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Virginia Farm to School Resource Guide: Helping Connect Virginia Foods to Virginia Schools

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“Everything is right about Farm to School: healthy fresh food, enhanced economic opportunity for farmers, and education for children about where food comes from. That’s a trifecta!”

Kathleen Merrigan
Former Deputy Secretary, United States Department of Agricultureⁱ

Welcome!

This *Virginia Farm to School Resource Guide* is designed to help cultivate connections between the many diverse stakeholders that support the Virginia Farm to School Program. This guide is intended to help facilitate locally and regionally-grown Virginia foods to school cafeterias and school-based meal programs. It contains research-based information, resources, and advice that can help start or expand a Farm to School initiative in your community.

Farm to School programs locally and nationally come in many different shapes and sizes that are ultimately unique to the communities that develop them. Stakeholders that may find this guide helpful include: Virginia school nutrition directors, farmers, food distributors, Virginia Cooperative Extension professionals, and other school-based and agriculture-based educators and service providers interested in Farm to School programs.

Purchasing Virginia-grown foods for school meals has been shown to be good for students, local farmers, and communities.ⁱⁱ Through Farm to School programs, students across the United States are enjoying fresh, locally and seasonally grown foods while learning about agriculture, human nutrition and food production. The Virginia Farm to School Program was established in 2007 through Senate Joint Resolution 347 that requested for the Virginia Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry and the Secretary of Education to establish a Farm to School Task Force charged with developing a plan for implementing Farm to School in Virginia. The Virginia Farm to School Program is an effort to increase the amount of fresh and nutritious Virginia Grown products offered in schools and to promote opportunities for schools and local farmers to work together. In 2009, the first Virginia Farm to School Week took place, and in 2010, the Virginia General Assembly passed a resolution making the second week of November the official Virginia Farm to School Week.

When supporting the Virginia Farm to School Program, we suggest that you develop collaborative partnerships with other Farm to School supporters. Through these partnerships, small successes can grow into large achievements that ultimately positively impact Virginia’s children, farmers, and communities. Here in Virginia, we are pleased to join a national effort that connects schools with their local agricultural communities. By doing so, Virginia is helping school-based youth understand where their food comes from and how their food choices impact their health, community, and the environment. We also support the local food and farm economy by promoting Virginia farmers!

Introduction to Farm to School

Today, Farm to School activities and programs take place in all 50 states as well as Washington, D.C. According to the National Farm to School Network, there are almost 12,500 schools involved with Farm to School nationally. These programs reach over 5.7 million students and purchase more \$13 million dollars of locally produced foods. ⁱⁱⁱ Evidence is beginning to show that Farm to School is an opportunity to create agricultural and regional economic development, while improving student nutrition, promoting healthy eating habits, and teaching kids where their food comes from. ^{iv, v, vi, vii, viii, ix, x}

Overview of Farm to School and the Virginia Farm to School Program

Farm to School is typically defined as “a program that connects schools (K-12) and local farms with the objectives of serving healthy meals in school cafeterias, improving student nutrition, providing agriculture, health and nutrition education opportunities, and supporting local and regional farmers.” ⁱⁱⁱ The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines Farm to School similarly, and as part of the *Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food* initiative, the USDA has made Farm to School a key priority area. ^{xi, xii} Farm to School programs are frequently thought of as a ‘win-win’ solution for both children and farmers. ^{xiii, xiv}

The concept of Farm to School emerged in large part because of a handful of individual’s work, which first began during the mid-1990’s. ^{xiii} Farm to School grew out of primarily two separate efforts in north Florida on the east coast of the United States (U.S.), and southern California on the west coast of the U.S. In north Florida, a USDA consultant worked to support local farmers, particularly minority farmers, by developing school cafeterias as a potential market for certain crops. ^{xv} In southern California, a fruit and vegetable salad bar filled with products from local and regional farmers was implemented in place of the standard hot meal at a low income school in Santa Monica. ^{xv}

In Virginia, Farm to School began as a result of state legislation passed in 2007, Senate Joint Resolution 347 (2007), which requested for the Virginia Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry and the Secretary of Education to establish a Farm to School Task Force charged with developing a plan for implementing Farm to School in Virginia. The Virginia Farm to School Program is an effort to increase the amount of fresh and nutritious Virginia Grown products offered in schools and to promote opportunities for schools and local farmers to work together. ^{xvi}

“Virginia’s Farm-to-School program is about creating connections between growers, distributors and educational institutions. Through these connections, we can provide healthy, locally grown foods and support our agricultural economy. Virginia’s Farm-to-School creates a win-win situation for Virginia’s children and for Virginia’s farmers.”

