

Building Capacity: Farm to School

Final Report for ES10-103

Project Type: Professional Development Program

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Projected End Date: 12/31/2012

Region: Southern

State: North Carolina

Principal Investigator:

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Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project

Project Information

Abstract:

This two year project was designed to build the capabilities of Extension, agricultural professionals, and communities in the development of Farm to School initiatives. Project team members developed the training methodology, created outreach plans, devised a needs assessment tool, determined the scope of mentoring/consulting services, and developed a comprehensive project evaluation plan. A conference on how Extension professionals can engage with Farm to School was planned and executed. Dissemination of materials and resources was provided through the ASAP, SSAWG, and the National Farm to School Network (NFTSN) websites. A team of project partners presented at a workshop at the National Farm to School Conference.

Project Objectives:

75 Cooperative Extension agents will define their role in the implementation of Farm to School programming. As the Farm to School movement continues to grow, farmers and other community members will look to Cooperative Extension for help implementing Farm to School initiatives. The workshops will provide Extension with the information and resources they need to define their role in this process. Several roles will be examined through the workshop trainings - farm and farmer assessments to meet school requirements, assistance implementing educational components of Farm to School (help establish school gardens, recommend farms for farm field trips, utilize the Family and Consumer Science portion of Extension to offer local food cooking classes and demonstrations, for example).

75 Cooperative Extension agents will increase their knowledge of the Farm to School market (the market potential and market requirements) and the accompanying educational components. Project teams that include farmers, School Food Service Directors (SFSDs), state sustainable agriculture coordinators, and representatives from Departments of Agriculture are collaborating to design and implement the regional Cooperative Extension Farm to School Conference. SSAWG and the National Farm to School Network will provide their expertise through consultation. At the end

of the conference, participants will understand school market requirements (liability insurance, GAP certification, distribution and other infrastructure needs, for example) and will be able to determine the potential for a given market based on the school population (size and demographics). Workshop trainers will provide information to familiarize Extension agents with the educational components of Farm to School and be able to provide this information to farmers, teachers, parents, and other community members. Outreach efforts for the trainings will uncover community resources and current Farm to School programs.

Extension agents will have access to pertinent and useful information through the training materials created by project teams. Conference notebook materials will be gathered from throughout the country to provide the best and most current information on Farm to School: best practices and lessons learned, case studies, market requirements. Extension agents will increase their knowledge of available Farm to School resources, gain a deeper understanding of the growth of the Farm to School movement, and better understand the barriers and challenges of the Farm to School market. These resources will be available in print to Extension agents attending the conference (75). Extension agents and other ag professionals unable to attend these trainings will be able to access them online (500).

Extension will be a Farm to School resource to farmers in their area. Whether for farmers in rural, tobacco-dependent and development-pressured areas or for farmers simply seeking market diversification, the Farm to School market can be a key risk management strategy. Rural areas often lack sufficient markets (especially if the area was heavily dependent upon tobacco and are now under heavy development pressure) but school systems exist in every county that have the potential to provide a steady market for farmers. Moreover, farmers that learn to work with school systems can also apply that knowledge to expand their market potential to work with other institutional markets (i.e., colleges/universities and hospitals).

Introduction:

Nationally, Farm to School programs have been the focus of significant media attention, feeding a dynamic movement that is gaining momentum due to its dual benefits of improving farmer incomes and student eating habits. In 2001, there were 6 pilot Farm to School programs in the United States (NFTSN Farm to School Chronology 2009). By 2009, Farm to School programs had expanded to 42 states in more than 8,900 schools (NFTSN, farmtoschool.org 2009). The last two U.S. Farm Bills (2002 and 2007) included language requiring the USDA to encourage schools to purchase from local farmers. Moreover, the 2007 Farm Bill allows school systems the use of geographic preference in procurement of unprocessed agricultural products.

ASAP's leadership in the Farm to School arena has been recognized by the National Farm to School Network (NFTSN): ASAP is currently the Regional Lead Agency for the Southeast, charged with leading Farm to School efforts in a six-state region. ASAP began their Growing Minds Farm to School program in 2002 as part of a broader initiative to sustain family farms through the development of local markets and reconnecting communities to local food and farms. ASAP's Farm to School work stands out because of a unique approach, which engages multiple stakeholder groups—farmers, educators and school food service directors, students and families, agricultural professionals, and other community members—to counteract trends in farm loss and childhood obesity. Through a combination of activities that bring fresh local food into school cafeterias, reconnect kids and school personnel to how food is grown, and integrates farm and garden based nutrition education into school

curricula, ASAP's Farm to School program provides market opportunities for family farms, nurtures lifelong eating habits among kids and families, and builds program sustainability by engaging communities in program activities and outcomes.

