



June 2024

E-Harvest Newsletter

A Message from Commissioner Miller

Howdy Neighbors! Welcome to Your E-Harvest Newsletter.



School's out and that means cafeterias aren't serving the regular healthy meals students enjoy every school day. Federally funded Summer Meal Programs work to provide consistent access to food during the summer, but they don't reach as many children as school meal programs. Please support the great TDA partners at schools, nonprofits, food banks, churches, and more serving meals when school is out for summer.

Sid Miller

Texas Agriculture Commissioner

School Lunch Hero Day Recap

May 3 was National School Lunch Hero Day. School districts across the state celebrated their cafeteria staff by handing out student signed thank you cards, giving gifts, decorating cafeterias and kitchens, holding favorite-cafeteria contests, inviting city officials to make proclamations, and so much more. Never forget the impact and importance of School Lunch Heroes keeping student hunger out of your schools.

Farm Fresh Schools

Harvest of the Month Recipes

June's Harvest of the Month is peaches. You can find peach growers across Texas on the [Farm Fresh Network](#) map on SquareMeals.org.



Treat your students to something special with this [Peach Buckle](#) recipe from HealthySchoolRecipes.com. Serve it for breakfast or as a treat at lunch time.

July Harvest of the Month: cherry tomatoes

Funding Opportunities

Bulk Milk

The Chef Ann Foundation has opened their [Bulk Milk](#) grant for this year. The grant provides a bulk milk dispenser, reusable cups, and dishwasher racks. This year, they've also provided a nationwide list of milk bib suppliers. Applications must be received by **June 27**.

Lots of Compassion

Also back this year is the [Lots of Compassion](#) grant from KidsGardening.org and Mrs. Meyer's Clean Day. Ten grant recipients will be awarded \$20,000 to transform a vacant or abandoned lot into a garden space. If your school has such an area, apply by **June 30**.

Learning Opportunities

Virtual Dairy Tour

Take a virtual tour of a working dairy farm with AgFoundation.org's "[In the Parlor with Dairy Farmers](#)" video. What better time to tour a dairy farm than National Dairy Month?

Farm from the Classroom

Registration is open now for Texas Farm Bureau's [Farm from School](#) series. This series of classes meet virtually every month with farmers to learn

about different aspects of agricultural life. Past topics include farm equipment, bison, strawberries, and watermelon. Registration is limited.

Menu Planning Inspiration

It's menu planning season for school districts. For those in need of inspiration, follow [these tips](#) from a seasoned Child Nutrition Director for finding inspiration for how to use locally purchased products.

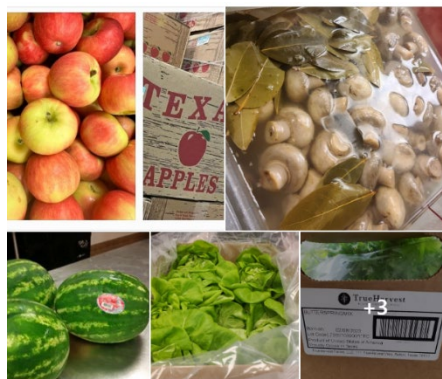
LFS Office Hours

The next LFS office hours meeting is scheduled for June 12, 2024, from 3-4 p.m. 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 March'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.

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](#).

The spotlight this month shines on Florence ISD. Located 40 miles north of Austin, Florence is a 3-campus district whose Child Nutrition Director is a champion of Farm to School programming.



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

A: Every day in the form of milk and TruHarvest lettuce.

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

A: We get a lot of positive comments on social media about our local efforts. Our participation has improved. I believe the combination of CEP, scratch cooking, and local purchasing efforts are the main reasons for the increases.

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

A: I have always been an advocate for agriculture. My family produces beef and hay. I was definitely affected by watching entire herds, flocks and fields be destroyed during the COVID pandemic due to processors going offline. Watching that reaffirmed my belief that local is not only good for the economy and the environment but is also a national security issue.

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

A: Yes, we work with Bouldin Food Forest, Fifth Branch Farms, TruHarvest and L&S Farms.

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

A: Farm Fresh is a great program. Purchasing local is good for the environment, the economy and certainly great for the nutrition of our kids. Food quality is improved and shelf life is extended.

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

A: We have been tracking local purchases for at least five years. There are actually many local items awarded in our food bids.

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

A: Time.

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

A: Most recently we used local bison in a Bison and Sorghum Soup recipe. The kids were really interested in trying that and we got lots of thumbs up.

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



A: We work with various groups and organizations. Our ACE program kids helped prepare and serve food at our community ESL night. We have worked with the high school Health program on food preservation techniques and nutrition. We enjoyed using local beef to experiment with various jerky recipes. We compared the taste and textures of traditional marinades and low sodium versions.