--- Todd Haymore, Virginia Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry

In 2009, the first Virginia Farm to School Week took place, and in 2010, the Virginia General Assembly passed a resolution making the second week of November the official Virginia Farm to School Week. ^{xvii} A 2011 survey by Virginia Tech found that 69 percent of respondents participated in the 2010 Virginia Farm to School Week. Of those participants, 65 percent continued to purchase local food throughout the 2010-2011 school year. Furthermore this same survey found that all respondents had at least heard of the Virginia Farm to School Program, and 55 percent of respondents stated that they were very knowledgeable about Farm to School. ^{xviii}

Many different types of Farm to School programs exist throughout Virginia. A 2011 survey of Virginia school nutrition directors found that 86 percent of respondents are serving meals featuring local foods. This included school divisions in every part of the Commonwealth.

Additional key findings of this survey include:

- 45 percent of respondents reported developing purchasing relationships with local farmers.
- 40 percent of respondents reported inviting a farmer to a school to support education about local food and agriculture.
- 36 percent of respondents reported planting a school garden.
- 32 percent of respondents reported working with teachers to include classroom-based curriculum featuring local foods and agriculture.
- Virginia School nutrition directors most strongly agreed with the potential benefit of Farm to School as it increases support of Virginia farms and/or businesses and that schools support their local economy and local community by purchasing local foods.
- Virginia School nutrition directors stated that the biggest potential problems of Farm to School were the seasonal availability of local foods and the inadequate supply of local foods.
- To increase the purchasing of local foods as part of Farm to School programs, Virginia school nutrition directors stated that they wished that more local food was available from distribution companies who they normally purchase from.
- Virginia School nutrition directors also stated that if there was one place for ordering local foods from multiple farmers their likelihood for greater participation in Farm to School would increase.

A full report of these findings from the survey is available online, <http://www.farmentoschool.org/VA/pubs.htm>.

Moving Forward with Policy: Virginia and National Farm to School Legislation

Throughout the U.S. and in Virginia there are a series of state and federal policies that support Farm to School. Historically, these policies have been enacted as ways to encourage and improve a school nutrition director's ability to procure or source local and regionally grown/raised foods.

Second Week of November as Virginia Farm to School Week

In Virginia, as a result of legislation passed in 2010 (House Joint Resolution 95), the second week of November is the official Virginia Farm to School Week.^{xvii} Each year across the Commonwealth, farmers, local school nutrition directors, cafeteria managers and assistants, food hubs and food distributors partner to put on local and regional Farm to School events and programs. These events have been shown to help connect local farmers to local schools as a market, highlight school and community gardens, teach children about agriculture, how food is grown, and where it comes from, and incorporate Virginia Grown products as part of the school lunch system.

Some of the activities and programs completed during past Virginia Farm to School Week events include:

- Serving Virginia grown or raised food in school breakfasts, lunches, or classroom snacks.
- Tasting specialty crops and other Virginia grown or raised foods in school classrooms.
- Building or celebrating school gardens.
- Promoting agriculture in schools through cooking contests, cooking demonstrations, or meet the farmer talks.
- Teaching students culinary and food preparation skills.
- Holding a farmers market featuring Virginia grown or raised foods at or near a school.
- Student field-trips to nearby farms or community gardens.
- Hosting after-school events such as film screenings and community-based panel presentations and discussions.

“Virginia’s Farm-to-School Program is a true “win-win”. Our students benefit from being served fresh, local food at school. These same schools represent a significant new market opportunity for Virginia farmers. It is my pleasure to bring this resolution before the General Assembly and to call attention to Farm-to-School Week in the Commonwealth.”

