

ILLINOIS EDITION

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO BRINGING
LOCAL FOODS INTO SCHOOLS

Created by



May, 2010

A Parents Guide to Bringing Local Foods into Schools -Illinois Edition

As a parent, you already know one of the most challenging aspects in raising your children is getting them to eat the right foods and to live healthy lifestyles. Busy schedules make it hard to prepare healthy meals at home and ensuring your children are getting the proper nutrition at school is never easy.

To meet this ever increasing challenge, more and more parents are taking action to promote healthier lifestyles within their school districts. They are finding solutions within their communities by partnering with other parents, teachers, school administrators, and local farmers. Together these groups are making a difference for their children’s well-being by bringing local foods into their schools.

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HOW TO GET STARTED

Farm to School Program

One way to get started in getting local foods into schools is creating a program dedicated to educating students about fresh, locally grown farm produce. Commonly called a Farm to School program, these programs can include everything from field trips to local farms to nutrition education in a local school garden to establishing farm-fresh salad bars in the school cafeterias. The good news is these programs are gaining momentum and are sprouting up across the country.

The following sections “How to Get Started,” and “Creating Partnerships” were provided by the Community Alliance With Family Farmers (CAFF).

ADVOCATE FOR FRESH FOODS IN THE CAFETERIA AND AT SCHOOL.

Whether they are in the classroom, school garden or out at a local farm, Farm to School lessons can teach about state-regulated standards while engaging students with agriculture and fresh foods. As a parent, you can encourage teachers and administrators to identify these opportunities, or take an active role in identifying and volunteering to help to implement them.

You can get involved in making changes in your school district's lunch program. Across the country, districts are connecting with local farms to serve fresh produce. District-level Wellness Committees also provide an opportunity for parents to participate in discussions about school food.

TO START YOUR LOCAL FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAM, JUST REMEMBER THREE SIMPLE STEPS:

Step One: Planting the Program

Farm to School programs have the potential to grow and effect changes that involve a lot of people, from students to teachers to school administrators to parents. To create a sustainable project, you'll need to invite participation (and help!) from a diverse group of school staff and community members.

Some schools have formed School Nutrition Action Councils (SNACs) as one way to bring teachers, parents and staff together to talk about Farm to School at their site. SNACs have taken on projects ranging from serving healthy meals at school events, to planning farm-focused school assemblies, to coordinating parent garden workdays. And, SNAC efforts can help implement the federally mandated School Wellness Policy (every district has one).

Step Two: Getting Started With Your Farm to School Program

Once you've got a Farm to School program planned and planted, here are some suggestions to help your program take off:

- 1) Meet with the food service director.** The director of the Child Nutrition Services program makes the decisions about what ends up in the lunchroom, so a meeting with them can provide insight into your school lunch program. Successful Farm to School programs work hand in hand with food services to bring fresh, local produce to school. It can also be helpful to act as a liaison between food services and the parent community such as the local PTA or PTO.
- 2) Your district has a School Wellness Policy—use it!** All schools receiving federal money for school lunch have a policy supporting nutrition education, physical activity, and healthy school meals. You can get a copy of this policy and get involved in the School Wellness Policy Committee to become an informed advocate for a healthy school. The policy may be posted on the district website, if not, call the district office to get a copy.
- 3) Offer to volunteer to support changes.** Parent volunteer efforts are critical in the classroom as well the cafeteria. In the cafeteria, parents can make changes a lot easier by volunteering to help bring local food to the cafeteria. For example, parents have acted as salad bar monitors for the first month of a new salad bar program, guiding students through the salad bar until they learned how the new bar worked. Parent donations have also provided food service with the necessary equipment to provide fresh, local foods. Another powerful way to support positive food service changes is to organize parents to eat lunch with their kids. This is a good way to get parents engaged with school food issues and to encourage students to taste new cafeteria offerings.

Other ways to support educational programs include parent workdays in the school garden, PTA sponsorship of Harvest of the Month to produce healthy snacks, parent coordination of farm field trips (often in conjunction with educational farms or community farm to school programs), and many other creative projects.

Step Three: Reaping the Rewards & Celebrate Your Successes

- 1) Record successes.** Throwing lunchtime or garden celebrations that highlight changes and recognize people for their hard work can be key to keeping up momentum in your Farm to School team. Take photos of students on the farm or in the garden and share them with your school administrators and board; ask your students before and after the program about their knowledge of local foods and farming; survey students to see if they eat more fruits and vegetables in the cafeteria or at home. Healthy minds need healthy foods: track changes in your students' scholastic performance and behavior as they learn to enjoy fruits and vegetables.

- 2) Share your ideas, resources and results.** Present your Farm to School work with your School Wellness Committee, PTA, School Board, and even the local media. Publicizing your success stories will help build momentum and encourage others to join your program!

