



## *Promoting Health in Minnesota Schools:*

# FARM TO SCHOOL

As society becomes more aware of and concerned with children's health issues, communities are turning to their schools to provide an environment that promotes both healthy eating and physical activity.<sup>1</sup> School policies supporting healthy eating and physical activity are an important component of school efforts to promote the health and well-being of school children. Good nutrition and physical activity help “contribute to improved academic performance, attendance rates, behavior, and lifelong health and well-being.”<sup>2</sup> A strong Farm to School policy is one way for schools to obtain healthy food and provide students with practical knowledge that will help them eat healthy foods throughout their lives.<sup>3</sup>

### **What is Farm to School?**

Farm to School programs (sometimes referred to as “F2S”) connect schools and local farms so that school cafeterias are able to serve fresher and more nutritious meals using locally produced food.<sup>4</sup> While different in each community, farm to school programs are generally created to:

- Help students eat more nutritious foods and develop healthier lifelong eating patterns.
- Support the local economy and local farmers.
- Integrate food-related education into the classroom curriculum.<sup>5</sup>

### **Why is Farm to School important?**

The majority of children in the United States do not meet daily recommendations for fruit and vegetable intake.<sup>6</sup> In addition, one in three children is currently obese or overweight. Poor diet is a critical cause of this childhood obesity “epidemic.”<sup>7</sup> With more than 30 million children eating school food every weekday of the school year, schools can play an important role in ensuring that children eat the recommended number of servings of fruits and vegetables.<sup>8</sup> Farm to School programs have been shown to increase the consumption of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.<sup>9</sup> Children also eat healthier foods with Farm to School programs because local farm fresh foods taste better than highly processed foods, and foods harvested locally at optimal ripeness with little transportation or storage time have increased nutrient levels.<sup>10</sup>

## **Do any federal or Minnesota laws require a Farm to School program?**

While schools are encouraged to start Farm to School programs, they are not mandated by Minnesota or federal law. However, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides competitive grants to schools to initiate and implement Farm to School programs.<sup>11</sup>

## **What other legal considerations could impact Farm to School programs?**

School food, including food purchased through Farm to School programs, must be procured (purchased) following federal and state procurement requirements.<sup>12</sup> In addition, food served as part of the federal school nutrition programs must meet federal nutrition standards for school meals. Food from Farm to School programs must be integrated into school menus in a way that fits with these standards.<sup>13</sup> Federal law now allows a school food service to use a geographic preference when purchasing school food; this can provide additional support for Farm to School programs.<sup>14</sup> Schools must also follow all applicable state and local health and sanitation laws with Farm to School programs.

## **Does the Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA)<sup>15</sup> Model Wellness Policy<sup>16</sup> address Farm to School?**

No, not specifically.

## **Could existing MSBA policies be used to support the creation and management of a Farm to School program?**

Yes. The MSBA has several policies that could be used to support the creation and management of a Farm to School program, including:

- 510 (School Activities)
- 601 (School District Curriculum and Instruction Goals)
- 603 (Curriculum Development)
- 604 (Instructional Curriculum)
- 610 (Field Trips)
- 720 (Vending Machines)
- 807 (Health and Safety)

Farm to School activities can also be included in school policies regarding school food purchasing, school food service operations, and other school food policies.

## **How can a Minnesota school district incorporate Farm to School into its school wellness policy?**

The following language can be incorporated into a school board policy that follows the MSBA's model. This language can also be individually tailored to fit into a school board policy that does not follow the MSBA model policy.

