



**INSTITUTE FOR AGRICULTURE AND TRADE POLICY**

# Farm to School in Minnesota

Third Annual Survey of School  
Foodservice Leaders



**By Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy  
in partnership with the Minnesota School Nutrition Association**

March 2011

*Farm to School in Minnesota: Third Annual Survey of School Foodservice Leaders*

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The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) works locally and globally at the intersection of policy and practice to ensure fair and sustainable food, farm and trade systems. IATP's Local Foods program works to build thriving local food systems by strengthening small and medium-scale sustainable farming, expanding market opportunities for locally produced food and improving access to healthy food choices. More information can be found at [www.iatp.org/localfoods](http://www.iatp.org/localfoods) and [www.farm2schoolmn.org](http://www.farm2schoolmn.org).

IATP's work on Farm to School efforts are funded in part by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota's Prevention Minnesota Initiative, which works to improve the health of Minnesotans by combating the root causes of cancer and heart disease, of which unhealthy eating is a leading factor.

The Minnesota School Nutrition Association (MSNA) is a nonprofit, state-wide professional association working to ensure that all children have access to healthy meals and nutrition education in Minnesota. Founded in 1956, MSNA represents over 2,700 foodservice professionals working in K-12 schools. More information can be found at [www.mnsna.org](http://www.mnsna.org).

## About this survey

Aimed at educating children about where and how their food is grown, strengthening local economies and supporting healthy eating habits, the Farm to School (F2S) movement is rapidly growing. The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) began supporting Farm to School efforts locally and nationally in 2007. Our efforts include training for K-12 school staff, building connections with farmers and allied businesses, promotions, outreach, research and related strategies.

IATP partners closely with the Minnesota School Nutrition Association (MSNA), a nonprofit association representing over 2,700 school foodservice professionals. In late 2008, IATP collaborated with MSNA to survey their members about their perceptions and experiences with Farm to School. A follow-up survey was conducted in 2010.

For our third annual survey, foodservice leaders at all 333 K-12 school districts in Minnesota were encouraged to participate. Responses from 165 districts, representing 70 percent of Minnesota's K-12 student population, were received. Their feedback is summarized in this report.

IATP will conduct a similar survey of farmers and distributors shortly.

## Key Highlights

- The number of Minnesota schools districts engaged in Farm to School has risen sharply from ten districts identified in 2006 to **123 districts in 2010**.
- The school districts now engaged in Farm to School:
  - range in size from about 100 to 39,000 enrolled students.
  - are in every region of the state.
  - have student populations totaling nearly 525,000.
  - indicate that some level of Farm to School activity took place at all or nearly all of their school feeding sites during 2010.
- Districts are incorporating a growing **diversity of foods** into their Farm to School programs, with apples, cucumbers, tomatoes, potatoes, winter squash, peppers, watermelon and carrots most commonly used. The vast majority of the Farm to School foods used were rated “very successful” or “somewhat successful” by school foodservice leaders.
- Among districts engaged in Farm to School, 70 percent purchased Minnesota-grown/raised foods directly from a **farmer** or producer-owned business (up from 44 percent the prior year) while 78 percent purchased such foods via a **distributor** (with some districts doing both).
- Eighty-seven percent of respondents characterized the **quality of the Farm to School foods** they used as either “excellent” or “good.” A slight majority characterized Farm to School foods as typically “somewhat more” costly on a **cost-per-serving** basis.
- Most districts engaged in Farm to School reported **purchasing** up to \$25,000 in foods grown or raised in Minnesota during 2010.
- Sixty-six percent of participating foodservice leaders characterized the **feedback** received from students as either “positive” or “very positive.” Seventy-three percent of participants characterized the feedback received from their farmers as either “positive” or “very positive.” Most other feedback was characterized as “neutral.”
- Nearly 40 percent of participating foodservice leaders perceive that student **consumption of fruits and vegetables** increases when part of their Farm to School program.
- Most feel that the **amount of food wasted** by students is about the same for Farm to School foods as other foods.
- The number of districts engaged in school **gardening**, farmer visits, Farm to School-related classroom curriculum and similar activities rose significantly in 2010, with further growth anticipated for the 2011-12 school year.
- As was the case in last year's survey, the most commonly cited **barriers** were:
  - extra labor / prep time.
  - price/“fitting Farm to School food into my budget.”
  - difficulty finding farmers to purchase from directly.
- When asked what additional F2S **support or training** would be most helpful, respondents indicated the strongest interest in “strategies for engaging students, teachers, parents and community” and Farm to School recipes.
- **Looking ahead to the 2011-12 school year**, 68 participating districts indicate that they will expand their Farm to School effort, while 49 plan to continue their program at about the same level. Only one participating district indicated that they expect to reduce their Farm to School activity.