- 3) Stay in touch with local and regional efforts to promote Farm to School Programs.** Reach out to other communities to spread the Farm to School Movement across the state and country! A great place to start is the Farm to School Website at www.farmtoschool.org

CREATING PARTNERSHIPS

Parents often serve as the binding force that connects an entire community. However, parents will need the support of others to implement a successful Farm to School program. While you may not be able to recruit all of these team members right off the bat, an ideal Farm to School Team includes:

- Community members
- PTA/PTO
- Teachers
- School administrators
- School board members
- School Food Service Directors
- Students

You'll also want to pull in farmers as well as community organizations and agencies, when their advice and help is needed.

SECURING FUNDING

As a great start for your Farm to School programs, community and school garden projects can provide an opportunity to integrate lessons in science, math, reading, environmental studies, nutrition, and health. Children who grow fruits and vegetables are more likely to eat those fruits and vegetables. These programs connect communities and schools with local farms with the objectives of providing a catalyst for neighborhood and community development, serving healthy meals in school cafeterias, improving student nutrition, and providing health and nutrition education opportunities.

When developing your garden projects, fundraising is a great way to make your project successful and helps bring the community together. Asking participants to give or raise money for a project is a time-honored way of cementing interest and loyalty and of uncovering hidden resources. These resources can be monetary, but they might also involve expertise, talent, and a shared passion for the project. For a community, getting gifts from charitable organizations or businesses greatly enhances your chance of having the school garden project get noticed and nurtured in the long run (from schoolgardenwizard.org).

ILLINOIS ORGANIZATIONS

In Illinois, there are many programs, which parents and students can not only learn about local foods but also actively participate in building a garden, growing and selling local foods, and volunteering at farmers market.

FARM DIRECT

The Farm Direct Website features 600 growers and processors and 200 farmers markets who sell directly to consumers. They are design to help buy locally grown foods by locating local farmers market or the product you're looking for in their directory. The farmers will get a fair price for their products. For additional information, contact www.illinoisfarmdirect.org

FAMILY FARMERS

FamilyFarmed.org's mission is to expand the production, marketing and distribution of locally grown and responsibly produced food, in order to enhance the social, economic and environmental health of our communities. One of their values is to build public and private partnerships that support the growth of regional food systems that benefit farmers, consumers, and businesses. For additional information, contact www.familyfarmed.org

CHICAGO BOTANIC GARDEN (GREEN YOUTH FARM PROGRAM)

The Green Youth Farm program provides students the chance to learn all aspects pertaining to organic farming. This includes activities such as planting, managing a hive of bees, cooking with the food students grow, and selling such food at farm stands and markets. From May to October students spend 20 hours each week and are also paid a stipend for their efforts. For additional information contact Angela Mason at amason@chicagobotanic.org

CHICAGO BOTANIC GARDEN (NEIGHBORHOOD GARDEN PROGRAM)

For over 20 years the Neighborhood Garden Program has helped interest groups such as parents and teachers in Illinois design, install, and maintain community and school gardens of all styles, purposes, and sizes. The Program provides education courses, which help parents and teachers start a school garden. Chicago Botanic Garden has a Garden Mentorship Program, which provides volunteer assistance with garden maintenance. For additional information on starting a school garden, visit www.schoolgardenwizard.org. For additional information about the Neighborhood Garden Program call Eliza Fournier at (847) 835-8352.

FARMERS MARKET

There are many farmers markets in Illinois. Parents can find the nearest farmers market and time and date of operations at the following website
<http://www.agr.state.il.us/markets/farmers/display2.php?offset=0&Loc=LAKE>

In addition, the following table, which shows when vegetables and fruits are in season, can be used to plan menus.

What's In Season?

Fruit / Vegetable	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Apples						■	■	■	■	■	■	
Artichokes							■	■				
Asparagus				■	■	■						
Beans						■	■	■				
Bell Peppers						■	■	■	■	■	■	
Berries						■	■	■	■			
Cabbage					■	■	■		■	■	■	
Carrots						■	■	■	■			
Cauliflower								■	■	■		
Cherries					■	■	■					
Corn							■	■	■	■		
Cucumbers								■	■	■		
Eggplant						■	■	■	■	■		
Garlic						■	■	■	■		■	
Grapes							■	■	■	■		
Greens					■					■	■	
Herbs								■	■	■		
Horseradish						■	■	■	■	■	■	
Leeks					■	■	■	■				
Lettuce				■	■	■		■	■	■		
Melons						■	■	■	■			
Nectarines						■	■	■	■			
Okra						■	■	■	■	■		
Onions				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
Peaches						■	■	■	■			
Peas				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
Plums						■	■	■	■	■		
Potatoes						■	■	■	■	■	■	
Potatoes (sweet)								■	■	■	■	
Pumpkins								■	■	■	■	
Radishes					■	■	■	■	■	■		
Rhubarb					■	■	■	■	■	■		
Spinach				■	■	■			■	■	■	
Sprouts					■							
Squash					■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
Strawberries					■	■						
Tomatoes						■	■	■	■	■		
Turnips						■	■	■	■	■		

EXISTING ORGANIZATIONS TO LEVERAGE

Incorporating healthy foods, particularly local foods in your children's school cafeterias may seem difficult. Organizations located both in Illinois and nationwide have the expertise and can help parents overcome many obstacles. Parents can reach out to and leverage the following resources, which have many years of experience with teaching children about healthy lifestyles.