--- Delegate Ed Scott, Virginia General Assembly

October as National Farm to School Month

As a result of federal legislation passed in 2010 (House Resolution 1655), nationally, October is the official National Farm to School Month.^{xix} Designating October as Farm to School Month is an attempt to encourage local farmers, school nutrition directors, and other food system

stakeholders to develop and celebrate Farm to School programs and activities. According to the National Farm to School Network, more than 131,490 students participated in National Farm to School Month activities and schools used \$101,011 worth of local food during October 2012. Because only a portion of schools are familiar with local area Farm to School programs, these numbers likely represent only a fraction of actual participation and impact. The National Farm to School Network reports that participation could easily be 10 or even 20 times higher. For more information about October as National Farm to School Month, please visit the official Farm to School Month website, <http://www.farmtoschoolmonth.org>.

USDA Farm to School Grant Program

As a result of the 2010 Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act, in 2012, the USDA launched the USDA Farm to School Grant Program with the objective of assisting “eligible entities in implementing farm to school programs that improve access to local foods in eligible schools.”^{xx} Through this grant program, approximately \$5 million dollars is available annually to schools, state and local agencies, producers and producer groups, non-governmental organizations, and Indian Tribal Organizations for Farm to School activities.

In 2012, the USDA funded 68 local Farm to School programs in 37 states including two Farm to School programs in Virginia. Funded programs in Virginia include those sponsored by the Rappahannock County Public Schools in partnership with Page County Public Schools and Orange County Public Schools, as well as the Richmond City Public Schools.

2013 USDA FARM TO SCHOOL GRANT PROGRAM VIRGINIA AWARDEES

Rappahannock County Public Schools. As part of the first USDA Farm to School Grant awardees, Rappahannock County Public Schools was awarded a planning grant as lead partnering with three regional rural school districts in Virginia—Page, Orange, and Rappahannock Schools. Together, they applied for a cluster planning grant to build upon each of their isolated successes in using local foods, educating children through school gardens, and connecting with local producers. Currently, they are working to identify and collaborate with local farmers, local distributors, food service staff, county extension staff and community stakeholders who are interested in planning and implementing Farm to School programs. Project directors are also training cafeteria staff to work with fresh foods and exploring ways to increase agricultural and nutritional education in all three districts.

Richmond City Public Schools. Richmond City Public Schools was also awarded a planning grant to expand their current Farm to School efforts beyond the annual celebration of Virginia Farm to School Week. The project covers four objectives that will address: (1) school nutrition staff readiness through education and training utilizing Farm to School best practices program offerings, and salad bar training, (2) a district-wide needs assessment to determine capacity for Farm to School activities; (3) building a network of contacts to help source local food purchases, and, (4) recruitment of local stakeholders and partners from the Richmond Public School Garden Task Force to serve as planning committee members in the development of a Farm to School action and sustainability plan.

The USDA has a team of staff members supporting Farm to School. Names and contact of these individuals, as well as more information including recorded webinars about the USDA Farm to School Grant Program can be found by visiting the USDA Farm to School Program, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool>.

USDA Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Program

The USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) is a federal program that encourages the inclusion of healthy Virginia foods in schools and classrooms. The FFVP is administered by the USDA in partnership with the Virginia Department of Education. According to the USDA, the program can help children learn more healthful eating habits and has been successful in introducing school children to a variety of produce that they otherwise might not have the opportunity to sample. ^{xx} The program began as a result of the 2002 Farm Bill, and was reauthorized in the 2008 Farm Bill. According to the USDA, the FFVP operates in selected low-income elementary schools and provides \$158 million in assistance to state agencies. States then select schools to participate based on criteria, including the requirement that each student receives between \$50 and \$75 worth of fresh produce over the school year. More information about the FFVP is available at the USDA website, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ffvp>.

Additionally, the USDA has also developed a handbook to help schools apply for this program and can be downloaded from the Internet at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/FFVP/handbook.pdf>.

Small Purchase Threshold

When procuring goods and services for the Child Nutrition Programs, a school food authority must determine whether they must use an informal or formal procurement method. It is important to understand and then identify which method best meets the needs of your individual school food service operation. Informal procurement occurs when a school food authority's purchases fall at or below the federal, state, or local small purchase threshold (*i.e.*, whichever is more restrictive). The informal procurement method is commonly referred to as procurement under the small purchase threshold or simplified acquisitions. ^{xii}

Under federal law, the small purchase threshold allows for school nutrition directors to complete more small purchase procurements using relatively simple and informal methods for securing services, supplies, or other property. Under Federal Law, [41 U.S.C. 403(11)], the small purchase threshold was increased from \$100,000 to \$150,000 in October 2012 (as said in memo code SP 01-2013 CACFP 01-2013 SFSP 01-2013). However, in Virginia, the small purchase threshold is set at \$50,000. This means that school nutrition directors must follow the Virginia rule as it relates to all USDA Food and Nutrition Service program procurements. In other words, Virginia school nutrition directors can purchase local and regional foods from Virginia farmers without using formal procurement process as long as the purchase is lower than \$50,000. It is important for each school nutrition director to check if the small purchase threshold is more restrictive for their municipality (*i.e.*, county or city) than for the Commonwealth of Virginia.