## Addition to the MSBA School Wellness Policy

### III. GUIDELINES

#### A. Foods and Beverages

##### 8. Farm to School Program

1. Farm to School programs enhance the nutritional and educational experience of school children by providing:
  - a. Nutritious, locally grown food as part of the school food program; and
  - b. Opportunities for school children to visit local farms and learn about the origins of their food and how their food is grown. Farm visits serve as an interdisciplinary teaching tool to influence student food choices and lifelong healthy eating habits.
2. Farm to School programs provide students with the opportunity to eat healthy, locally grown foods and be exposed to a variety of fresh produce that reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of the student population. The school district will support the development of Farm to School programs to help students eat more nutritious foods and promote healthier lifelong eating patterns; support the local economy and local farmers; and teach students about the origins of their foods and how their food is grown.
3. The school district supports the integration of a Farm to School program into the school food program and the curricular and co-curricular activities as appropriate to facilitate the nutritional and educational goals of the school district.
4. The school district, to the extent possible, will buy and feature farm fresh foods, incorporate a nutrition education curriculum, and provide students with experiential learning opportunities.<sup>17</sup>
5. The school district will support the sustainability of a Farm to School program through activities including, but not limited to, fundraising, solicitation of community donations, use of existing resources, and allocation of school district funds.
6. The school district will provide information to encourage families to teach children about health, nutrition, and the importance of daily physical activity.<sup>18</sup>
7. The school district will encourage and support healthy eating by students and engage in nutrition promotion that is:
  - a. Integrated into other areas of the curriculum such as math, science, language arts, social sciences, and elective subjects where appropriate and provides eating experiences, farm visits, garden activities, and cooking classes.
  - b. Enjoyable, developmentally appropriate, culturally relevant, and includes participatory activities, such as contests, promotions, taste testings, and field trips to include farms and gardens.
  - c. A part of a curriculum where students will learn to develop life-long skills in nutrition, health education, and physical activity.
8. The district will recognize the lunch period as an integral part of the educational program. The district will strive to use the school cafeteria as a “learning laboratory” to allow students to apply nutrition skills taught in the classroom. Healthy foods, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low fat dairy products, will be encouraged.<sup>19</sup>
9. Neighboring school districts will work cooperatively and, whenever possible, purchase collectively in order to increase the amount of products purchased from local farms.<sup>20</sup>

## What other ways can schools support Farm to School?

In Minnesota, the superintendent is responsible for implementing and enforcing school board policy. Superintendents issue protocols, procedures, and guidelines to help implement the school board's policies. The following language can be incorporated into existing guidelines. However, as school boards and superintendents may adopt more specific or general guidelines based on their needs and goals, policy language can be interchangeable with the guidelines listed below.

### Farm to School Guidelines

- Staff members are encouraged to utilize food from local farms in kitchen classrooms and cafeterias.
- Staff members are encouraged to establish relationships with local farms so that farmers and farm workers will visit school classrooms and students will visit farms.
- Food service and teaching staff will work together to integrate experiences in cafeterias, kitchen classrooms, and farm field trips with the formal learning experience of all students.
- School food service staff will work with school departments and with community partners [and the Student Health Council] to facilitate student understanding and appreciation of fresh, local, sustainably grown food.
- Students will be offered the opportunity to participate in outdoor education programs that make connections between diet, health, the environment, and the interdependence of living things.
- Regular professional development will be provided to teachers and the food service staff on basic nutrition, nutrition education, and benefits of sustainable agriculture.
- School food services will coordinate its menus with seasonal production of local farms so that school meals will reflect seasonality and local agriculture.<sup>21</sup>

## Are there any other resources that may be helpful in developing a Farm to School program?

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides research, training, and technical and financial assistance. Through its Farm to School Program,<sup>22</sup> the USDA supports these local initiatives in a number of ways, including:

- Funding school garden projects.
- The “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food” awareness program.
- Promoting fresh fruit and vegetables in schools.<sup>23</sup>

Farm to School efforts are supported by a number of public and private initiatives operating at the state, regional, and local levels.<sup>24</sup> Some resources available related to these initiatives include:

- National Farm to School Network, *Minnesota Resources*, <http://www.farmtoschool.org/MN/pubs.htm>
- USDA, *Farm to School Program*, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/F2S/webinars.htm>
- Minnesota Department of Health, <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/chp/cdrr/nutrition/FTS/>
- Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, <http://www.misa.umn.edu/FarmFoodResources/FarmtoSchool/index.htm>
- University of Minnesota Extension, *Minnesota Farm to School Toolkit*, <http://www1.extension.umn.edu/food/farm-to-school/toolkit/>
- Minnesota Department of Agriculture, *Farm to School*, <http://www.mda.state.mn.us/grants/grants/mnfarmtoschool.aspx>

*Last updated June 2013.*

This publication was prepared by the Public Health Law Center at William Mitchell College of Law, St. Paul, Minnesota, made possible with funding from the Minnesota Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Public Health Law Center provides information and technical assistance on issues related to public health. The Public Health Law Center does not provide legal representation or advice. This document should not be considered legal advice. For specific legal questions, consult with an attorney.



