

FARM TO SCHOOL PLANNING GUIDE

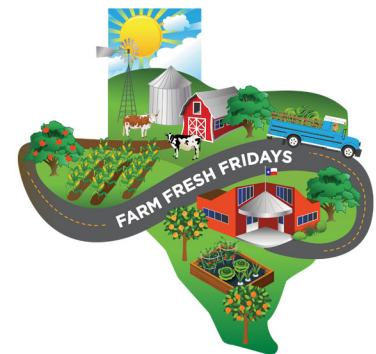


**BRING FARM FRESH FOODS AND LEARNING
OPPORTUNITIES TO YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL**

HELP GROW THE FARM FRESH INITIATIVE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

The Farm Fresh Initiative connects Texas schools and child care centers with local food producers to bring more healthy fresh foods to nutrition programs and deliver a win-win-win for kids, producers and communities.

- **Kids win** - Children enjoy nutritious fresh food while learning about health, agriculture and nutrition. It is the first step in building a lifetime of healthy habits.
- **Producers win** - The Farm Fresh program delivers financial opportunities to local farmers and ranchers by opening the doors to new purchasing relationships in federal nutrition programs.
- **Communities win** - When schools and child care centers buy local foods it stimulates the local economy and strengthens community relationships.



Texas Farm Fresh Initiative
*Planting the Seeds for Student
Achievement while Supporting
Texas Farmers and Ranchers*

***Together, we can
build healthier
Texas schools!***

This guide provides resources for parents interested in establishing or supplementing Farm Fresh activities at their child's school, child care center or summer meals program.

GETTING INVOLVED IN FARM TO SCHOOL

PARENTS CAN SUPPORT A SCHOOL'S PARTICIPATION IN THE FARM FRESH INITIATIVE IN TWO WAYS:

1. IN A CLASSROOM

You can encourage teachers and administrators to use classroom lessons, field trips and more to teach children about food, food cultivation and nutrition. Consider taking an active role by volunteering to help with activities or lessons.

2. FOOD SERVICE

Contact your food services team and encourage them to add fresh, local products to meals and snacks! Let them know that often, local products are available through the contracted distributor and they may already be purchasing local products such as milk.

Whether your interest lies in nutritional education or access to fresh, local foods, parental engagement in the Farm Fresh Initiative always has an impact.



STEP 1: UNDERSTAND THE LANDSCAPE



REACH OUT TO SCHOOL STAFF

Find out what's already being done in the classroom to educate students about nutrition and food production. Common projects already in place include classroom instruction, cooking projects, school gardens and field trips to farms. Find out what teachers are doing, what they think has been effective and what they would include on a Farm Fresh wish list. Determine where help is needed and how much time staff can devote to farm fresh topics without disrupting regular lessons.



REACH OUT TO YOUR DISTRICT'S CHILD NUTRITION DIRECTOR

Meet with the child nutrition director to learn more about foods used for lunches and snacks. In your discussion, ask about policies that help guide their food sourcing such as procurement policies and school Wellness Policies.



REACH OUT TO LOCAL FARMERS AND RANCHERS

Locate a nearby farmer or rancher and ask about what they're already doing to connect with local schools or students. Determine if any of these producers would be willing to participate in educational opportunities in partnership with local educational programs. Activities might include classroom visits, local produce taste tests and field trips. Find farmers and ranchers in your area through the Texas Department of Agriculture's [Farm Fresh Network](#) or a local farmers market.

STEP 2: DEFINE YOUR GOAL



After determining the school's existing level of Farm Fresh Initiative participation, you can better define your goals for building the program.

Examples of goals include the following:

- Serving more fresh local foods in meals
- Establishing a garden
- Implementing activities such as field trips to farms, visiting farmers' markets or offering cooking lessons.

To enlist support, clearly communicate what you are trying to do and how it will benefit children, food producers and the community.

STEP 3: FORM A TEAM

Sustainable programs require assistance from a broad group of staff and community members. Teachers, administrators, coaches, food service staff, parents, local farmers, community organizations such as garden clubs, and even local colleges and universities can play important roles in establishing a sustainable farm to school program. Determine the individuals you think would want to assist with a child nutrition or Farm Fresh effort. Meet with potential team members to share your vision for your school's Farm Fresh program and encourage attendees to participate in establishing or expanding the program.



Having trouble implementing the Farm Fresh Initiative?

- Contact your school's Parent Teacher Association (PTA) - Members of the PTA board are typically well connected with school staff, and may be able to help you identify individuals who share your passion for farm to school programming. Additionally, the PTA itself may agree to help champion farm to school efforts.
- Connect with your School Health Advisory Council (SHAC) - SHACs assist Texas school districts in ensuring that local community values are reflected in health education instruction. SHACs are required by law for every district and meet at least four times per year.

STEP 4: ESTABLISH AN ACTION PLAN & GET STARTED



You already have personal goals for Farm Fresh at your child's program. Share your goals with the team, invite their input, and define one or two attainable steps that will get your plans off the ground.

Examples include the following:

- Identifying meal items that you would like to transition to local, seasonal options
- Securing a location and scheduling a work day to build a school garden plot
- Planning a field trip to a farm or farmers' market, or scheduling a farmer visit
- Hosting a local food event, such as a tasting of local produce
- Identifying classroom lessons or activities related to the Farm Fresh Initiative

Seeking inspiration for farm to school programs? There's no need to reinvent the wheel. Check out these resources:

- [Texas Farm Fresh Garden Based Learning](#)
- [The Texas Harvest of the Month Program](#)

These actions will help make the team effective:

- Agree upon the roles and responsibilities of each team member.
- Define the steps required to move your action plan forward.
- Establish a project timeline.
- Establish the team's communication schedule, as well as ongoing meeting needs.

Did you know?

Every October, the Texas Department of Agriculture hosts its Farm Fresh Challenge as a fun and engaging way for school nutrition professionals and their schools to gain recognition for their efforts to bring local foods and garden-based learning activities to their students. Make sure your program operators are aware of the **Farm Fresh Challenge** and encourage them to pledge participation each October.

STEP 5: MAINTAINING MOMENTUM



Parent volunteer efforts are vital to maintaining momentum - both in the classroom and in the meal program. In the classroom, parents can volunteer to help coordinate and execute activities, research and manage new projects, or schedule and work during volunteer opportunities.

During meal times, parents can make changes easier by volunteering to help introduce local food choices. For example, it may be helpful to guide students through a new salad bar until they learn how it works.



Parents can further support positive food service changes by organizing parents to eat lunch with their kids at school. This is a good way to get parents engaged with school food issues and to encourage students to taste new menu items.

Recognizing people for their hard work will also help maintain the momentum in your farm to school team, and encourage ongoing participation. Lunchtime or garden celebrations can highlight changes while recognizing those who have contributed to projects and inviting new participants.

Expanding Farm Fresh

Sometimes funding is needed to implement your goals. If your goal is to build a school garden, then tools, building materials and plants may be needed to get the garden up and running. Similarly, introducing a salad bar may require new equipment. Consider the following steps to get material or financial contributions:

- Reach out to local home improvement stores or nurseries to request donations for a school garden.
- Research funding opportunities at [SquareMeals.org/Funding](https://www.SquareMeals.org/Funding).
- Host a fundraiser using healthy, local foods at your child's school.



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