Through the Farm to School work done in the southeast region, ASAP identified Cooperative Extension as a likely leader in the Farm to School arena. However, they currently lack the information and training necessary to enable them to be a resource in their communities. As interest in Farm to School continues to grow, agricultural professionals trained on the practicalities of institutional purchasing and Farm to School programming have the potential to play a key role in catalyzing Farm to School initiatives.

In this project, ASAP will develop and conduct trainings for Extension and other professionals in NC, SC, and GA. These three states are within the southeast region of the NFTSN. ASAP's role in leading Farm to School efforts in the region for the past two and half years provides the organization with the experience and expertise to coordinate and manage this project: a depth of knowledge of Farm to School activities occurring across the project geographic area, an understanding of the opportunities for strengthening and expanding Farm to School activities; and a wide spectrum of crucial contacts in each of the six states.

In building the capacity of Extension and other professionals to assist farms and communities with Farm to School initiatives, this project promotes sustainable agriculture in terms of farm profitability, environmental stewardship, and quality of life for farm families and communities. Project activities will provide Extension with the knowledge, tools, and resources to link farms and schools. This is a community-based link that provides farms in rural communities (in particular) with a viable, local market opportunity. Farms that are profitable stay in business and maintain working farmland. It provides community schools—children, faculty, and staff—with access to fresh, local food and knowledge of the people growing food in their communities. Moreover, in these three states, farms producing specialty crops, which are the crops suitable for the school market, are smaller. Smaller farms have fewer detrimental environmental impacts and their size allows them to respond more quickly to the demands of the market, including the shift to more environmentally friendly production practices, such as IPM or organic.

The review of SARE funded projects demonstrates the dearth of projects to build professional development and assist in the development of Farm to School initiatives. Farm to School projects funded by SARE are primarily producer grants and research and education grants:

Producer grants aimed at establishing relationships between schools and farms and bringing more locally grown food into school cafeterias (FNC08-714 - Bistro Kids Farm 2 School Program: Bringing Healthy, Locally Grown Food to the Next Generation; CS06-048 - Schools + Potatoes Upper E. Tennessee Development System; CNE06-012 - Farm to School in Hancock County; LNE03-187 - Vermont Food Education Every Day) and providing children with on-farm experiences (FW00-299 - Good Humus Produce Farm to School Project).

Research and education grants to assess market opportunities in schools (GS08-067, Southeastern North Carolina Food Systems Project; LNE03-183 - Towards a community-based school food system), to assess the capacity of schools to purchase and prepare locally grown foods (CNE08-050, Downeast Maine Farm to School; LNE96-065 - Farm to School Food Education Project), to develop demonstration programs linking farms and schools (LNE94-049 - Project Farm Fresh Start: A Farm-to-School Feasibility Study), to create classroom curriculum (LNE96-065 - Farm to School Food Education Project; LNE94-049 - Project Farm Fresh Start: A Farm-to-School Feasibility Study) , to provide farmers with the means

to process and pool production (LNC04-247 - Wisconsin Homegrown Lunch II: Maximizing School Food Service), to create marketing and educational materials (LNE03-183 - Towards a community-based school food system); and the ASAP project LS07-197 Appalachian Grown: Farm to School Project examining the profitability of Farm to School for farms.

A search of SARE's database shows only one previously administered Professional Development Project. This project (ENE05-094 - Building professional capacity to enhance farm-to-school marketing and distribution networks) occurred in the Northeast, in New York State. No PDP Farm to School projects have been implemented in the south.

ASAP will incorporate relevant findings from all Farm to School projects into the development and implementation of Extension trainings.

