



**March 2024**

## **E-Harvest Newsletter**

### **A Message from Commissioner Miller**

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



Healthy local foods jumpstart good nutrition. Join me in celebrating National Nutrition Month by buying and serving food from Texas. Serving local foods is also educational. Everybody likes to learn about the benefits of eating fresh, local foods. Remember ... Texas Agriculture Matters!

Sid Miller

Texas Agriculture Commissioner

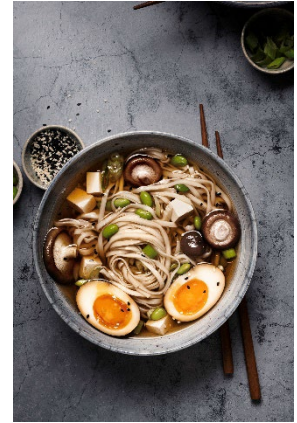
### **School Lunch Hero Day**

Leading up to National School Lunch Hero Day, TDA will share uplifting and appreciative things people say about cafeteria staff. Child Nutrition staff work tirelessly to provide nutritious meals to students across the country and deserve recognition on a large scale. Think of what you appreciate about your district's school lunch heroes, and send it in an email to [FarmFresh@TexasAgriculture.gov](mailto:FarmFresh@TexasAgriculture.gov)

### **Farm Fresh Schools**

**Harvest of the Month Recipe**

Every month, the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) spotlights a fruit or vegetable currently being harvested in Texas. The Harvest of the Month for March is mushrooms. [Healthyschoolrecipes.com](https://healthyschoolrecipes.com) compiles NSLP compliant recipes created by school districts across the country. Try this [Vegetarian Miso Noodle Soup](#) to showcase local mushrooms in your cafeteria.



April Harvest of the Month: Broccoli

### **Funding/Donation Opportunities**

The American Heart Association [Teaching Gardens Network](#) has materials to help you with your school garden needs. Joining the network (it's free) provides you access to their resources, including this [informational sheet](#) about requesting donations for your school garden. There are tips for requesting monetary donations and donations of plants and other goods.

### **Learning Opportunities**

#### **Little Rainclouds**

Help your students learn about mindful plant watering with this [Little Rainclouds](#) activity from BigGreen.org.

#### **Next LFS Office Hours: March 13, 2024**

The fourth office hours meeting is scheduled for March 13, 2024 from 3-4pm CST; grant recipients will receive the zoom link via email and LFS monthly e-blast. If you'd like to view the recorded sessions and slides from February's office hours, please visit the [LFS webpage](#). If you are participating in the LFS grant and are not receiving communications, contact [localfoodgrant@texasagriculture.gov](mailto:localfoodgrant@texasagriculture.gov).

### **Farm Fresh Sharing**

*Farm Fresh Sharing* is a feature where we spotlight Contracting Entities (CEs) from Texas and across the country who take part in farm to school activities and answer questions from you. The goal of this section is to make connections between CE 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](#).

March brings the opportunity to highlight Frankston ISD. Located just southwest of Tyler, Frankston ISD is a small district using the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) to provide meals to all students at no cost in the 2023-24 school year.

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

A: Weekly

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

A: Yes, in (meal) participation for eating fresh local produce.

**Q:** What TDA resources, other than the Farm Fresh Network map, have you used to help you with Farm Fresh Programming?

A: DOD Program and our distributor's weekly email about local produce available.



**Q:** What inspired you to start Farm Fresh Programming?

A: The Farm Fresh Challenge.

**Q:** What motivates you to continue and expand your current Farm Fresh efforts?

A: For one, the students like fresh produce and two, I feel like the more we can help our local farmers, the better for them.

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

A: Absolutely.

**Q:** A frequent reason for not using local producers is the procurement process. What would you say to other CEs who are afraid to make mistakes in procurement?

**A:** I am one of those. I would say to contact the local producer, ask questions such as, “Are there other districts in the area you service?” Contact the districts that they service and ask questions. And also contact your local ESC.

**Q:** What resources would you recommend for them to be more comfortable with local food procurement?

**A:** The ARM (Administrative Review Manual), your local ESC, and contact some Food Service Directors in your area who procure local foods.

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

**A:** With the Farm Fresh Program our students are eating more locally. Our participation as far as eating fresh fruits and vegetables has increased. It’s important for our students to also know where the items come from. Not just a store. But a farm.

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

**A:** Since 2017

**Q:** What is your students’ favorite local product that is part of a menu item?

**A:** Watermelon and oranges

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

**A:** Coloring handouts, surveys, fruit of the month, Farm Fresh Fridays.

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

**A:** Signage, sometimes handouts

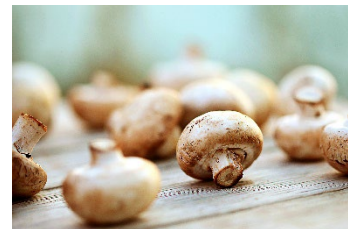


**Q:** What advice would you give a CE trying to decide if/how to participate in Farm Fresh programming?

**A:** Once you start looking at your menu, you'll find items that are already local. Adding fresh produce to the mix will bring you right up there. We dropped some canned fruit and added fresh fruit which turned out to be a great move.

