



# July 2024 E-Harvest Newsletter

## A Message from Commissioner Miller

### Howdy Neighbors! Welcome to Your E-Harvest Newsletter.



We are well into summer, and it is already time to start thinking about Back to School. I encourage parents to make plans to have their students eat meals at school. Check your school's website for the household application to apply for free or reduced-price meals. Also, students eligible for reduced-price breakfasts can eat free breakfasts. When students access school meals, parents can feel confident that their children are getting the necessary nutrients that will fuel success in the classroom.

Sid Miller

Texas Agriculture Commissioner

## Farm Fresh Schools

### Harvest of the Month Recipes

Cherry tomatoes are the Harvest of the Month star in July. Find tomato suppliers across Texas by using the [Farm Fresh Network](#) map on SquareMeals.org.

Get creative with a cold salad for your students. This [Mediterranean Quinoa Salad](#) from USDA uses



cherry tomatoes and other vegetables to create a vibrant, nutritious side dish.

August Harvest of the Month: red and yellow bell peppers

### **Funding Opportunities**

No Kid Hungry awards grants to School Food Authorities that provide meals to children through federally funded Child Nutrition Programs. If you have a need for grant funds to expand or strengthen access to your program, fill out this form: [No Kid Hungry Grant Inquiry](#)

### **Learning Opportunities**

#### **Pilot Light Food Education Center**

Pilot Light Food Education Center has created a library of resources for schools to teach students about where their food comes from in ways that fit in with multiple school subjects. This [lesson plan](#) that explores the “three sisters” method of planting corn, beans, and squash meets standards for English Language Arts and Social Sciences.

#### **No LFS Office Hours in July**

We are skipping LFS office hours for July. Please contact [localfoodgrant@texasagriculture.gov](mailto:localfoodgrant@texasagriculture.gov) for any questions. Enjoy your summer! – LFS Grant Team

#### **Please respond to TDA’s Farm Fresh Survey 2024!**

This 5–10-minute survey helps inform the agency of Texas Farm Fresh activity and provides feedback on your needs and how to support Farm Fresh programming in schools and childcare settings across the state. Please complete the [NSLP and CACFP Operators](#) survey before August 1.

### **Farm Fresh Sharing**

*Farm Fresh Sharing* spotlights Contracting Entities (CEs) from Texas and across the country who take part in farm to school activities. They answer questions about Farm Fresh programming and share success stories. If you are interested in being featured, please fill out this [survey](#).

If you attended the Farm Fresh Round Table session at MegaCon, you are already familiar with this month’s Child Nutrition Director (CND).

Courtney Boullion is the CND for both Hamshire-Fannett and Hardin-Jefferson ISDs. Combined, the two districts have 8 campuses and a strong Farm to School mission.



**Q:** How often do you serve local foods in your cafeterias?

**A:** We serve local foods at least once per week on a regular basis. During the Farm Fresh Challenge we served local foods every day.

**Q:** Have you noticed an increase in meal participation and higher opinions about school meals since you began serving local foods?

**A:** We really did have a big increase in participation with the Farm Fresh Challenge last year in 2022. It was the first year that the district had gone from management company to self-operation and that really was a turning point in participation numbers. The community began to realize we were increasing quality and selection in our serving lines and that was something everyone could get behind.

**Q:** Are you able to support other districts with implementation of Farm Fresh Programming? (Support includes mentoring, sharing information, answering questions, etc.)

**A:** I have been able to help other local districts with implementation of the program. I get questions often on the process so I am able to share information. I also have an active Child Nutrition Facebook page where other districts can see our ideas and promotions.

**Q:** Do you have frequent contact with your local food producers?

**A:** Yes, I do keep in contact with local farmers. We actually have a farmer about a mile down the road. We keep a good relationship and determine how he can help us with our initiative. I do communicate with him directly and he will update my list of what is available in the quantities needed or when something I am looking for will become available.

**Q:** Are any of your local producers a part of the Farm Fresh Network?

A: Yes, a few of the local producers I use are part of the Farm Fresh Network such as Doguet's Rice, Pryor Cattle Company, and Southeast Texas Olive Oil.

**Q:** What would you like other CEs, your students' families, and Texas producers to know about Farm Fresh Programming in school meals?

A: The Farm Fresh Initiative is an excellent way to educate students and increase the quality of food all at the same time. Students are often not given a vast variety of fruits and vegetables at home, so they do not really know what they like and dislike. Our serving lines give them an opportunity to try something new and determine their opinion on an item. I often post recipes on new items so that families can try things at home too that they may have never thought to try.