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

A: We promote our local products in various ways. In addition to social media, we include information in announcements and signage on the serving line. Also, the TDA “I Tried Local” stickers are handy at the elementary level.

Q: What advice would you give a CE trying to decide if they want to participate in Farm Fresh programming?

A: Reach out to districts that already participate. I think it is helpful to talk to similar size districts to help answer procurement questions. With the new micro-purchase threshold, we are finding compliance a bit easier. However, a larger district would still need procurement processes for larger quantity purchases.

Farm Fresh Childcare

Finding New Recipes

The hot summer months call for cool and refreshing menu items. Whip up a batch of these [Peach and Yogurt Smoothies](#) with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) recipe to keep your littles and your kitchen from overheating.



Learning Opportunities

Flowers are blooming which means bees and other pollinators are collecting nectar and pollen. KidsGardening.org has two activities to help students learn about pollinators and keep them hydrated during the warmer months. The [Pollinator Field Guide](#) walks you through how to create your own resource for learning about the insects that help keep

flowers and food plants producing. The [Pollinator Water Station](#) provides instructions for creating a hydration station for pollinating friends.

Farm Fresh Producer National Dairy Month



In 1937, grocery organizations implemented National Milk Month to sell more milk during the summer months. In 1939, June was officially recognized as National Dairy Month, a time to celebrate milk and milk products. Whether it's a glass of milk, a slice of cheese, or a scoop of ice cream, remember to take a moment of appreciation this month for Texas dairy farmers.

Farm to School Opportunities

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.

Farm to School Opportunity: Texas Schools are Looking for Texas Farmers!

[Local Food for Schools \(LFS\) grant program](#) recipients have been awarded grants ranging from \$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 not a member yet, please join [here](#) to connect with Texas schools across the state!

Farm Fresh Network Update Request

If you are currently registered in TDA's [Farm Fresh Network](#), please take 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.

Additional Questions or Concerns? Please contact the Farm Fresh Initiative Team at farmfresh@texasagriculture.gov.

Farm Fresh Families

Supporting Farm to School in the Summer Months



You may think Farm to School doesn't have a purpose in the summer months. But summer is when school districts are planning their menus, determining activities for the coming year, and developing new recipes to use farm fresh ingredients. How can you support Farm to School when children aren't in school?

Continue healthy eating habits learned at school. Visit a farmers' market on the weekends. You don't need to spend a lot of money to show your children what produce and other locally produced items are available in the summer months. Let them choose one or two items to try at home.

If you have the time, you can volunteer to help your school set up or maintain a school garden. One of the main barriers to school gardens is the lack of time to maintain them. Offer to organize volunteers and schedule maintenance activities. Have a planting party with students and other parents. Take time to learn about and educate your child(ren) about gardening, garden management, and natural methods of pest control.

Farm to School thrives with community involvement. With Farm Fresh Families by their side, Farm Fresh Schools and Childcare providers will succeed.

Farm Fresh Back to Basics

MegaCon Review

MegaCon 2024 was a success. Thank you to all who attended and made it an engaging conference. We look forward to seeing you again next year!

Some Statistics

- Attendees: 1093

- CEs present to receive awards: 72
- Farm Fresh Challenge intent to pledge CEs: 79
- MegaCon Farm Fresh Survey respondents: 28
 - Raffle winners: Risa Trevino, KyLee Oefinger, Skyla Barger, Wanda Judie, April Slick, and Emiliana Guerra

Announcements

- Cream of the Crop has been added to the Farm Fresh Challenge as a third tier for school year '24-'25 and beyond. Watch this space and SquareMeals.org/FarmFreshChallenge for more information.
 - There will be more resources available to ensure Farm Fresh Challenge success for all CEs who participate, including a step-by-step Success Guide, a tracker to keep all of your Farm Fresh Challenge information in one place (this can be attached to your attestation form), and new educational activities and resources created by TDA.
 - New resources will be available when the Farm Fresh Challenge pledge opens on **August 12** (those who pre-pledged at MegaCon will receive the materials and the full pledge form **August 5**).
- TX-UNPS is being replaced by Texas Automated Nutrition System (TANS)
- The HART Initiative has been expanded and more resources created to ensure success for students who participate. The Participation Guide now includes guidance for monthly projects, resources, and templates to make those projects easier to complete and expanded appendices. TDA will provide more encouragement, support, and recognition of effort for students. A reminder that [applications](#) are open until **August 30**.

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:

- Chisholm Trail Bison Co – Benbrook
 - Meat/Protein
- Little Bear Produce – San Benito
 - Fruits/Vegetables
- Local Bounti – Mt. Pleasant
 - Fruits/Vegetables
- L & L Farms – Batesville
 - Fruits/Vegetables
- La Pale Frozen Fruit Bar – Brownsville
 - Frozen Treats

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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