For more information about this policy, visit the USDA website that outlines using both informal and formal procurement methods. The Virginia small purchase threshold is outlined at the Department of General Services.

USDA Farm to School Procurement Methods Website
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/f2s/Procurement.htm>

Geographic Preference

Through the 2008 Farm Bill, the Secretary of Agriculture was instructed to help schools purchase locally grown and locally raised foods to maximum extent possible. The geographic preference rule was put in place through federal legislation to help give school nutrition directors the ability to include language in their bids that allows for the procurement process to preference the sourcing of local and regional foods.

A few new resources are available to help individuals understand issues related to using the geographic preference rule. The USDA Farm to School Program recently published a factsheet that outlines the details of procuring local foods using geographic preference. This fact sheet is available online. Additionally, School Food FOCUS has also published a primer on geographic preference which can be downloaded on their website. Within the primer, individuals will learn about the federal authority for using geographic preference and how the federal authority coincides with state procurement laws.

USDA Geographic Preference Factsheet
http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/F2S/pdf/F2S_geo_pref.pdf

School Food FOCUS Website
<http://www.schoolfoodfocus.org>

USDA GEOGRAPHIC PREFERENCE FACTSHEET

“Federal regulations do not prescribe the precise way that geographic preference should be applied, or how much preference can be given to local products. Thus, there are a variety of ways to apply geographic preference and one way is not considered better or more effective than another. The key is to be sure that use of geographic preference does not restrict free and open competition. Further, regardless of which method is used, the selection criteria must be clearly described in all solicitation materials.”

Virginia Farm to School Recommendations

To continue strengthening the Virginia Farm to School Program, there are a number of strategies and best practices that can be implemented by Virginia school nutrition directors, farmers, food hubs and food distributors, and agricultural educators. These activities are based on research that was completed as part of the Virginia Farm to School survey and a series of interviews and focus groups with Farm to School stakeholders. Below are these recommendations summarized by each stakeholder group.



Recommendations for School Nutrition Directors

Below are a few important points to know when starting or expanding your Farm to School program and working with farmers to source locally and regionally-grown foods.

School nutrition directors are critical to developing successful Farm to School programs. Through interviews and focus groups with farmers and food distributors, we found that school nutrition directors are one of the most important individuals in the community to help develop successful local and regional Farm to School programs. As a school nutrition director, you may be very familiar with Farm to School and working with local foods or just starting to become familiar with and knowledgeable about Farm to School.

When working with others to develop a local Farm to School program, real-world experiences have showed that there are several best practices. Below are a series of recommendations developed for school nutrition directors who are just getting started with Farm to School activities.

1. **Start small and grow slowly.** Start small with a single product, one day, or one school. Starting small can help you learn best practices for working with local and regional foods that will allow you to grow your Farm to School program. In starting small, you can then develop annual goals for sourcing of locally and regionally-grown foods.
2. **Networks are essential.** Build a network of farmers, food distributors, and Farm to School supporters. This network of individuals and organizations can be critical to creating or expanding a successful Farm to School program.

"My best advice is to start small. School Nutrition Directors have so many irons in the fire and this shouldn't be overwhelming. Look at your existing menus, see where you can painlessly substitute a local for a non-local item, and go from there. If every district in Virginia procured even a small percentage of their foods from local farmers and producers, it would make a huge positive economic impact."

--- Andrea Early, School Nutrition Director, Harrisonburg City Public Schools

You may want to contact your local Virginia Cooperative Extension office for assistance in locating local farms that produce local foods. A complete listing of local Virginia Cooperative Extension offices can be found online at the Virginia Cooperative Extension website, <http://www.ext.vt.edu>. Developing a network may also mean contacting other businesses, institutions, and organizations who purchase food for the names of local farms and farmers who sell local or regionally-grown foods. The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is a good resource to help identify farms and farmers for participation in local and regional Farm to School programs.

