



Health Law and Policy Clinic of
Harvard Law School

Farm to School in Mississippi

What is Farm to School?

Farm to School refers to any program that connects K-12 schools with local farmers. Most Farm to School efforts focus on so-called “farm direct” purchasing, where schools buy products directly from local farmers to serve in the school cafeteria. The business partnerships that develop through farm direct programs often lead to educational activities, with farmers and schools working together to teach students about nutrition, agriculture, and other subjects. Not all Farm to School programs involve farm direct purchasing: distributors can also participate by purchasing locally grown products and making them available to school purchasing officers.

Why Farm to School?

Farm to School has been shown to benefit economic development, children’s health, and educational outcomes.

Farm to School

- Strengthens local economies, improves livelihood of local farmers, and spurs additional spending on other local products and services.
- Increases the amount of fruits and vegetables consumed by students in the cafeteria, classroom, and at home.
- Is an effective way to enhance nutrition education and health literacy according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Why now?

Farm to School has grown rapidly since the first pilot projects appeared in 1996. Between 2000 and 2004, the number of Farm to School programs grew from only a handful to approximately 400 in 22 states.¹ Since then, the number of Farm to School programs has more than doubled every few years, with approximately 1,000 programs operating by 2007 and over 2,000 by 2010.² The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 will enable further growth through new competitive grants for Farm to School programs and increased funding for schools that serve more fresh fruits and vegetables.

How do schools buy their food in Mississippi?

Public schools in Mississippi buy food from three different sources: independent distributors, the Mississippi Department of Education's statewide purchasing program, and the United States Department of Agriculture's commodity programs. The national commodity programs serve to supplement food purchased from the statewide program or from independent distributors.

The Statewide Purchasing Program

- The program decreases costs through large volume bidding and reduces the amount of resources individual school districts devote to bidding.
- All but three public schools in Mississippi participate in some way.
- Over 60% of public schools in Mississippi purchase their produce from the program.

Are there any Farm to School programs in Mississippi?

There is a statewide Farm to School program run through the Department of Defense Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Program and operated by the Mississippi Department of Education and the Department of Agriculture and Commerce. However, there are no farm direct programs operating locally through schools. Additionally, state inspection and certification requirements prevent most Mississippi farmers from participating in the statewide program.

¹ National Farm to School Network, "Farm to School Chronology," <http://www.farmtoschool.org/files/F2SChronology3.09.pdf> (last visited March 8, 2011).

² National Farm to School Network, "About Us," available at <http://www.farmtoschool.org/aboutus.php> (last visited March 8, 2011).

What are the barriers to Farm to School in Mississippi?

- Small and mid-sized farmers do not have the equipment or the required certification to participate in statewide purchasing programs.
- Farmers and food service directors are not communicating with each other and may not be aware of the opportunities presented by Farm to School.
- Most school food service directors in Mississippi do not have any experience purchasing products directly from growers and may not know how to start or know that they are allowed to purchase in this way.
- Schools are often not equipped to buy local products.
- Many school systems in Mississippi are extremely small and located in rural areas. As a result, an individual school district may not have enough demand to attract farmers.

What steps can be taken to expand Farm to School?

- **Integrate Farm to School** into the statewide purchasing program.
- **Publicize opportunities for farmers** to sell their products to the statewide purchasing program and individual schools.
- Work to **establish a mini-grant program** to support Farm to School in Mississippi.
- **Organize a meeting** between key farmers, state procurement officials, and representatives from the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce to **discuss barriers to Farm to School and strategies for overcoming them.**
- Help **create a statewide coordinator** to connect farmers to school food service directors and assist local efforts.

We're looking for ideas!

We have been conducting interviews with folks around Mississippi and other states in order to make comprehensive recommendations for how Mississippi can move forward in this exciting area. Please let Emily Broad or Nate Rosenberg know if you have any ideas or suggestions for the report. Nate can be reached nrosenberg@jd11.law.harvard.edu and Emily at ebroad@law.harvard.edu.