# Farm to School Start-Up Kit

# WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE KENT SCHOOL DISTRICT NUTRITION SERVICES





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#### Introduction

During 2010-2012, Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) and Kent School District Nutrition Services partnered to establish a new farm to school program in the district. The process they followed is outlined in this Start-Up Kit, along with links for the tools developed for use in other school districts.

The Start-Up Kit provides step-by-step guidance and links to useful tools and resources along the way. The kit was created to provide a clear way to present the process and tools used in the Kent School District project, and as such, is not intended to be your sole source of information for starting farm to school.

For more information about farm to school, visit WSDA's Farm to School Toolkit online at <a href="https://www.agr.wa.gov">www.agr.wa.gov</a>.



### The Kent School District Farm to School Project

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#### **Participating Farms and Businesses:**

American Produce Express
Black River Blues Blueberry Farm
Burnt Ridge Nursery & Orchards
Full Circle Farm
High J Orchards
Magana Farms

Shepherd's Grain
Smith Brothers Farms
Tahoma Farm/Terra Organics
Tonnemaker Family Orchard

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## **Step 1 - Consider the Big Picture**

#### Your vision for farm to school:

- Why are you interested in farm to school?
- What do you consider as benefits of farm to school?
- What would you like to accomplish with a farm to school program? – Long term? Short term?
- O What will your Farm to School program encompass?

#### Identifying goals with potential partners:

- District & school administrators, teachers, and staff
- Community partners
- Students & parents



## **Step 2 - Examine Your Current Operation**

Review current practices to identify possibilities for change, as well as great things already happening. Kitchen observation, discussions with key food service personnel, and the following questionnaire will provide useful information for planning a farm to school program.

#### \*Nutrition services director questionnaire

This self-assessment tool uses a set of key questions about your current operation to assist you in identifying farm to school opportunities and challenges



## **Step 3 - Learn about Washington Products**

Review Washington-grown product availability, identify potential ingredient substitutions, and explore new menu ideas.

- ★Washington Grown Produce Seasonality Charts:
  Vegetables & Legumes
  Fruits & Herbs
- **★ Washington Grown Food Kit** recipes, menu planning and nutrition information by food item



# **Step 4 - Engage Staff**

Talk to kitchen & cafeteria staff to discuss your vision and generate shared goals. This is the opportunity to brainstorm ways to start out farm to school in the district with those who will implement it.

- \*Foodservice staff focus group interview
- \*Foodservice staff survey

## **Step 5 - Determine Your Capacity and Make a Plan**

Pulling together information from the previous steps, consider your capacity and set achievable goals & timelines. Your farm to school strategic plan may include menu changes, new purchasing practices, promotion and educational events, engaging the school community in partnership, building school gardens, or other farm to school activities. Explore the <a href="WSDA Farm to School Toolkit">WSDA Farm to School Toolkit</a> for ideas and links to other resources.

#### \*Strategic plan template

This template helps you organize goals and actions to take to achieve them, and map out projects with roles and timeline.



#### **Step 5-Determine Your Capacity and Make a Plan (con't)**

If your plan will involve increased use of whole, fresh produce, consider changes that may be necessary in kitchen operations. Additional equipment, even some small items, can make processing and preparation of these foods easier and more efficient.

- \*Farm to school equipment recommendations Light processing
- \*Farm to school equipment recommendations Scratch cooking



## **Step 6 - Outreach to Local Farms**

Start to connect with farms in the area from which you wish to source. Consider volume requirements, products grown in your immediate region, and products that may be grown in other parts of the state when selecting farms to contact. Create a file of interested farms, available product, and other useful information. The farm file will help you plan and conduct outreach once you are ready to send procurement requests.

- \*Farm profile and purchase log template
- \*Sample vendor questions
- \*Sample food safety checklist (from Iowa State Univ. Extension)

## **Step 7 - Procurement**

A central goal of farm to school is to purchase locally-grown food to serve and educate students. In order to do this, consider what adaptations to make in your purchasing process, from product specification to procurement methods and implementation of a geographic preference.

#### \* A School's Guide to Purchasing Washington-Grown Food

This handbook provides information on rules and requirements for applying a geographic preference in school food purchases and step-by-step guidance for increasing purchases of locally-grown food. Includes specification tips and sample purchasing documents.



