

IMPACTS OF FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Farm to School is a dynamic nationwide movement that has the dual benefits of improving farmer income and student eating habits. As a result, media attention on the movement and the number of programs across the country has increased drastically in recent years. In 2001, there were six pilot Farm to School programs in the United States (National Farm to School Network, *Farm to School Chronology* 2009). Today, there are Farm to School programs in all 50 states and in more than 9,715 schools (National Farm to School Network, farmtoschool.org 2010).

Economic impacts

Economic impacts and the potential of Farm to School programs are currently popular points of discussion and research. The University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality and the University of Minnesota's Department of Applied Economics recently collaborated to examine the economic impact of Farm to School in central Minnesota. Their report, released in June 2010, quantified the potential annual economic impact of Farm to School programs as ranging from \$20,000 for a monthly special meal to \$427,000 for sourcing a large amount of easily adapted products.

In 2009, the nonprofit Ecotrust used input-output analysis to estimate the economic benefits Farm to School purchasing had on the Oregon economy. Preliminary analysis of this study showed that for every food dollar spent locally by the two school districts examined, an additional 87 cents was spent in Oregon, generating a multiplier of 1.87 for Farm to School spending.

A survey of Child Nutrition Directors in Western NC, conducted by Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project, showed that more than 70% of those responding demonstrated a high interest in purchasing from local farmers. Even if these Child Nutrition Directors began local purchasing with one product, the impact would be significant with slow, steady growth expected over time (*Growing Local*, 2007). In addition to the direct market potential for local farmers, Farm to School programs offer local farm promotion and cross marketing potential.

Health

Researchers are also now looking at Farm to School as an obesity prevention strategy. Of the Farm to School programs that have been evaluated, most have demonstrated increased selection or intake of fruits and vegetables following the incorporation of farm produce into school salad bars, meal selections, or class-based education (Joshi & Azuma, 2008). Increase in fruit and vegetable consumption reported by Farm to School studies ranged from 0.99 to 1.3 servings per student per day, compared to other non-Farm to School studies focused on school-based nutrition education interventions ranging from 0.2 to 0.99 more servings of fruits and vegetables per student per day (Joshi & Azuma, 2008). In addition to quantitative research, the CDC has identified Farm to School programs as an effective community mechanism to improve the quality of school meals, enhance effectiveness of nutrition education, and provide opportunities for eco-literacy training of students through hands-on experiences in the outdoors. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has included Farm to School as part of their comprehensive action plan strategies to improve children's health and prevent childhood obesity.

Education

Farm to School programs are based on the premise that students will choose to eat more healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables, if they have positive experiences and relationships with the source of their food. These experiences (including school gardens, farm field trips, and cooking with local food) are not only critical components of obesity prevention strategies, but also important teaching tools that meaningfully engage students while building connections to agricultural heritage and rural communities.

Summary

Farm to School -local food served in schools, school gardens, farm field trips, and cooking with local food- can be easily integrated across program areas. Beginning with a classroom activity or one local food purchase may seem like an insignificant step, but the goals of these activities are far-reaching and part of a national effort to create healthier food systems.