**Q:** How long have you been participating in Farm Fresh Programming?

A: At Hamshire-Fannett, we have been participating for 2 years now which is the amount of time the program has been self-operation. I am also the Director of Child Nutrition at Hardin-Jefferson ISD and they have been participating for 4 years in total.

**Q:** What has been your biggest challenge in connecting with local producers?

A: The biggest challenge has been transporting the produce from the farmer to each of our schools. Some of them are unable to deliver so managing that on top of the normal job requirements can be challenging.

**Q:** What kind of educational activities have you been able to implement as part of or related to the Farm Fresh Initiative?

A: We usually do a taste test of some kind with a locally grown food. The students will have a chance to give their opinion on the item. This year we made zucchini brownies. We did the taste test to where one grade did not know there was zucchini in the brownies and the next grade did. We compared the data between each group.



Another thing we have done was pickling cucumbers and letting the students watch it go through the process. Then a couple of weeks later, the students get to try the homemade pickles.

This year we made homemade salsa with local ingredients and served it on the lines as well.

We do many educational sessions on the process of food going from farm to table. We will teach the students usually in PE and then do an activity to corresponds.

**Q:** How do you promote the local products you use?

**A:** I use our Child Nutrition Facebook page to promote all the activities and food items to the community and students. I also collaborate with the Communications Director to help me with this process of advertisement.

## Farm Fresh Childcare

### Finding New Recipes

Top this nutritious [Bean Burrito Bowl](#) with a beautiful, fresh pico de gallo made from Texas-fresh tomatoes. Are your littles meat eaters? Swap out the beans with ground beef to make a meaty version.



### Learning Opportunities

The National Farm to School Network (NFSN) is dedicated to increasing farm to school programming in K-12 and Early Childcare settings. They have a plethora of resources to help you promote school gardens, including this [Gardening with Young Children](#) series.

## Farm Fresh Producer

### Cow Appreciation Day



The second Tuesday of July was coined Cow Appreciation Day in 2005. This day celebrates all that cows do for people. They provide us with milk and cream and beef to drink and eat. They're also cute.

## **Funding Opportunities**

### **Organic Certification**

If you're interested in being certified as an organic farmer, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has opened applications for the [Organic Certification Cost Share Program](#). Applications close October 31 and cover expenses incurred between Oct. 1, 2023 and Sept. 30, 2024.

### **Farm to School Opportunities**

#### **Please respond to TDA's Farm Fresh Survey 2024!**

This 5–10-minute survey helps inform the agency of Texas Farm Fresh activity and provides feedback on your needs and how to support Farm Fresh programming in schools and childcare settings across the state. Please complete the [Producer](#) survey before August 1.

#### **Farm Fresh Network Update Request**

If you are currently registered in TDA's [Farm Fresh Network](#), please take a moment to review and update your information. Schools are reaching out now and we want to ensure they have the correct information to contact you. *If you need to make changes to your FFN information or have questions about your membership, please contact [farmfresh@texasagriculture.gov](mailto:farmfresh@texasagriculture.gov).*

*Additional Questions or Concerns? Please contact the Farm Fresh Initiative Team at [farmfresh@texasagriculture.gov](mailto:farmfresh@texasagriculture.gov).*

#### **Farm Fresh Photo Library**

TDA is undertaking a grassroots effort to increase our photo library. To showcase Texas farmers, ranchers, and producers, a form has been created to collect photo submissions from Farm Fresh participants willing to share. Find the form [here](#).

**Farm Fresh Families**

## Calling Families with High School Students

Do you have a high school student interested in health and nutrition? Do they have a passion for agriculture and/or local foods? Your high school student can help their school district promote school meals and Texas agriculture, and influence menu options while doing so.



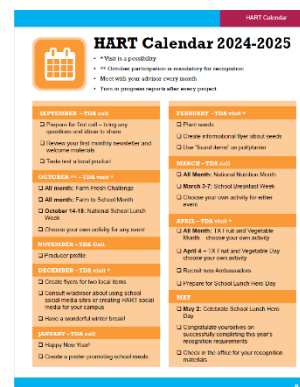
The Texas Department of Agriculture's (TDA) [Health Ambassadors for a Ready Texas \(HART\) Initiative](#) was created to include student leaders in the school meal process. The goal of the HART Initiative is to increase meal participation through education and promotion of what school meals entail. Peer to peer communication is a valuable tool for dispelling myths and increasing awareness of the hard

work and local products that go into creating school breakfast and lunch.