3. **Plan for local logistics.** Consider the logistics such as cost of local foods, bid process, distribution, storage, food preparation time and space, supply, and ordering/packaging details. Research has found that the logistics of buying locally and regionally-grown foods can be sometimes challenging. As a school nutrition director, it is important that you consider all of the logistics of local food distribution and have a detailed plan for delivery and preparation.
4. **Build a relationship with your food distributor.** Ask your food distributors to purchase locally or regionally-grown foods. If you are working with a food distributor to purchase locally or regionally-grown foods, ask for the names of the farms they are working with.
5. **Highlight the successes.** Share good news about the program success with school and community stakeholders. Sharing information about your successful Farm to School efforts can increase the support of your program through the community. This can also mean highlighting local foods on your menus or giving them special names on your menus to help inspire students to eat more local foods.
6. **Build school system and community support.** Educate students, teachers, parents, and community members about the importance of Farm to School. By educating these stakeholder groups, more individuals may be willing to assist with your Farm to School program efforts or provide additional resources for completing Farm to School programs.
7. **Become familiar with the seasonality of Virginia agriculture.** Learn about the seasonality of locally-grown foods in Virginia. It is important for you to know when certain crops are in season so that you can appropriately include them on your school menus. The appendix contains a produce availability calendar for you to plan seasonal meals by including locally and regionally-grown foods.

Many of these recommendations are further explained in detail at the Virginia Farm to School website, under “Program Tools,” and can be found online at: <http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/marketing/farm.shtml>.

Checklist for Schools: Working with Farmers on Farm to School

When working with farmers and other food distributors to order Virginia grown/raised foods, we recommend being conscious of what types of crops or meat products the farmer is producing, the production methods used, product handling and storage methods, transportation logistics, and food safety standards. Below are a series of questions we suggest asking when starting to work with a new farmer as part of your Farm to School program.

1. What types of fruits, vegetables, or meats do you produce or grow?

2. What is your pricing structure for (insert type of food)...?

3. What is your insurance coverage? What type and how much?

4. Have you considered GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) certification? If so, have you started that process?

5. Are any of your products certified organic?

6. What types of procedures are in place to ensure food safety and traceability within your agricultural operation?

7. Do you provide a means for delivering your products?

8. Would you be willing to work through a distributor?

Recommendations for Farmers

Below are a few important points to know when starting or expanding your participation in the Virginia Farm to School Program and working with schools to market your locally and regionally-grown foods.

Farmers are an essential part of successful Virginia Farm to School Programs. They provide products available for school meals and can help educate students about different agricultural growing practices and the rural lifestyle. By selling your products to local schools, it is likely that your business will receive increased visibility. There are several strategies that farmers can employ to better connect their products to local and regional school divisions.



Mr. Sandy Fisher, local farmer and his cow, Brookview Farm, Goochland County, grass fed and finished cattle farm.

1. **Become familiar with the schools in your community.** Visit the Virginia Farm to School webpage on the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services website (<http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/marketing/farm.shtml>) to see the list of which schools are currently interested in purchasing from Virginia farms. If you see a school in your region that you may be interested in working with, we suggest meeting with the school nutrition director to learn about their school nutrition program.
2. **Talk about your farm operation.** When working with a Virginia school nutrition director or food distributor, be prepared to share details and supportive information about your farming operation. They may also want to tour your farming operation or see and taste product samples.
3. **The right products at the right time.** Determine which products you can grow and sell to local and regional school divisions. You will have to determine how your products get to each school, what volume the school nutrition director or food distributor may want, the condition of the product (washed, boxed, etc.), and how the food will be prepared by kitchen staff. These are important aspects of working with schools as a market opportunity.
4. **Build a network of Farm to School famers.** Explore working with other farmers to collectively pool or aggregate your products so that there is enough of a supply available for schools divisions. Schools often require a large volume of products for their school meals. You may or may not be able to provide enough supply. If you cannot fill a complete order, we suggest working with other nearby farmers to aggregate enough product to meet the needs of a particular school division or distributor.