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Education & Outreach Initiatives

Objective:

Description:

Methods

Training methodology, training materials, and resource manuals for trainings: At the beginning of the project, ASAP, project teams, project evaluators, and representatives from SSAWG and the NFTSN met at Devils Fork State Park near Greenville, SC to develop a training methodology, outreach plans, a draft needs assessment tool, and a plan of evaluation for training. At this meeting project leaders: (1) implemented a mandatory bi-monthly conference call schedule to facilitate project development and implementation; (2) drafted an initial needs assessment survey with the intent that survey results be used to inform workshop content for the conference; (3) determined that it would be more beneficial to conduct a single conference to serve all three states rather than three state-specific trainings; (4) tasked project leaders from each state (NC, SC, GA) with developing workshop materials pertinent to each of the respective states; (5) decided that project outreach should include Extension only; (6) chose post-evaluation surveys as the best means to evaluate conference workshops; (7) brainstormed resources that should be provided to conference attendees, including distribution models, case studies, policy requirements for selling to schools, step-by-step how to documents, cross marketing opportunities, planning successful Field Days, funding Farm to

School, and connecting Farm to School with local food; and (8) developed an outreach plan for Extension professionals across all three states. The project team wanted to get the best possible response to the needs assessment and disseminate information about the conference to Extension across all three states. At the retreat it was decided that the most comprehensive way to reach this group was through their internal mailing lists. The project team drafted a letter explaining the project and needs assessment to the head of Extension for each of the three states. The heads then had to approve the needs assessment being sent out through their system. Through this method, the project team was able to reach the widest possible Extension audience.

Evaluation plan and evaluation materials: With guidance from the project evaluators, project team members, ASAP, and representatives from SSAWG and NFTSN developed a comprehensive project evaluation plan. A process evaluation was used to measure the impact of project activities in relation to project outcomes. Process evaluation measures included recordkeeping to quantify workshop participation and outreach. End-of-training surveys were used to gauge the quality of the training: presenters, relevance of information, and quality of delivery. Specifically project staff:

- Conducted an electronic needs assessment survey conducted in Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina
- Conducted a Regional Cooperative Extension Farm to School Conference post-training evaluation survey
- Tracked Cooperative Extension Farm to School Conference registrations, attendance, resource materials disseminated
- Conducted a survey of Extension agents who applied for the scholarships to attend the 2012 National Farm to Cafeteria Conference
- Tracked the number of participants that attended the workshop team members hosted at the National Farm to Cafeteria Conference
- Tracked views/downloads of online resource material from the Growing Minds website

Needs assessment and outreach: At the initial project meeting, a needs assessment tool was designed to assess the needs of the potential workshop participants. Project teams disseminated the needs assessment to Extension agents, agricultural professionals, farmers, school foodservice directors, teachers, and other relevant community members; results from the needs assessment were used to develop training content for the Cooperative Extension Farm to School Conference. Outreach for the conference began January 18th with the dissemination of a "Save the Date" email for the conference. The email was distributed to all Extension professionals in NC, SC, and GA through Cooperative Extension. The email targeted the 229 people who participated in the 2010 needs assessment survey, though the conference attendee limit was set to 100 registrants. Registration information was posted on ASAP's Growing Minds website <http://growing-minds.org/> and via the Extension email channels. On August 23 (two days before the conference) a press release titled "Regional Cooperative Extension Agents to Learn Farm to School in Asheville" was issued to promote the importance of the event to the public and other stakeholders.

Regional Cooperative Extension Farm to School Conference: The Cooperative Extension Farm to School Conference was held August 25, 2011 at Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College's Enka Campus in the Haynes Conference Center (Candler, NC). A total of 102 Extension agents attended the event - 44 from North Carolina, 29 from Georgia, 23 from South Carolina, and 6 from Arkansas, Mississippi, and Florida. Three sessions including 12 workshops were held with topics covering: Connecting with Curriculum; How School Nutrition Programs Work; Farm to School Field Trips; Evaluation and Documentation; Case Study; Cross-Program

Collaboration; School Gardens; Farm to School Cooking; How School Nutrition Programs Work; and Models for Local Food Procurement. Attendees received a notebook with educational materials to complement the information presented in the workshops. At the closing of the conference, attendees gathered (by state) to make a dissemination plan and to discuss what they learned.