# Survey Questions & Responses

## A note to readers:

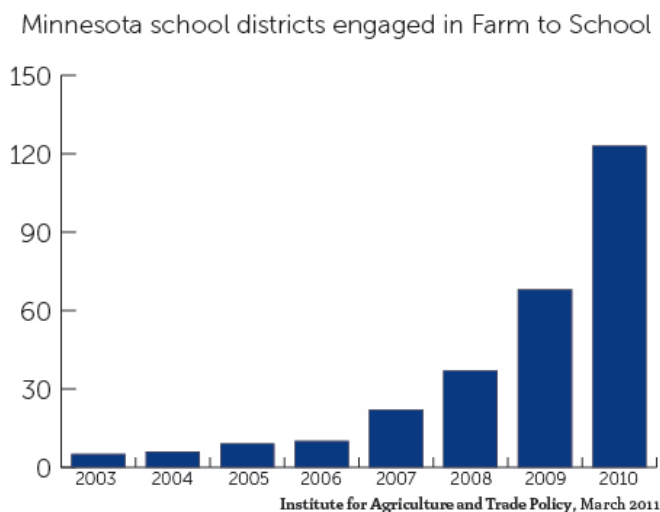
- This survey addresses calendar year 2010.
- While some school districts consider neighboring states to be part of their Farm to School (F2S) program, the survey focused on food that is grown or raised in Minnesota to ensure greater consistency of the data.
- The percentage figures shown below are based on the number of respondents to each given question.
- Comparative figures for 2009 are shown where relevant.

## 1. Basic information about all survey respondents (name, title, school district, student enrollment, etc.)

Foodservice leaders from 165 Minnesota school districts responded to the survey. The survey respondents represent 50 percent of the public school districts in the state and 70 percent of Minnesota's K-12 student population.

## 2. In what year did your Farm to School program begin?

123 districts reported that they have an active Farm to School program, with many programs launched in 2009 and 2010. 42 districts that responded to the survey are not currently involved with Farm to School. A list of participating districts is shown at the end of this report. The growing number of Minnesota districts engaged in Farm to School is shown below:



## 3. How many of your school feeding sites were engaged in Farm to School activity in 2010?

The vast majority of districts with Farm to School programs reported that F2S activity occurred at all or nearly all of the school feeding sites in their districts. Specifically, districts engaged in F2S indicate that they have 840 feeding sites in total, with F2S activity reported at 811 (or 96.5 percent) of those sites in 2010.

## 4. Did you purchase any Minnesota-grown food directly from a farmer- or producer-owned business during the 2010 calendar year?

Eighty-six districts answered "Yes," up from 36 districts in 2009. Among districts engaged in Farm to School, 69.9 percent purchased directly from a farmer or producer-owned business in 2010, up from 43.9 percent of participating districts in 2009.

## 5. How would you rate your experience purchasing food directly from a farmer- or producer-owned business? (1 = Trouble-free, 7 = Very Problematic)

The average rating was 2.78.

## 6. Did you purchase any Minnesota-grown food through a distributor during the 2010 calendar year?

Ninety-six districts answered "Yes," up from 57 in 2009. Among the districts engaged in Farm to School, 78.0 percent purchased Minnesota-grown food through a distributor in 2010, up from 74.1 percent in 2009.

## 7. How would you rate your experience purchasing food through a distributor? (1 = Trouble-free, 7 = Very Problematic)

The average rating was 1.78

**8. Which of the following Minnesota-grown food items did you use during the 2010 calendar year? Please rate the overall level of success you experienced with that food item. (Note: The survey instrument included a list of 37 items.)**

Each of the 23 items shown below was used by more than 10 Minnesota school districts. In 2009, 12 items were identified that were used by more than 10 districts. On average, districts that are engaged in Farm to School used seven Minnesota-grown fruits and/or vegetables in 2010. Most items were rated either “very successful” or “somewhat successful” by participating foodservice leaders.