## **Farm Fresh Childcare Finding New Recipes**

One of the best ways to get children to try something new is to “hide” it in another food item you know they’ll eat. If your littles are leery of trying mushrooms, try this [Vegetable Frittata](#) recipe from USDA. Eggs are mixed with mushrooms, onions, bell peppers, cheese, and spinach and baked in a muffin pan for a perfect serving size.



## **Funding/Donation Opportunities**

The American Heart Association [Teaching Gardens Network](#) has materials to help you with your early care garden needs. Joining the network (it’s free) provides you access to their resources, including this [informational sheet](#) about requesting donations for your garden. There are tips for requesting monetary donations and donations of plants and other goods.

## **Learning Opportunities**

### **Mighty Mushroom & Friends**

Would you like to teach your students more about mushrooms in celebration of the Harvest of the Month? The Mushroom Council has a list of mushroom resources featuring [Mighty Mushroom](#), a cartoon mushroom who teaches students all about mushrooms.

## **Plant People**



KidsGardening.org has a fun, customizable activity using seeds, pantyhose, potting soil, and assorted art supplies to grow plant people. Instructions can be found here: [Plant People](#)

## Farm Fresh Producer

### National Agriculture Week



Agriculture is appreciated year-round, but the week of March 17–23, 2024 is National Ag Week. Nationally, there are roughly 22 million people working in agricultural businesses. Each farmer/rancher feeds an average of 44 people, an increase from an average of 25 people fed per farmer in the 1960s. We all know farmers and ranchers work hard, but did you know that the average time a farmer spends working on the farm in their lifetime is 58.3 years? From all of us here at TDA, a huge thank you to Texas farmers and ranchers for all you do to provide food for Texans of all ages.

### Learning Opportunities

Farm to School has become a focus for many states, especially after the supply chain issues encountered during COVID. Purchasing foods directly from a farm, ranch, or local producer helps to diminish the possibility of not having a menu item. National Public Radio has reported on [Farm to School](#) and the impact it can have on farms that supply local school districts.

### Farm to School Opportunities

**[Local Food for Schools \(LFS\) grant program](#) recipients have been awarded up to \$30,000 - \$250,000 to purchase minimally or unprocessed local Texas foods from Texas businesses.**

[Participating school districts](#) are currently looking for new qualifying Texas farmers, ranchers, and distributors that have products they can spend LFS grant funds with and increase Texas foods on school meal trays. TDA is encouraging schools to use the [Farm Fresh Network](#) (FFN) as a resource to find local producers. If you are currently registered in the TDA's [Farm Fresh Network](#), please take moment to review and ensure your contact information is up to date. If you are not a member yet, please join [here](#). *Questions about the LFS grant opportunity? Please contact*

[localfoodgrant@texasagriculture.gov](mailto:localfoodgrant@texasagriculture.gov). For questions about your FFN membership or to make changes to your FFN information, please contact [farmfresh@texasagriculture.gov](mailto:farmfresh@texasagriculture.gov).

### **Are you “Farm to School” ready?**

Schools are looking for Texas producers to provide more local foods on student meal trays. Visit TDA’s Farm to School [Tools for Producer](#) page for support and resources to help you prepare to work with child nutrition programs across Texas.

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

Farm Fresh Families

### **Getting to Know School Meals**



Protein in school meals comes in many forms. Meat is an obvious source of protein for students. But, what about other sources? Child Nutrition programs have a lot of options for proteins to serve at mealtimes.

### **Welcome to the final issue of the School Food**

#### **Digest!**

Proteins in school meals, currently referred to as meat/meat alternates, include fish, pork, beef, turkey and chicken. For students who don’t eat meat, protein requirements still need to be met for a meal to qualify for federal reimbursement. Beans, eggs, cheeses, yogurt, tofu, and seed or nut butters are considered meat alternates in child nutrition programs.

As with the other food components in school meals, meats and meat alternates have specific serving sizes for each group. Protein supports growing muscles in children by providing protein, B vitamins, and minerals such as iron, zinc, and magnesium. Some meats and meat alternates, such as nuts, fish and seafood, also have healthy fats that help support heart and brain health.

To learn more about proteins and the role they play in proper nutrition, check out [MyPlate.gov](http://MyPlate.gov)

## Farm Fresh Back to Basics

### National Nutrition Month

In 1973, the American Dietetic Association (ADA), now known as the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND), created the first National Nutrition Week to increase awareness of the importance of nutrition and healthy eating habits. In 1980, that one week was expanded to include the entire month of March and continues to this day. What better way to celebrate a month dedicated to good nutrition and agriculture (National Agriculture Week is in March) than to include fresh produce, grains, proteins, and dairy products grown and produced right here in Texas? Tag the local producers you use in social media posts to raise awareness of their hard work and your desire to serve the best products to your students.

### 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.

### Texas Farm Fresh Network



TDA is pleased to welcome these new members to the Farm Fresh Network:

Hi-Fi MYCO	Austin
Weimar Meat Company	Weimar
Dorsett Cattle Company LLC	Gilmer
KLB & Sons Ranch Beef	Garrison
North Texas Microgreens LLC	McKinney



England Cattle Co. Beef

Mercedes

## 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.

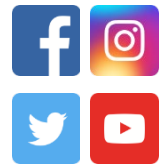
### Interested in learning more about Texas products?

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



TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
**COMMISSIONER SID MILLER**

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