Conduct training at the National Farm to School conference: The National Farm to Cafeteria Conference was held on August 2-5, 2012 in Burlington, Vermont. Staff from ASAP as well as three of the Extension agents from each state (NC, SC, GA) that attended the Cooperative Extension Farm to School Conference led a workshop to disseminate lessons learned (from the Cooperative Extension Farm to School Conference). ASAP provided scholarships to nine Extension agents who went to the Cooperative Extension Farm to School Conference to attend the Farm to Cafeteria conference. ASAP and Extension partners conducted a workshop entitled "Role of Extension in Farm to School"; they discussed the importance of Cooperative Extension in supporting local Farm to School initiatives and provided examples of how Cooperative Extension has been integrated into Farm to School programs across the country.

Training materials available online: Training materials have been posted on ASAP, SSAWG, and NFTSN websites to increase availability. ASAP has formatted the materials to insure they are easily downloadable and accessible. Jim Lucas of SSAWG in Alabama has been promoting the availability of all training materials through web articles (e.g.:

<http://www.ssawg.org/home/2012/12/4/southern-sawg-joins-national-farm-to-school-network.html>) and a blog on the SSAWG website (e.g.:

<http://www.ssawg.org/home/2011/9/2/it-takes-a-team-for-farm-to-school.html>).

Resources posted to the Growing Minds website include

(<http://growing-minds.org/special-projects/regional-cooperative-extension-conference/resources/>):

- 2011 Farm to School Needs Assessment- Cooperative Extension
- General Farm to School
 - o Barriers to Farm to School
 - o Defining Success in the Farm to School Arena
 - o Farm to School Works in All Climates
 - o Organizing a Farm to School Meeting
 - o School Food Environment
- Evaluation
 - o Evaluating Your Farm to School Program: Best Practices and Tools (webinar)
 - o Whole Measures for Community Food Systems
 - o Farm to School Collaborative Evaluation
 - o Farm to School Evaluation Information Sheet
- Food Safety
 - o Food Safety and Liability Insurance: Emerging Issues for Farmers and Institutions
 - o Mind the GAP
 - o OK Farm to School Manual: Food Safety
 - o Food safety in school and community gardens (presentation)
- Garden resources
 - o NC 4-H Strawberry Project
 - o SC Toolkit for Starting or Enhancing a School Vegetable Garden
- Models for Local Food Procurement
 - o ASD Value Chain Tool Kit
 - o Background on Alternative Distribution Systems
 - o Carpio Report Handout
 - o Distribution Learning Committee

- o Distribution Models for Farm to School
- o OK Farm to School
- o SC distributor perspective
- o School Marketing – Regional Marketing Model
- o Sysco Case Study 2009

Outreach and Publications

Publications

- 2011 Virginia Farm to School Program Survey
- National Farm to School Network created a School Food 101 webinar
- 2011 Farm to School Needs Assessment- Cooperative Extension
- Barriers to Farm to School
- Defining Success in the Farm to School Arena
- Farm to School Works in All Climates
- Organizing a Farm to School Meeting
- School Food Environment
- Evaluating Your Farm to School Program: Best Practices and Tools (webinar)
- Whole Measures for Community Food Systems
- Farm to School Collaborative Evaluation
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Outreach

- Conducted a needs assessment of Cooperative Extension agents to determine potential workshop content
- Conducted a Cooperative Extension Farm to School Conference
- Conducted a training at the National Farm to School conference
- Posted training and training materials to the Growing Minds website

Outcomes and impacts:

Needs Assessment Survey: Of the estimated 750 Extension agents in the targeted NC, SC, and GA regions, 229 filled out the needs assessment survey (31%). To encourage their involvement in the distribution of the needs assessment survey, ASAP developed a one-page document summarizing the Farm to School movement and its impacts and shared it with Extension. Sixty-six percent of assessment respondents asked to be added to the email list for the National Farm to School Network. Sixty-eight percent of respondents indicated that a training workshop would be the most helpful resource for a successful Farm to School program. Seventy-two percent thought that Farm to School is a potentially profitable market for farmers. Survey results were reviewed by the project team in a March 2011

conference call and integrated into planning for the regional Cooperative Extension Farm to School Conference.

In addition to informing the content for the Cooperative Extension Farm to School Conference, the needs assessment generated interest among researchers and organizations focused on developing the capacity of Cooperative Extension programs. For example, one Extension agent from Virginia requested the data from the needs assessment survey and used the analysis to help inform his dissertation on the 2011 Virginia Farm to School Program.