Food item	Number of districts using item	Very Successful %	Somewhat Successful %	Not Successful %
Apples	103	77	19	1
Cucumbers	63	79	11	3
Tomatoes	63	70	16	3
Potatoes	58	72	19	3
Squash, Winter	54	50	33	4
Peppers	49	67	24	2
Watermelon	45	69	20	4
Carrots	45	76	22	0
Cabbage	41	68	20	5
Sweet Corn	37	68	16	11
Onions	31	74	19	3
Cantaloupe	30	63	17	17
Green beans	26	54	31	8
Wild rice	24	63	21	8
Zucchini	23	65	30	4
Turnips, parsnips and/or rutabagas	22	64	14	14
Broccoli	20	65	30	0
Salad greens	18	50	22	22
Beets	15	13	27	40
Honey	15	80	13	0
Grains	14	93	7	0
Pumpkins	13	85	0	0
Bison	11	73	18	9

Note: Percentages for individual foods will not sum to 100 percent where respondents indicated they used a given item but did not rate the success level.

**9. How much of the Minnesota-grown product listed above did you purchase in calendar year 2010?**

88.3 percent of respondents reported purchasing between \$1 and \$25,000.

**10. Did you purchase foods from neighboring states during calendar year 2010?**

The following number of districts answered Yes:

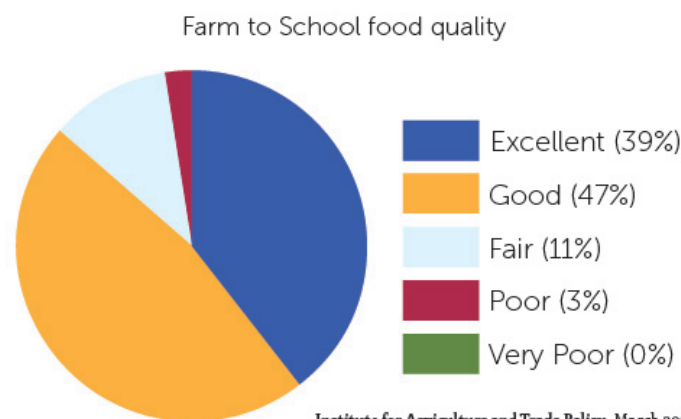
State	Respondents
Wisconsin	24
North Dakota	9
Iowa	8
South Dakota	5

**11. In addition to your main school lunch program, did you engage in Farm to School in any of the following contexts:**

Context	Respondents
Breakfast programs	30
A la carte	21
Snack programs	19
Summer feeding programs	15

**12. Overall, how would you rate the quality of the Farm to School foods you used in 2010?**

Eighty-seven percent of respondents characterized quality as either “Excellent” or “Good.”



**13. On a cost-per-serving basis, how do Farm to School foods typically compare to non-Farm to School items?**

Response	Respondents (%)
Significantly more	17
Somewhat more	55.4
About the same overall	21.4
Somewhat less	4.5
Significantly less	1.8

**14. In your opinion, how aware of your Farm to School activities are the following groups:**

Option	Very aware %	Somewhat aware %	Not at all aware %	Very Aware 2009 %
School foodservice staff	65.3	32.2	2.5	46.6
Students	22.3	70.2	7.4	11.7
Parents	9.9	77.7	12.4	7.8
Teachers/ Administrators	24.8	63.6	11.6	13.0
Your community	7.6	70.6	21.8	6.7

**15. How would you describe the feedback you have received about your Farm to School activities from:**

Option	Very positive %	Positive %	Neutral %	Negative %	Very negative %
School foodservice staff	23.9	46.2	24.8	4.3	0.9
Students	21.2	45.1	33.6	0.0	0.0
Parents	21.9	28.6	48.6	0.0	1.0
Teachers/ Administrators	23.4	41.1	34.6	0.0	0.9
Your community	16.5	28.2	54.4	0.0	1.0
Your farmers/ producers	30.8	42.3	26.0	0.0	1.0

**16. Do students increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables when those foods are part of your Farm to School program?**

- Yes: 39.3 percent
- No: 37.6 percent
- Not sure: 23.1 percent

**17. Have students selected and consumed Farm to School foods that you thought they wouldn't eat?**

- Yes: 40.2 percent
- No: 39.3 percent
- Not sure: 20.5 percent

**18. Overall, what is the impact on your school meal participation on days when Farm to School foods are served?**

Option	%
Significant increase	1.7
Some increase	12.8
About the same	84.6
Some decrease	0.9
Significant decrease	0.0

**19. Overall, how does the amount of food wasted by students differ between Farm to School foods and other foods?**

Option	%
Significantly more waste with F2S foods	0.8
Somewhat more waste	4.2
About the same	77.1
Somewhat less waste	6.8
Significantly less waste with F2S foods	1.7
Not sure	9.3

**20. Did you celebrate Farm to School Week (Sept. 20–24, 2010) in your district?**

68 districts responded "Yes."