## Step 7 - Procurement (con't)

Communicating product needs is a priority in purchasing, and specifications and needs should be clear when working with local farms or smaller distributors.

- \*Washington-grown produce specifications table sample produce specification text for produce available in WA
- \*Washington-grown fruit pack size table standard pack size for selected fruits
- \*Produce size images for communicating with farmers

## Step 7 - Procurement (con't)

For seasonal or special events purchases, you may choose to do separate purchases outside your prime vendor contracts in order to get the best price for the best seasonal products. These frequently fall under the small purchase threshold, and an informal procurement may be used.

- \*Sample informal procurement request for seasonal items
- \*Sample award announcement email text
- \*Sample informal phone quote
- \*Sample invoice



## **Step 8 - Plan Promotion & Education**

#### Kick-off event ideas

- Tote bag w/ F2S logo or other giveaways for staff and/or students and families (e.g. magnets, buttons, etc.)
- Taste tests or samples with farmers/producers
- Table/booth at school wellness fair or family nights

#### Promote your vision in the school community

- School Board, schools & PTSAs
- Websites and social media (nutrition services, schools)

#### Outreach to schools/teachers for collaboration

- Farm-to-School menu item promotion w/ DECA, FFA or CTE programs
- Education about nutrition, food, agriculture and the environment
- School gardens

## Step 8 - Plan Promotion & Education (con't)

#### Farm to School event calendar:

- Taste Washington Day (last Wednesday of Sep.)
- National Farm to School Month (October)
- National School Lunch Week (3<sup>rd</sup> week of Oct.)
- National School Breakfast Week (1<sup>st</sup> week of Mar.)

#### • Farm to School tie-in opportunities:

- Showcasing F2S in your salad bars
- Harvest of the Month program (Seattle Public Schools materials)
- Ethnic meal program
- Invite farmers/producers to join students for lunch

## Step 8 - Plan Promotion & Education (con't)

- School-based promotional/educational events
  - Farmer in the classroom events and assemblies
  - Taste tests
  - Recipe contests
  - Student cooking challenges
  - School fundraising
  - \*Taste tests in the classroom (guide)
  - \*Sample farm to school produce information flyers

# **Step 9 - Train Kitchen and Serving Staff**

Based on your farm to school strategic plan, identify the skills and knowledge that staff will need to succeed. This may include information about Washington-grown foods, seasonality and recipes, safe handling and storage of fresh produce, cooking and food preparation skills.

- **★** Sample preparation & serving protocols for specific produce items Beets Turnips Winter squash
- **₩** Washington-grown produce basics chart
- Washington-grown produce storage tips



## Step 10 - Serve Fresh, Local, Seasonal Food

Encourage students to try new menu items with signs, nutrition information, and staff interaction. Invite teachers, staff and administrators to join the students for lunch.







# **Step 11 - Get Feedback from Students**

Surveys and taste test results can provide feedback on how students and families are responding to new menu items. This can inform promotional activities and menu decisions.

#### \* Sample student surveys

1st grade – interactive classroom activity

5<sup>th</sup> grade – interactive classroom activity

**Secondary** – conducted via online district survey system

- \* Sample parent surveys at family night event to learn about fresh fruit and vegetable program (used to pilot farm to school items)
- \* Sample survey results report

## **Step 12 - Evaluate Your Farm to School Program**



- Keep track of your activities throughout the process to identify best practices, challenges, and mitigations.
- Monitor local purchases, including how the items were served and how they were received by students and staff.
- Keep records on vendor relationships and product volumes to guide future purchasing
- O Determine your desired impacts on students, foodservice staff, farmers and the school and local community.
- Identify areas for further growth move snack items into main menu,
   add new side dishes or ingredients for entrees.



## **Continuing Farm to School**

- Promote your farm to school program in the schools, community and local media and outreach to find local organizational partners who can work with you to strengthen your program.
- Visit WSDA's <u>Farm to School Toolkit</u> for updates and information affecting farm to school projects.
- Join WSDA's Farm to School Connections listserv to stay connected to others interested in farm to school in Washington (at the above website)
- Visit the <u>National Farm to School Network</u> to learn more about farm to school from others around the country



# Good luck and keep us posted!

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