Similarly, as a result of the Cooperative Extension needs assessment survey, the National Farm to School Network created a School Food 101 webinar to help instruct Extension agents on ways to become more involved in school food reform. The webinar was held Tuesday, June 12, 2012 and can be viewed on the National Farm to School website here: <http://www.farmtoschool.org/webinars.php>

Cooperative Extension Farm to School Conference: A total of 102 Extension agents attended the event – 44 from North Carolina, 29 from Georgia, 23 from South Carolina, and 6 from Arkansas, Mississippi, and Florida. Each attendee was given a resource notebook at the conference which contained the following information: connecting to curriculum; cross program collaboration; program evaluation; farm field trips; Farm to School case studies; Farm to School cooking; general Farm to School information; how school nutrition programs work; models for local procurement; rules and regulations; and school gardens. At the end of the conference, attendees were given a survey to evaluate the content and presentation of information in the workshops. A total of 60 evaluations were completed with positive results. Across all workshops using a scale of 1-5 (1 being a low rating and 5 being a high rating) participants said that “Workshop content provided useful information” (4.3); “Speakers were prepared and knowledgeable” (4.6); and “Materials provided by the conference will be useful” (4.3). Similarly, when asked to rate the conference as a whole, attendees rated as follows: “Overall effectiveness of the conference” (4.6); “Overall value of the conference” (4.6); “Conference facilities” (4.6). Lastly, 90% of respondents said they were somewhat or much more prepared to work towards implementing Farm to School programming at their job as a result of this conference.

National Farm to Cafeteria Conference: A total of 30 people attended the “Role of Extension in Farm to School” workshop. Though no formal evaluation of the workshop was conducted by the project team, the anecdotal feedback from the workshop was very positive. Following the conference, presenters Emily Jackson of ASAP and Geoff Zehnder of Clemson were invited to attend the National Association of County Agricultural Agents Conference and present the same information in another workshop. The slides from both conferences are appended to this report.

Based on the results from project activities and participant feedback, project staff expect Cooperative Extension agents in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia to become leading examples of how Extension can successfully plug into Farm to School programming. The workshops, conferences, and materials provided by this project have demonstrably increased Extension agent’s knowledge of the interworking of Farm to School; provided clear, specific, and achievable methods for Cooperative Extension agents to integrate Farm to School activities into their current work; provided a network of support (with other Extension agents, community groups, school personnel) to sustain and promote Farm to School curriculum; and created advocates for the Farm to School program.

Project Outcomes

Project outcomes:

Project evaluation surveys and correspondence with Extension agents through the Needs Assessment survey, Cooperative Extension Farm to School Conference, and the National Farm to Cafeteria Conference detail the knowledge and skills that Extension agents have gained as a result of project activities:

Goal: "Cooperative Extension agents will define their role in the implementation of Farm to School programming."

Evaluation surveys from the Cooperative Extension Farm to School Conference asked participating Extension agents to define their role in Farm to School programming. Their responses are as follows: Local food coordination (28%), school garden/community garden program (47%), farm field trips (35%), cooking/tastings with local food in schools (45%), procurement for schools (17%), market opportunities for farmers (30%), training and technical assistance for farmers (23%), training and technical assistance for schools (30%), economic resource development (13%), and other fill in responses including promoting the North Carolina 10% campaign, teaching, collaborating, and advocating (8%).

In addition to the formal post-conference evaluations, ASAP project leaders evaluated Extension learning outcomes from those agents interested in attending the National Farm to Cafeteria Conference. Agents who participated in the Cooperative Extension Farm to School Conference were able to apply for a scholarship to attend the Farm to Cafeteria conference, and this application included questions about the knowledge gained and Farm to School activities conducted since the conclusion of the Extension conference. Questions included: "What barriers or opportunities have you encountered in F2S since the conference?", "What have you tried to put in place? Did it work? Why or why not?", and "What other types of training or resources do you need at this point?" ASAP project leaders also received general personal communications and updates from project participants in the months following the Farm to School and Farm to Cafeteria conferences that detailed the accomplishments and successes of Extension agents in implementing Farm to School activities. Together, this data detail the longer-term effects of the interventions on Extension agents' perceptions of their role in Farm to School programming. Results showed an overall increase in agents' enthusiasm for Farm to School programming, and an expansion in their views of the role of Cooperative Extension within Farm to School:

"[I have been] working with schools to have gardens, coordinating with County Department of Public Health school outreach program, and planning to work with schools for the EFNEP [Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program] program."