**21. Please check the Farm to School Week activities that you engaged in.**

Of the districts that participated in Farm to School Week, the following percentages engaged in these activities:

Activity	%
Menuing Farm to School foods in our cafeteria	95.2
Communications/promotions at school	65.1
Media	41.3
Taste testing /demos	38.1
F2S activities in the classroom	14.3
Visits from farmers or student field trips to farms	14.3
Gardening /greenhouse /orchard activities	6.3
Community events	4.8

**22. How would you rate your overall experience with Farm to School Week?**

Option	%
Very positive	24.2
Positive	53.2
Neutral	22.6
Negative	0.0
Very negative	0.0

**23. Would you like to participate in Farm to School Week in Fall 2011?**

- Yes: 84 districts
- No: 4 districts
- Not sure: 31 districts

**24. Are you a member of the Minnesota School Nutrition Association (MSNA)?**

95 respondents answered "Yes."

**25. Did your district receive funding through the Minnesota Department of Health Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) for your Farm to School activities in 2010?**

46 respondents answered "Yes."

**26. Which prime vendor(s) do you currently use? (Check all that apply)**

Option	%
Reinhart Foodservice	27.3
Apperts	26.7
Food Services of America	14.9
U.S. Foodservice	13.7
Hawkeye Foodservice Distribution	12.4
Upper Lakes Foods, Inc.	10.6

Smaller percentages of respondents reported using SYSCO, Indianahead, Southwest Wholesale and/or Martin Brothers. Note: Some districts may purchase from more than one prime vendor.

**27. Which produce distributors do you buy fresh produce from? (Check all that apply)**

Option	# of respondents
Bix Produce	52
Bergin Nut & Fruit Co	19
Other produce distributors	7

**28. What percentage of your school feeding sites are equipped for modified scratch cooking?**

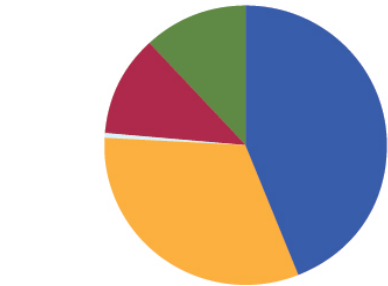
Option (Percentage of feeding sites)	# of respondents
0%	10
1-25%	23
26-50%	18
51-75%	21
76-100%	90

**29. How important is it to you that fresh produce is delivered to you in "ready to use" form (e.g., cleaned and chopped)?**

Option	%
We can only work with "ready to use" produce	6.9
We have a strong preference for "ready to use"	39.0
We can work with uncut produce on an occasional basis	37.7
We are very comfortable handling uncut produce	16.4

**30. Looking ahead to the 2011-12 school year, we:**

Anticipated Farm to School Participation in 2011-12



- Will expand our existing Farm to School effort (68)
- Will keep our Farm to School effort about the same level as last year (49)
- Will reduce Farm to School activities (1)
- Will pursue Farm to School for the first time (18)
- Haven't engaged in Farm to School so far and don't expect to start (18)

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When asked to look ahead to the 2011-12 school year, 68 districts indicate that they will expand their F2S efforts, while 49 plan to continue their program at about the same level. Only one district with an existing F2S program expects to reduce their F2S activity.



**31. What other types of Farm to School activities are happening or anticipated in your district?**

Farm to School Activities	Happening in 2010	Anticipated for 2011-12 School Year	Happened in 2009
Farm to School education (e.g., farm visits, classroom activities)	31	51	9
Growing food (e.g., school gardens, greenhouse, orchards, growing in the classroom)	26	45	8
Freezing, canning or storing Farm to School foods in your district/school	10	18	N/A
Food waste management (e.g., diverting waste for composting or hog feed)	26	25	N/A

**32. From your perspective, what are the biggest barriers to using more Farm to School foods? (Choose up to three.)**

The percentage of respondents that chose each item is shown below:

Option	%
Extra labor/prep time for local product	58.7
Price/fitting Farm to School food into my budget	54.7
Difficulty finding farmers to purchase from directly	42.0
Concerns about farm liability coverage or on-farm food safety practices	26.0
Don't have the equipment, facilities or staff skills that we need	22.0
Multiple orders, invoices and deliveries	20.0
Prime Vendor/Distributor doesn't offer the local products we want	19.3
Lack of clarity/limitations related to County/City health regulations	10.7
Poor product quality	10.0

**33. What additional facilities or equipment would make the most difference in helping you increase your use of fresh Farm to School foods in the future? (Please check all that apply.)**

27.9 percent of respondents indicated that they “generally have the equipment and facilities that we need.” The following percentage of respondents indicated interest in these types of equipment and facilities:

