



January 2024 E-Harvest Newsletter

A Message from Commissioner Miller

Howdy Neighbors! Welcome to Your E-Harvest Newsletter.



Happy New Year E-Harvest partners! This year, I am asking my fellow Texans to make a resolution – eat and serve more Texas agricultural products in 2024. Everybody can start with the famous Texas red grapefruits. They are in season and Texas citrus brightens those winter days. Enjoy, and remember ... Texas Agriculture matters.

Sid Miller

Texas Agriculture Commissioner

Farm Fresh Schools

Congratulations Local Food for Schools Grant Recipients!

Last November, Commissioner Sid Miller officially awarded 331 school districts between \$30,000 and \$250,000 in Local Food for Schools (LFS) grant funds to purchase local Texas foods. In total, more than \$22.3 million was allocated across the state. Click [here](#) to view the list of LFS grant recipients.

The aim is to strengthen connections to farmers and ranchers, develop a Farm Fresh generation of Texans, and support Texas agriculture.

Participating schools and Texas producers interested in supporting local food in schools can visit www.squaremeals.org/LFS to learn more.

TDA's Farm Fresh Cooking for the Seasons Recipe Book

Every month, the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) spotlights a fruit or vegetable currently harvested in Texas. Ruby Red Grapefruit is the star in January. Grapefruit juice and zest can be substituted for other citrus, including the oranges in the [cookies](#) found on **page 77** of the Farm Fresh Cooking for the Seasons Cookbook.



February Harvest of the Month: Red Leaf Lettuce

Funding/Donation Opportunities

SCALES

In an effort to increase procurement of local products in schools, Boise State University partnered with U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to create the [Supporting Community Agriculture & Local Education Systems](#) (SCALES) grant. This nationwide opportunity will provide up to 70 School Food Authorities (SFAs) with up to \$150,000 to implement projects that increase local product use through partnerships with entities throughout the food system. Applications are due no later than **January 26, 2024**.

2024 GroMoreGood Grassroots Grant

The application period for the KidsGardening.org/Scotts Miracle-Gro Foundation [GroMoreGood Grassroots Grant](#) has opened. Grants will be awarded to 170 recipients in 2024. Applicants can receive funding for new or existing garden programs, with priority given to programs that will be the most impacted. Applications close on **February 9, 2024**.

Learning Opportunities

Next Local Food for Schools Grantee Office Hours: January 17

On December 12, 2023, the Local Food for Schools (LFS) Grant team hosted a virtual office hour session to answer questions and support LFS

grant participants. The recorded session and slides are available under the Office Hours section of the [LFS webpage](#). The next office hours meeting is scheduled for January 17, 2024; a zoom link will be sent out to LFS grant recipients. If you are participating in the LFS grant and are not receiving communications, contact localfoodgrant@texasagriculture.gov.

Ideas for Farm to School

California Food for California Kids is an initiative that collaborates with school districts in the state to increase local foods in schools. Each year, they give out Leadership and Innovation Awards. For an overview of what 2023's nine winners have accomplished, read about their fresh ideas here: [CFCK Awards](#)

Food Corp Lessons

Did you know that FoodCorps has a [606 page curriculum](#) for K-12 instruction? FoodCorps service members can use this guide to educate students on food related topics, including healthy food choices, food ecology, growing healthy foods, and more. To learn more about FoodCorps and how they can help you increase your farm to school activities, go to their website: FoodCorps.org

Farm Fresh Sharing 2023 Farm Fresh Challenge

Farm Fresh Sharing is a feature spotlighting Contracting Entities (CEs) from Texas and across the country that take part in farm to school activities and answer questions from you. Beginning in February, we will feature an interview with a Texas CE or producer in each E-Harvest. CEs who have agreed to be spotlighted choose 10 questions from a list of 20 curated by TDA. They send those answers to TDA with pictures of their farm to school activities. The goal of this section is to make connections between CEs and producers, answer questions about Farm Fresh programming, and share success stories. If you are interested in sharing your experiences and inspiring other CEs, please fill out this [survey](#).

The 2023 Farm Fresh Challenge (FFC) was a rousing success. For the first time, the October Challenge was open to both National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) operators. TDA received 192 pledges to participate from CEs and 107 CEs received recognition. Pledges among NSLP CEs were up 13.6% from the 2022-23 school year, while CACFP pledges increased by 1,500%. Recognition increased from a total of 96 in 2022-23 to 107 in 2023-2024.



In October, CEs taking part in FFC activities spent \$13.68 million on local products. The challenge provided 2.67 million students with opportunities to learn about Texas agriculture using word games, coloring pages, farmer visits, student farmers' markets, mobile dairy visits, and more. You can see some of the flyers, fun displays, and creative use of local foods for educational activities on the Farm Fresh Challenge Success Stories page on SquareMeals.org.

TDA representatives visited three separate school districts to view beautiful tasting event displays, student farmers' markets, and Southwest Dairy's Mobile Classroom. CEs were very welcoming, and everyone who was able to visit had a wonderful time.

Farm Fresh Childcare Finding New Recipes

Grapefruit recipes that are suitable for young children can be hard to come by. Did you know that grapefruits can be broiled and/or roasted? Roasting grapefruit makes them sweeter and juicier. Try roasting some grapefruit and adding sections to a green salad or creating a citrus fruit salad.