"The information I received from the conference presentations enabled me to move forward on finalizing a program of activities that would introduce school students to topics such as local foods and healthy eating practices. We were able to expand awareness about local foods and nutrition among parents, school staff and the larger student body at the school's annual Fall Harvest event."

"One of programs that I implemented following the F2S Conference was a program called "Cooking with Care." This program gives youth the opportunity to make meals from scratch to donate to a foster family in the county. Each month, we have tried to incorporate a locally grown vegetable into the menu and include an educational component on the featured food."

In addition to these examples, other Extension agents noted their increased efforts

to offer workshop sessions aimed at training early childhood educators, elementary school teachers, food assistance programs, and 4-H educators on ways to support and promote locally grown foods in their programs. As a result of their efforts and outreach, Extension agents have been asked to present at other conferences, serve on advisory committees, organize workshops and events, and develop educational and promotional materials centered around integrating local food into agricultural education.

Goal: "Extension agents will have access to pertinent and useful information through the training materials created by project teams."

The Cooperative Extension Farm to School Conference provided 102 Extension agents with a notebook and CD of resource materials to complement workshop session topics. These resources included tips and checklists for managing farm field trips, integrating school gardens, curriculum connections for K-12 teachers, managing food costs, pricing resources, Farm to School brochures, school lunch procurement best practices for Extension agents, distributor perspectives on supplying food to schools, and more. Conference attendees found the variety of the notebook materials to be informative and useful. Recipients of the notebooks have this to say of the materials: "I appreciate the notebook and CD. Great info! Thanks," "Great notebook!," "Notebook and CD very helpful," "The notebook and disc. I need to go back and absorb all the information," "I have more information and resources to enable me to take additional steps in networking with the schools and farmers."

The usefulness of the conference notebook and other resources posted to the Growing Minds website has lasted far beyond the conferences themselves. Follow-up contact with participants in the program shows that Extension agents used the information to create their own events, produce promotional materials, and provide instruction:

"I worked with the coordinating group to incorporate elements of the resources I had brought back from the conference. For example, we created a 4-H Wheel (of Fortune) activity that tapped the knowledge of students and parents about a host of healthy living issues including good nutrition. Seasonal items donated from the NCAT farm were also shared with families."

"The ideas gained at the conference really provided a format and ideas for working this into my regular programming and I sought new opportunities to reach out to the community. Also, realized our educational materials were limited on fresh fruits and vegetables and researched information available to promote the program."

The materials created for this project are available on ASAP's Growing Minds website

(<http://growing-minds.org/farm-to-school-resources-for-cooperative-extension/>). To date, there have been a total of 20 page views (the page was created October 30, 2012).

Goal: "Extension will be a Farm to School resource to farmers in their area."

One month after the Cooperative Extension Farm to School Conference, an attendee from Georgia called to say that she has had three different people contact her about Farm to School. One was a program development coordinator wondering how to help Extension 4-H Nutrition programming highlight Farm to School. Another caller was looking for general information about Farm to School. The last caller was another conference attendee who wanted to collaborate on a Farm to School winter curriculum for their program areas. The Georgia agent expressed that she felt more prepared to address these questions because of her training at the conference.

A group of Georgia Cooperative Extension agents (14) formed a committee that planned a Farm to School information session at the annual Extension Winter

Conference in January 2012. Included in the conference was a series of brochures titled "Farm Fresh and Fast," which feature seasonal, local Georgia produce. The brochures (which are available for download on the UGA Cooperative Extension website <http://www.fcs.uga.edu/ext/pubs/>) serve as a resource for Farm to School programming by depicting what fresh and local products are available at any given time of the year.

In her application for a scholarship to attend the National Farm to Cafeteria Conference, another Extension agent spoke about her role in facilitating a connection between local farmers and a school district: "The Glenville, Georgia Farmers, who spoke at the conference about their operation with selling to the Atlanta Schools, are now selling to the Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools. I was able to facilitate this local partnership with the school food system and the Corp. group. [I have] also been promoting to other growers the need to be able to supply local/regional produce to school systems."