Option	%
Additional small equipment (e.g., knives, peelers, slicers, food processors, wedgers)	44.3
More refrigeration space	42.9
More prep space	30.7
Large scale chopping equipment	28.6
Steamers	20.7
More freezer space	17.9
More dry storage space	14.3
Ovens (combi or other)	7.9

**34. What additional support or training would be most helpful in starting or expanding your Farm to School program? (Please check all that apply.)**

Option	%
Strategies for engaging students, teachers, parents and community	51.8
Farm to School recipes	51.8
Help connecting with farmers	46.7
Introductory “Farm to School 101” training for my staff	44.5
Hands-on food prep training for cooks (e.g., knife skills)	34.3
More buy-in from school administrators/school board	21.9
Additional F2S promotional resources	16.8
Help connecting with the media	16.8



# Minnesota School Districts Engaged in Farm to School

The 123 school districts listed below had active Farm to School programs in 2010. They were identified through the 3rd Annual Farm to School Survey of school foodservice leaders conducted by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy in partnership with the Minnesota School Nutrition Association, and released in March 2011.

Adrian School District	Grand Meadow School	Sartell-St. Stephen Schools
Albany Area Schools	Hastings Public Schools	Sauk Rapids-Rice Public Schools
Albert Lea Schools	Hermantown ISD	Shakopee Public Schools
Alexandria Public Schools	Holdingsford/Rocori Public Schools	Sibley East Schools
Anoka-Hennepin School District	Hopkins Public Schools	South St. Paul Special School District
Atwater Cosmos Grove City Public School	Hutchinson Public Schools	South Washington County Schools
Becker Public Schools	Ivanhoe ISD	St. Francis Independent School District
Belgrade-Brooten-Elrosa Public Schools	Jordan Public Schools	St. James Public Schools
Bemidji Area Schools	Kasson-Mantorville Public Schools	St. Louis County Schools
Benson Public Schools	Lakeville Area Public Schools	St. Paul Public Schools
Bird Island Olivia Lake Lillian ISD	Little Falls Community Schools	St. Cloud Area School
Bloomington Public Schools	Mahnomen Public School	St. Louis Park Public Schools
Brainerd Public Schools	Mahtomedi Schools	Stillwater Area Public Schools
Breckenridge Public Schools	Mankato Area Public Schools	Triton School District
Brewster Public School	Marshall Public School	Verndale Public School
Brooklyn Center School District	Minneapolis Public Schools	Waconia Public Schools
Browerville Public School	Minnetonka Public Schools	Wadena-Deer Creek Public Schools
Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose Schools	Minnewaska Area Schools	Waseca Public Schools
Caledonia School District	Montevideo Public Schools	Watertown Mayer School District
Cambridge-Isanti Public Schools	Morris Area Schools	Waterville-Elysain-Morristown Pub. Schools
Canby School	Mountain Lake Public School	Wayzata Public Schools
Cannon Falls Schools	Murray County Central Schools	West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Area Schools
Centennial School District	New London-Spicer Schools	Westonka Public School
Chisago Lakes Area Schools	New Prague Area schools	White Bear Lake Area Schools
Cleveland Public School	New Ulm Public Schools	Willmar Public Schools
Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley ISD	North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale ISD	Winona Area Public Schools
Columbia Heights Public Schools	Northfield Public Schools	Worthington School District
Cook County Schools	Onamia Schools	Yellow Medicine East Schools
Crookston Public Schools	Orono Schools	
Dawson-Boyd Public Schools	Owatonna Public Schools	
Deer River School	Perham-Dent Public Schools	
Delano School District	Pine City Public Schools	
Dover-Eyota Public Schools	Pine Point Public School	
Duluth School District	Pine River-Backus Schools	
East Grand Forks Public Schools	Pipestone Area School District	
Eastern Carver County Schools	Plainview-Elgin-Millville Comm. Schools	
Eden Valley Watkins Public Schools	Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools	
Elk River Area School District	Red Wing Public Schools	
Eveleth-Gilbert Public Schools	Redwood Area Schools	
Faribault Public School	Richfield Public Schools	
Farmington Schools	Robbinsdale Area School District	
Foley Public Schools	Rochester Public School	
Forest Lake Area Schools	Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan Public Schools	
Fridley Public Schools	Rothsay Public School	
Fulda Public School	Round Lake-Brewster School Districts	
Gibbon Fairfax Winthrop ISD	Royalton Public School District	
Glencoe Silver Lake Public Schools	Rushford-Peterson Schools	