The Public Health Law Center thanks Terri Swartout from the Minnesota Department of Education and Cathy Miller from the Minnesota School Boards Association for their assistance in reviewing and providing feedback on this document.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> See, e.g., *Local Wellness Policy: A Guide for Development*, MINN. DEP'T OF EDUC. 5 (Sept. 2005), available at <http://www.health.state.mn.us/cdrr/nutrition/docsandpdf/localwellnesspolicy.pdf>.
- <sup>2</sup> *School Wellness Policies*, IDAHO DEP'T OF EDUC., <http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/cnp/wellness/> (last visited May 6, 2013).
- <sup>3</sup> *Policies*, NAT'L FARM TO SCHOOL NETWORK, <http://www.farmtoschool.org/policies.php> (last visited May 6, 2013).
- <sup>4</sup> NAT'L FARM TO SCHOOL NETWORK, <http://www.farmtoschool.org/> (last visited May 6, 2013).
- <sup>5</sup> *Farm to School*, U.S. DEP'T OF AGRIC. FOOD AND NUTRITION SERV., <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/F2S/Default.htm> (last visited May 6, 2013).
- <sup>6</sup> Susan M. Krebs-Smith, Patricia M. Guenther, Amy F. Subar, Sharon I. Kirkpatrick, & Kevin W. Dodd, *Americans Do Not Meet Federal Dietary Recommendations*, 140 J. OF NUTRITION 1832, 1845 (2010), available at <http://jn.nutrition.org/content/140/10/1832.full.pdf+html>.
- <sup>7</sup> *Overweight in Children*, American Heart Ass'n, [http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/Overweight-in-Children\\_UCM\\_304054\\_Article.jsp](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/Overweight-in-Children_UCM_304054_Article.jsp) (last visited May 6, 2013).
- <sup>8</sup> *How Would the Farm to School Grant Program Work?*, NAT'L FARM TO SCHOOL NETWORK, available at <http://www.farmtoschool.org/files/F2SPolicyFAQ.pdf>.
- <sup>9</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>10</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>11</sup> Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, Pub. L. No. 111-296, 124 Stat. 3183 (codified in various sections of 42 U.S.C.); See also *Serving School Garden Produce in the Cafeteria*, PUBLIC HEALTH LAW AND POLICY (May 2011), available at [http://saladbars2schools.org/pdf/SchoolGarden\\_to\\_Cafeteria\\_Liability\\_May2011](http://saladbars2schools.org/pdf/SchoolGarden_to_Cafeteria_Liability_May2011).
- <sup>12</sup> Office of Federal Procurement Policy Act, Pub. L. No. 93-400, 41 U.S.C. § 401 *et seq.* (1974); see also *Legal and Practical Considerations in the Operation of Federal School Nutrition Programs*, PUBLIC HEALTH LAW CENTER 2 (Jan. 2013), available at <http://www.publichealthlawcenter.org/sites/default/files/resources/Legal%20and%20Practical%20Considerations.pdf>.
- <sup>13</sup> See U.S. GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE, GAO-09-814, SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAMS: IMPROVED REVIEWS, FEDERAL GUIDANCE, AND DATA COLLECTION NEEDED TO ADDRESS COUNTING AND CLAIMING ERRORS 4 (2009); *Healthier School Meals: A Summary of the New USDA Standards for School Breakfast and Lunch*, FOOD RESEARCH AND ACTION CENTER (2012), available at [http://frac.org/pdf/school\\_meal\\_nutrition\\_rule\\_summary.pdf](http://frac.org/pdf/school_meal_nutrition_rule_summary.pdf).
- <sup>14</sup> *Feeding America's Schoolchildren*, PUBLIC HEALTH LAW CENTER 13-14 (2013), <http://www.publichealthlawcenter.org/sites/default/files/resources/Feeding%20America's%20Schoolchildren.pdf>.
- <sup>15</sup> LEAGUE OF MINNESOTA CITIES, HANDBOOK FOR MINNESOTA CITIES 17:14 (2012), available at <http://www.lmc.org/media/document/1/chapter17.pdf> ("The Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA) supports, promotes and enhances the work of public school boards. MSBA is a private nonprofit organization that provides technical assistance; cost-saving programs; and advocacy, training, research, and referral services for all of Minnesota's public [school members]. Membership in MSBA is voluntary.").
- <sup>16</sup> *MSBA/MASA Model Policy 533: Wellness*, MINN. SCHOOL BOARD ASS'N & MINN. ASS'N OF SCHOOL ADMIN. (2010).

<sup>17</sup> *Minnesota Policies*, NAT'L FARM TO SCHOOL NETWORK, <http://www.farmtoschool.org/MN/policy.htm> (last visited May 6, 2013).

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> *Sample Farm to School Wellness Policy Language from Minnesota*, MINN. DEP'T OF HEALTH (2010), *available at* <http://www.health.state.mn.us/healthreform/ship/docs/wellnesspolicylanguage.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> *Model Wellness Policy Guide*, CENTER FOR ECOLITERACY 10 (2010), *available at* [http://www.ecoliteracy.org/sites/default/files/uploads/cel\\_model\\_wellness\\_policy\\_guide.pdf](http://www.ecoliteracy.org/sites/default/files/uploads/cel_model_wellness_policy_guide.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*