Other agents have been working to forge relationships between farmers and schools by bringing key players together at large events: "I have made contacts with the Department of Agriculture and am looking for opportunities to work with them on their Feed My School program. In a partnership, we are currently working to revitalize the local state farmers market in our area. I served on the planning committee for Summer Fest and will be conducting food demos with local grown products at the event."

In addition to all of these activities, extension agents also report activities including building gardens, conducting cooking demonstrations with kids, and developing relationships with Foodservice distributors.

Goal: "Cooperative Extension agents will increase their knowledge of the Farm to School market (the market potential and market requirements) and the accompanying educational components."

The post conference evaluation of the Cooperative Extension Farm to School Conference shows that attending Extension agents increased their knowledge of the Farm to School market as well as their understanding of the educational components of the program. Using the five point scale where 1 is low and 5 is high; attendees rated the overall effectiveness of the conference 4.58, and the overall value 4.55. Individual attendees further noted that the "Workshops were great. Having all the "players" in the Farm 2 School arena was great because it helped me to understand the whole picture," and "All workshops were extremely helpful as well as hearing from peers what they were doing in their communities. The conference sparked lots of ideas to brainstorm." One attendee even remarked, "The variety of classes related to Farm to School was most helpful (case studies, evaluations, cooking, etc.)."

In the months following the Farm to School and Farm to Cafeteria conferences, Extension agents were inspired to find other opportunities to educate themselves on Farm to School topics and to facilitate new connections between local food and schools. Evidence of this is found in agents' responses to the questionnaire that accompanied the application to attend the National Farm to Cafeteria Conference. From these responses, project evaluators found the following evidence of increased learning, connections, and actions taken by participating extension agents:

"Our county is in the process of having a local foods study conducted, and the Farm to School program has the potential to be a part of a planned development of local farmers, local food produce and products, and economic development through food entrepreneurs."

"The information you bring back from a conference is invaluable. I did put the

knowledge gained into place since last summer and have seen positive results. I plan to share information from the conference with other agents and look for opportunities in both urban and rural areas to promote fresh and local products. I feel there are great opportunities.”

“I became very passionate about the F2S movement after participation in the conference last fall. I feel like I have only begun to scratch the surface of this important concept and feel like I can broaden my educational opportunities with the knowledge I will gain from this conference.”

Recommendations:

Potential Contributions

The long term benefits expected of this project are:

- 1.Extension and other professionals, equipped with new knowledge and tools provided by this project, assist their local farms and communities with Farm to School initiatives, which in turn promotes sustainable agriculture in terms of farm profitability and quality of life for farm families and communities.
- 2.Extension agents, armed with knowledge of the Farm to School program, become a community-based link to provide farms with a viable, local market opportunity. This, in turn, results in farms that are profitable, stay in business, and maintain working farmland.
- 3.With the help of informed Extension agents, schools, students, faculty, and staff have increased access to fresh, local food, and knowledge of the people growing food in their communities.
- 4.Cooperative Extension agents see themselves as an integral component of the Farm to School program in their communities, and position themselves as sustaining forces to the program’s expansion and development. As the Farm to School movement grows, farmers and other community members look to Cooperative Extension for help in implementing Farm to School initiatives.
- 5.Cooperative Extension agents, understanding the school market requirements for food, and farmer capacity in their areas, provide information to farmers, teachers, parents, and other community members that increase local food purchasing by local school districts.
- 6.With a better understanding of the barriers and challenges of the Farm to School market, Cooperative Extension Agents work to decrease the barriers preventing local farmers from selling to local schools (e.g. by providing trainings and resources to farmers). Farmers will use the information they have learned from Extension about Farm to School and apply that knowledge to expand their market potential to work with other institutional markets (i.e., colleges/universities and hospitals).

Future Recommendations

- Presentations at regional Farm to School Conferences on ways to integrate Cooperative Extension programs into Farm to School (and vice versa)
- Farm to School Cooperative Extension training at the 2014 National Farm to School Conference
- Ongoing training for Cooperative Extension Agents to keep them up to date on the Farm to School program
- Compiled case studies of the successful integration of Cooperative Extension programming and Farm to School programming
- Research into additional methods for integrating Farm to School with Extension

education

Information Products

- [Resources for Cooperative Extension Agents \(Website\)](#)
- [2011 Farm to Extension Conference Notebook \(Conference/Presentation Material\)](#)

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture or SARE.



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