HART Ambassadors work with an advisor on campus, who acts as a sounding board for the student and a liaison between the student and the Child Nutrition Director. One campus can have multiple students who work together on projects, though each student will need to complete their own progress report for each project.

To earn recognition, HART students complete tasks for 6 out of 9 months. Their Participant Guide includes a calendar and details about each month's task. Templates have been created to guide them on information to include and an appendix full of resources can be found in the final pages of the Participant Guide. The only caveat to project completion is that every Ambassador must participate in October, the month that encompasses Farm to School Month, the Farm Fresh Challenge, and National School Lunch Week. New for students participating in the HART Initiative this year is a project tracker, which allows them to keep all of their project information in one place and decreases the time needed to complete their progress reports.

Recognition for students includes a signed letter and certificate from Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller and a patch embroidered with the



HART logo. Students who join the HART Initiative will receive a pin with the HART logo with their welcome kit.

The [HART application](#) closes **August 30**. Encourage your high school students to apply now!

For School Years '24-'25 and '25-'26 TDA is also participating in the MyPlate grant, which offers another opportunity to promote nutrition and healthy eating through the use of the MyPlate app and other materials. The final question on the HART application gives students the opportunity to express their interest in participating in this grant.

## Farm Fresh Back to Basics

### What is the Farm Fresh Initiative?

A short explanation that explains TDA's Farm Fresh vision can be given using the acronym **CROPS**:

**C**ultivate a Farm Fresh generation connected to Texas agriculture that understands where their food comes from, how it was made, and the benefits it contains.

**R**eimagine Texas meal trays by increasing nutritious local foods served and create an enduring mindset among young Texans in which foods are chosen with the knowledge that those choices positively impact not only their own health, but the health of their community at large.

**O**ffer education, training, and resources to empower Texas Producers and Child Nutrition Program Operators to sell and purchase local Texas foods.

**P**romote Texas Farm Fresh foods and agricultural producers that support a Homegrown & Healthy Texas.

**S**trengthen TDA's administration of U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) food and nutrition programs through subject matter expertise, training, technical support, and promotion of Texas agriculture and local food systems.

The Farm Fresh sessions at MegaCon were informative for CEs and TDA. We learned a lot about what CEs need and common misconceptions about Farm to School. For the next few issues, we'll include topics that were discussed and work to dispel some of those misconceptions.



## **Farm Fresh Definition of Local**

First up, what is local? TDA defines local as anything grown, raised, and/or produced in the state of Texas. For those who received LFS funds, the definition of local includes businesses headquartered in the Lone Star state, as well. Child Nutrition program operators may use distance from their location as a definition of local. For example, a school district may decide that local means anything within 200 miles of their location.

What is not considered local? Something made with ingredients from Texas, but processed, packaged, and shipped from another state is not something that meets the definition of local for LFS or the Farm Fresh Challenge. For instance, a manufacturer based on the East coast imports Texas fruits and vegetables to make a smoothie to be sold to schools, then ships them back to Texas is not considered local. Yes, they use \*some\* local ingredients, but the majority of the work to produce that item takes place outside of the Lone Star state.

## **Farm Fresh Getting Started**

What are some easy steps to get started with Farm Fresh? First, check with your distributors to see what local products they have available. Many distributors will have a list of Texas products they carry. Once you have these lists, you can check your orders to see which local products you're already using. Expand on this easy step by using menu indicators to show which local products you're serving. You can include information about local products included in your menu items in morning announcements, school newsletters, and social media posts.

## **Questions**

Do you have Farm to School questions or subjects you'd like to learn more about? Submit this [form](#) to possibly have them answered/discussed in future E-Harvest issues.



TDA is pleased to welcome the following producers to the Farm Fresh Network:

Dresden Specialty Meats	Barry	Protein
Top Essential Farm	Bedias	Protein
Gilmore Beef and Cattle LLC	Troy	Protein
Sir Loin Meat Company LLC	Farmersville	Protein
Provalley Foods, LLC	McAllen	Protein
Windy Oaks Farm	Mabank	Protein
Beuerlein Angus Ranch, LLC	West	Protein
Feathered Fork Farms	Lott	Protein
Double Creek Farms	Clifton	Protein
Easy Texas Beef Processors	Frankston	Protein
Rockin L Cattle Company	Brenham	Protein
Ratcliff Premium Meat	Oakwood	Protein

## Contact TDA

Email: [FarmFresh@TexasAgriculture.gov](mailto: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?**

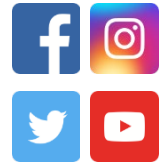
Sign up for the *Go Local. GO TEXAN E-zine* today.



TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
**COMMISSIONER SID MILLER**

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