CATCH PROGRAM (COORDINATED APPROACH TO CHILD HEALTH)

The CATCH Program brings schools, families, and communities together to teach children how to be healthy for a lifetime. CATCH is effective because healthy behaviors are reinforced through a coordinated approach-in the Classroom, in the Cafeteria, in Physical Education, at Home, and After School. The program is currently being implemented in over 7,500 schools and after-school programs across the United States and Canada.

Contact Information:

Website - www.catchinfo.org

PURPLE ASPARAGUS

Purple Asparagus is a non-profit organization dedicated to bringing families back to the table by promoting and enjoying all the things associated with good eating, eating that's good for the body and the planet. It provides nutritional education to children and families. It has provided nutritional education in schools, at community centers, farmers' markets, and health fairs in which it teaches children and families how to incorporate fresh and seasonal produce into their diets in a joyful way.

Contact Information:

Melissa Graham

Phone - (773) 991-1920

Email - info@purpleasparagus.com

Website - www.purpleasparagus.com

SEVEN GENERATIONS AHEAD (SGA)

Seven Generations Ahead is a non-profit organization whose mission is to build ecologically sustainable and healthy communities. SGA advocates for proactive, local community solutions to global environmental issues, and works to promote clean, renewable energy; eco-effective materials and products; intelligent, sustainable building design; and fresh, local food raised using ecologically safe and healthy practices.

Contact Information:

Melissa Tobias
Phone - (708) 660-9909
Email - Melissa@sevengenerationsahead.org
Website - www.sevengenerationsahead.org/

FARM TO SCHOOL

The Farm to School program brings healthy food from local farms into the school system nationwide. The program teaches students about the path from farm to the lunchroom table, and instills healthy eating habits.

Contact Information:

Marion Kalb
Phone - (505) 474-5782
Website - www.farmtoschool.org

COMMUNITY ALLIANCE WITH FAMILY FARMERS (CAFF)

CAFF's mission is to build a movement of rural and urban people to foster family-scale agriculture that cares for the land, sustains local economies and promotes social justice. CAFF has developed pilot sourcing programs to provide fresh, local produce for institutions such as hospitals and programs connecting children to the food they eat.

Contact Information:

Diane Del Signore
Phone - (530) 756-8518
Website - www.caff.org

ACTION FOR HEALTHY KIDS

Action for Healthy Kid's mission is to engage diverse organizations, leaders and volunteers in actions that foster sound nutrition and good physical activity in children, youth and schools. It provides expertise, volunteers, programs and resources nationwide through a unique collaboration of more than 11,000 members – professionals, parents, educators, community volunteers, business leaders and students – in partnership with professional associations, government agencies and corporations.

Contact Information:

Linda Dawson
Phone - 1-800-416-5136
Email - ldawson@iasb.com
Website - www.ActionforHealthyKids.org

NUTRITIONAL UPGRADING REALIZED THROUGH UNDERWRITING, RESOURCES AND EDUCATION (NURTURE)

Nurture's program combines philanthropic giving with hands-on teaching, providing limited-resource parents with tools to help them stretch their food dollars in a meaningful and healthy way. It seeks to empower parents with time efficient and cost effective means to provide healthy meals for their families.

Contact Information:

Kathryn Guylay
Email - Kathryn@guylay.com
Website - <http://nurtureyourfamily.org>

FAMILY FAVORITE RECIPES

Once your family has a taste of healthy and fresh foods, they'll soon replace their old favorite snacks in favor of the healthy ones! Replacing carbonated, sugary soda with an easy, homemade, fruit-sweetened soda is one of the easiest ways to reduce the calorie count of your family's diet. Below are a few of our favorite combinations.

For more healthy and seasonal recipes that you can try with your family, please visit the Little Locavores blog: <http://www.littlelocavores.blogspot.com/>

HEALTHY SODA RECIPES:

Strawberry Spritzer

1 10-ounce package frozen strawberries
2 cups white grape juice
1 teaspoon fresh lime juice
8 ounces soda water

Thaw strawberries at room temperature for 20 minutes. Blend in blender or food processor. Add remaining ingredients. Stir gently and enjoy!

Apple Orange Spritzer

1 6-ounce can frozen orange juice (thawed and diluted)
1 6-ounce can frozen apple juice (thawed and diluted)
4 1/2 cups soda water or club soda

Prepare frozen juices and mix together with soda water. Serve.

Anytime Fruit Spritzer

Club soda or soda water
Fruit juice of your choice

Fill glass 3/4 full of soda water; top with fruit juice.

GOOD LUCK!

Teaching healthy living through the benefits of local, fresh foods is one of the best gifts you can provide your children. We sincerely hope that the information contained in this document helps you find the best way that you and your school district can help make this important initiative a reality in your district.