not required to bid on products, thus allowing them to buy more expensive higher quality local food; and funding the farm to cafeteria section of the Farm Bill.

Next Steps

Participants learned how to coordinate their efforts with the national farm to school program. At <http://www.farmschool.org> are a variety of resources for programs, as well as access to a network of other programs around the state. At the state level Pennsylvanians are encouraged to join The Farmers' Market Alliance listserv, <http://www.thefoodtrust.org/dada/mail.cgi> The Center for Food and Justice, <http://departments.oxy.edu/uepi/cfj/> and the Community Food Security Coalition, <http://www.foodsecurity.org> are also excellent resources to learn more about farm to school. <http://www.ecoliteracy.org/programs/rsl-guide.html> offers guides for beginning farm to school programs.

Many participants also left the conference with concrete steps to take including attempting school board meetings, getting to know the farmers and school food service directors in their area, and writing op eds in their local papers to encourage the use of local foods in the cafeteria.



A Regional Summit to Promote Sustainable Food Systems
Learn about Trends in Food Distribution, Promote Nutrition Education, and
Reduce Hunger in the Mid-Atlantic Region

Glossary of Terms

À La Carte – In schools, à la carte refers to food and beverages sold to students in the cafeteria in addition to the meals and snacks served through the federally-reimbursed child nutrition programs.

Child Nutrition Programs – The five USDA domestic food assistance programs that primarily serve the nutritional needs of children. These programs include: the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Summer Food Service Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and the Special Milk Program.

Commodity Foods – As a result of federal surplus-removal and price-support programs, the USDA purchases excess food produced by American farmers. The USDA utilizes a number of commodity distribution and nutrition programs to provide these excess commodities to low-income Americans.

Competitive Foods – In schools, competitive foods refers to food and beverages available other than those served through the federally-reimbursed child nutrition programs, including food and beverages available through à la carte lines, vending machines, snack bars, student stores and through fundraisers.

Farm Bill – Authority for the Food Stamp Program is contained within the Farm Bill. This legislation can also affect commodity distribution programs such as TEFAP and CSFP and the child nutrition programs that receive commodity foods. In addition to nutrition programs, authority for many other USDA programs and activities is contained within the Farm Bill. The Farm Bill was most recently reauthorized by the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, P.L. 107-171.

Farm to Cafeteria – Part of the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, Farm to Cafeteria projects link local farmers and schools to bring locally-grown food into the National School Lunch Program. Examples of Farm to Cafeteria projects include salad bars, seasonal items incorporated into lunch menus, and school gardens. Although currently no funds have been appropriated for the implementation of this program, schools in 17 states have started their own programs, sometimes referred to as Farm to School programs, with funding from community organizations and Community Food Projects Grants from the USDA.

National School Lunch Act – The National School Lunch Act and the Child Nutrition Act are the two pieces of authorizing legislation for the child nutrition and WIC programs. These laws were most recently reauthorized by the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004.



A Regional Summit to Promote Sustainable Food Systems
Learn about Trends in Food Distribution, Promote Nutrition Education, and
Reduce Hunger in the Mid-Atlantic Region

National School Lunch Program (NSLP) – This USDA program helps public and private schools provide nutritious lunches to all students. Low-income students are able to receive free or reduced-price lunches through the program.

Department of Defense Farm to School Program- In 1994, the Department of Defense began offering its produce buying services to institutions other than military bases and installations. Hospitals, schools, and prisons are just some of the institutions to utilize these services. Several years later, at the request of USDA, the DoD Farm to School Program (DoD F2SP) was developed. This Program buys farm-grown fruits and vegetables only within the state.