Funding/Donation Opportunities

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Learning Opportunities

Sovereignty Gardens

Teach your little students about gardening the indigenous way with [Sovereignty Gardens](#), a series of short videos featuring Bran the puppet and his puppet bison, Stompy. Videos are around 5 minutes long with downloadable companion lesson plans.

OK Farm to School

The [Oklahoma Farm to School Program](#) has a list of agricultural short films and video clips available to educate students about food, other crops, and farm animals. The dancing cows in “Who Put That Burger on Your Plate” are highly entertaining.

Farm Fresh Producer

National Bean Day



January 6 is National Bean Day. An assortment of beans can be grown in Texas, including beans for drying, Southern peas, green/snap beans, lima and mung beans. Beans are high in fiber and dried beans are a good source of protein.

Funding Opportunities

FruitGuys Community Fund

FruitGuys has opened their 2024 [Community Fund](#) grant. The grant is open to small farms (less than 300 acres) that are owned/operated by the applicant. Nonprofit agricultural businesses may also apply. Awards will not exceed \$5,000. Projects are scored based on community impact and environmental sustainability. Application closes **January 30, 2024**.

Learning Opportunities

Texas Schools are Looking for Texas Farmers!

TDA is encouraging schools to use the [Farm Fresh Network](#) as a resource to find local producers to increase Texas foods on school meal trays and connect schools to Texas agriculture. If you are a producer currently registered in TDA's [Farm Fresh Network](#), please take a moment to review and update your information since schools are using the FFN producer list and reaching out. If you are not a member yet, please join [here](#). *If you need to make changes to your FFN information, please contact farmfresh@texasagriculture.gov.*

Farm Fresh Families

Getting to Know School Meals

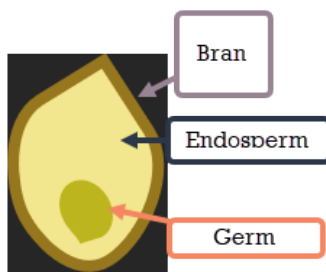


December gave us the opportunity to delve further into vegetables in school meals. Let's take a look at grains in child nutrition programs.

Welcome to the fourth issue of the School Food Digest!

Grains are an important part of school meals. Eighty percent of grains served per week in school nutrition programs must be whole grain rich. As with fruits and vegetables, there are minimum grain portion requirements for each age group.

Anatomy of a Grain



Grains are made up of three parts: the germ, the endosperm, and the bran.

The **germ** is the part of the grain that sprouts and can grow into a new plant. It provides a bit of protein, some B vitamins, unsaturated fats, and minerals.

The **endosperm** comprises the largest part of the grain. In it, you will find protein, vitamins and minerals, and complex carbohydrates. This portion of the grain serves as a nutrition source for the germ, giving energy to the seedling to grow roots and sprout.

The **bran** has several layers and provides a protective covering for the endosperm and the germ. The bran is where you will find fiber, antioxidants, and B vitamins.

Serving whole grain-rich grains means that the bran is not removed therefore fiber remains in the grain item, which supports digestion and keeps you full longer by slowing down absorption. When the grain is enriched, the bran and germ are removed leaving only the endosperm and then the lost nutrients are added back in to enrich the grain product, but the fiber is not added back. Schools are required to serve a certain amount of whole grain-rich grains to give students a fiber source. More whole grain information can be found here: [MyPlate](#)

[Whole Grains Council](#)

Come back next month for a look at milk in school meals.

Farm Fresh Back to Basics

Starting the New Year with Texas Farm Fresh

Welcome to 2024! The new year provides the opportunity for new beginnings, new attitudes, and a fresh perspective. Planning for the next school year starts soon and what better time to prepare to increase your farm to school programming?

The [Farm Fresh Network](#) map has been updated to include a search feature. Look for specific producers, search for specific products, or find a producer based on your location.

Get ideas for Farm to School activities by looking through the 2023 Farm Fresh Challenge Success Stories on [SquareMeals.org](#). These showcase the fun, inventive ways CEs across the state highlighted local foods and Texas agriculture during October.

Plan for a school garden! Check out the [Plan](#), [Grow](#), [Harvest](#), and [Connect](#) resources in the Let's Get Growing series created by TDA.

Need more inspiration? Read this [article](#) in AgWeek about the success of Minnesota's Farm to School movement. And stay tuned for monthly profiles of Texas CEs, beginning next month!



Contact TDA

Email: FarmFresh@TexasAgriculture.gov
Toll Free: (877) TEX-MEAL

Connect with Others

Texas Farm Fresh Network:

Use this tool to connect with Texas food companies that currently sell or are interested in selling to schools, childcare centers, adult care centers and summer meal programs. Company listings include contact information, product availability and distribution radius.

Funding Opportunities:

Financial support from organizations may help establish or advance local Farm Fresh initiatives. This list includes opportunities from TDA, USDA and other organizations.

Interested in learning more about Texas products?

Sign up for the *Go Local. GO TEXAN E-zine* today.



TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
COMMISSIONER SID MILLER

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