



**May 2024**

## **E-Harvest Newsletter**

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

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



I invite all those operating federal nutrition programs in Texas to join me in Austin for MegaCon 2024, taking place from May 14th to 16th. MegaCon offers valuable insights to run successful nutrition programs.

Additionally, School Lunch Hero Day was recognized on May 3rd. School nutrition professionals in Texas play a vital role in preparing nutritious meals, meeting strict standards, addressing food allergies, and serving students with a smile. Let's show our appreciation with a Texas-sized thank you for their heroic efforts!

**Sid Miller**

**Texas Agriculture Commissioner**

### **School Lunch Hero Day**

The first Friday of May is National School Lunch Hero Day. On May 3, 2024, administrators, teachers, students, families, and the public are encouraged to recognize the cafeteria staff who diligently prepare nutritious meals for children across the country. We asked for submissions about your School Lunch Heroes to share here and across TDA. Here are some of the responses we received:

[Ahna Delgado, Millsap ISD](#): “Behind every nutritious meal served, lies the silent hero who nourishes our children’s bodies and souls.”

[Sharon Glosson, North East ISD](#): “School Lunch Hero Day is an amazing opportunity to recognize the significant contribution that the school meal program staff provide to the learning environment each day.”

[Jennifer Odom, Alvin ISD](#): “Our Alvin ISD school lunch heroes are amazing, incredible, and true warriors daily. Day in and day out they serve thousands of students delicious and nutritious meals. They work so hard to serve meals they are proud of and truly put their heart into each tray. Not only do they worry about the quality of the meal each student receives, they also worry about the regulations to make sure we are serving meals according to the USDA meal pattern. They are the real daily heroes and I am so glad we can celebrate them annually in this way.”

## **Farm Fresh Schools**

### **Congratulations!**

Congratulations to Spring Branch ISD and Bastrop ISD for winning KidsGardening.org’s GroMore Good grant funds! Spring Branch Elementary PTA in Spring Branch ISD and Cedar Creek High School in Bastrop ISD were awarded funds to help bring gardens to their communities.

### **Harvest of the Month Recipe**

Celebrate May’s Harvest of the Month with this beautiful [Blueberry Caprese Salad](#) from the Institute of Child Nutrition’s Recipe Box. This colorful side salad will tempt your students’ tastebuds while showing them the versatility of these delicious berries.



June Harvest of the Month: Peaches

### **Recognition Opportunities**

In cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Chef Ann Foundation, Action for Healthy Kids is administering the Healthy Meals Incentives Initiative for rural school food authorities (SFAs) who

work to improve the nutritional content and appeal of school meals. Visit [Action for Healthy Kids](#) to learn more about the requirements for each recognition level.

## Funding Opportunities

The Newman's Own Foundation is seeking applicants for their [Food Justice for Kids Prize](#). Applicants from school districts should have a project to help students learn about culturally relevant foods, including how they're grown, harvested, and prepared, or an idea that improves students' access to school meals, and/or a project that increases the amount of nutrition education or nutritious foods. Applications must be submitted by **June 11**.

## Learning Opportunities

### Summer Ag Institute

Texas Farm Bureau offers two Summer Ag Institute (SAI) sessions in June. This Continuing Professional Education opportunity gives participants real-life agricultural experience over four days. Agricultural experiences can increase enthusiasm for Farm to School programming and the use of local products in school meals. Registration is open to teachers and limited to 40 per session. Registration for both locations closes on **May 17**. The Waco SAI takes place **June 10-13**. Lubbock SAI is scheduled for **June 16-19**.

### LFS Office Hours

There will be no LFS Office Hours in May. We'll see you at MegaCon!

## 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](#).

This month we are highlighting Culberson County-Allamore ISD (CCAISD). Located in Van Horn (West) Texas, CCAISD is a small district that can provide free meals for all students because of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

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

A: Daily for both breakfast and lunch.

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

A: I wanted to increase and attract food interest in school nutrition.

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



A: The support of my superintendent, teachers, staff, students, Congressman Tony Gonzales, and local events planner (she started the first farmers' market this summer in Van Horn), MegaCon, and my girls at Region 18. I enjoy the presentations, setting up events, and illustrating different ways to eat food items.

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

A: I come from the finance industry (bank). Money talks. In Texas, food and agriculture support an estimated 3.7 million jobs with an economic impact of \$64.5 billion annually. Texas leads the country in job growth. Low tax rates allow businesses to invest in their workers, expand new markets, and raise incomes. Texas offers the largest transportation network. Texas products boost the Texas economy. Local school meals are nutritious, farm fresh, and taste GOOD. We are not only feeding the future generation, but teaching them to eat healthy foods, and the importance of ranching and farming. Food in their belly. Clothes on their back.

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

A: I started participating in 2019.

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

**A:** Distance and freight cost. We are located in a rural area surrounded by mountains.

**Q:** Do you have a specific resource to find producers in your area?

**A:** Yes, I use lists provided at MegaCon, Region 18, and Labatt.



**Q:** Do you use TDA's mapping tool on SquareMeals?

**A:** Yes, I do.

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

**A:** Milk or chocolate milk is definitely their favorite.

**Q:** Do you have a garden?

**A:** No, we do not.

**Q:** How do you support your Farm Fresh programming (funding, maintenance, harvesting, volunteers to help)?

**A:** Funding: I use DoD, Labatt, and local as much as possible for there are no delivery fees.

**Maintenance:** Cafeteria staff prepare for the tasting tables or to serve on the serving line. They also do the clean-up.

**Harvesting:** I try to use local pecans and peppers, which are donated. We also have illustrations of local cotton, alfalfa, hay, and barley to encourage farming. Students in pre-k – 2<sup>nd</sup> grade have an annual trip to the pumpkin patch 160 miles away (320 miles round trip) (General Fund Expense).

**Volunteers:** Always reach out to those folks who are voted into their position. I have found they want to assist, appoint, or will direct you to someone. Also reach for those who serve in your community.

**Farm Fresh Childcare**



## Finding New Recipes

Turn a boring breakfast into a fun and fruity one for your littles with this [Waffle Fruit Pizza](#). Spread a whole grain waffle with a “sauce” made of cream cheese and vanilla, and top it with blueberries and other fresh fruits.



## Funding/Donation Opportunities

Did you know that some public libraries offer seed libraries? The Dallas Public Library is one of the libraries participating in this program. Those interested in checking out seeds can find more information here: [Dallas Public Library Seed Library](#)

## Learning Opportunities

Looking for information on how to start seeds in your classroom? Look no further than KidsGardening.org. This [Q&A document](#) walks you through every step of beginning to grow seedlings in your classroom. From using recycled materials as “pots” to the type of planting medium to use and the ideal growing temperature, everything you need to know can be found here.

## Farm Fresh Producer

### Learn About Composting Day



**May 29** is Learn About Composting Day. Farmers and ranchers have a wealth of knowledge about this sustainable method of creating nutrient-rich fertilizer. Share your knowledge with someone new this Learn About Composting Day!

### Wildfire Help

If you were impacted by the recent Panhandle wildfire, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has resources available to help. Find more information here: [USDA Disaster Assistance for Texas Farmers and Ranchers](#)

## 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](mailto:farmfresh@texasagriculture.gov).*

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

## **Texas Family Land Heritage Program**

TDA has hosted a ceremony at the Capitol for the past 50 years to celebrate farmers and ranchers whose families have maintained their agricultural practices for at least 100 years. If you are a Family Land Heritage member and would like to join the [Farm Fresh Network](#), TDA would be honored to include you. If you are a Farm Fresh Network member whose family has owned and operated your farm or ranch for the past 100 years or more, find more information about the Texas Family Land Heritage Program here: [Family Land Heritage Program](#)

## Farm Fresh Families



### Getting to Know Those Who Prepare School Meals

**Friday, May 3, 2024**, is National School Lunch Hero Day. School lunch heroes can and do have a positive impact on your child's daily life. Pass along your thanks for all their hard work today.

## Farm Fresh Back to Basics

### HISD Beyond the Plate

Houston ISD (HISD) has developed an incredible school garden. Their dedication to increasing farm-to-school through in-district agriculture education is an inspiring model. In this [guest blog](#) from the National Farm to School Network, agriculture educator Marcus Glenn discusses the journey HISD has taken to reach their current Farm to School success and the partnerships that have helped them along the way.

### Farm Fresh Surveys

TDA has created a short (5–10 minute) survey for all Child Nutrition operators to help determine where support is needed for Farm Fresh programming in schools and childcare settings. Responses so far have informed MegaCon Farm Fresh Foundations content and inspired a list of resources to create. Respondents can remain anonymous. Please take a few minutes to complete the form here: [Farm Fresh Survey '24](#)

### 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:

### 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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