5. **Become familiar with school food procurement regulations.** Purchase the necessary policies and insurances so that you are in compliance with school food procurement regulations. This may mean increasing your insurance coverage. Weighing the costs and benefits of working with schools as a market opportunity is an important step to working with schools.
6. **Know which food safety best practices are right for you.** Think about becoming Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certified. Schools may ask you to become GAP certified as a preventive measure to ensure food safety. Some distributors will only purchase from farmers who are GAP certified. We suggest contacting your local Extension agent to discuss the pros and cons of GAP certification.
7. **Talk with your school nutrition director or VCE professional about the school nutrition menu planning process.** Educate yourself about school nutrition menu planning and procurement regulations and current practices. This will allow you to more effectively communicate with school nutrition directors when discussing how they purchase food for their school meals.

Checklist for Farmers: Working with Schools on Farm to School

When working with school nutrition directors or food distributors to deliver your products to schools, we recommend that you develop a strong relationship with each perspective buyer/handler and initiate an open line of communication. Below are a series of questions we suggest asking school nutrition directors or food distributors when starting to sell local and regional foods as part of a Farm to School program.

1. What types of products are you interested in purchasing? How much would you be interested in purchasing?

2. What is your pricing structure for (each product)?

3. Do you require delivery of products? How many different locations would you like for delivery of products to?

4. What type of condition do you prefer when obtaining products? Washed, boxed, sliced etc.?

5. How long do you typically take for payment/ reimbursement? Do you require an invoice?

6. Do you require Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification from farmers?

7. Would you like to tour my farming operation or sample my locally-grown products?

Recommendations for Food Distributors

Food distributors are an important stakeholder when it comes to developing a vibrant Virginia Farm to School Program. They are an essential group to help connect school divisions with locally and regionally-grown foods and farmers reach schools as a market opportunity. Below are a few recommendations we suggest when working with a food distributor.

Recommendations for Food Distributors When Working with Schools

1. **Know local and regional food preferences.** Ask each school division that you work with which types of locally and regionally-grown foods they would like to purchase.
2. **Demonstrate flexibility with quantity in local and regional food sales.** If at all possible, be open to distributing smaller quantities of locally and regionally-grown foods compared to non-locally or regionally-grown foods.
3. **Key stakeholder appreciation.** Appreciate the opportunity you can play in connecting farmers and their products to school meal programs.

Recommendations for Food Distributors When Working with Farmers

1. **Quality matters.** Be prepared to pay a little more for locally and regionally-grown foods. In some instances, locally and regionally-grown foods may cost a little more than non-locally-grown foods.
2. **Think outside of the box.** Be prepared to receive farm products that may be packaged differently than typical foods. Have a conversation about how each of your packaging needs can be met.
3. **Be prepared for farmers to ask you to come to their farm to pick-up their products.** This may or may not work for your company. Consider the options! Be open to the possibility of farmers asking to pick-up from their farm operation.



Recommendations and Considerations for Virginia Cooperative Extension Professionals and other Agricultural Educators

Farm to School programs are designed to give farmers another economic development opportunity to market their products to nearby school divisions for school lunches, snacks, and other school food and nutrition programs. They are also designed to give students greater access to healthy local and regionally grown/raised foods. This win-win approach has been a hallmark theme that has helped develop Farm to School across the U.S.

As individuals who are dedicated to supporting Virginia's agricultural industry and improving student access to healthy foods, agricultural service providers and Virginia Cooperative Extension agents have the opportunity to play a central role in strengthening Virginia's Farm to School Program. Through a 2011 survey of Virginia school nutrition directors, respondents stated that they were familiar with many Virginia agricultural and local food service providers. School nutrition directors stated that they were most familiar with Virginia Cooperative Extension, followed by the *Virginia Grown* Program, National Farm to School Network, *Buy Fresh Buy Local*, local food hubs, and local marketing campaigns. The following recommendations have been developed to help Virginia Cooperative Extension agents and other agricultural service providers continue to support the Virginia Farm to School Program.

Five Steps to Starting a Farm to School Program:

1. Assess where you are and where you would like to be.
2. Form a team and collaborate.
3. Establish one or two attainable goals.
4. Learn from others.
5. Promote Farm to School in your school and community.

These steps were developed by the National Farm to School Network. More information about these steps and getting started with Farm to School can be found online.

National Farm to School Network: Getting Started with Farm to School Publication
http://www.farmentoschool.org/files/publications_494.pdf

1. **Facilitate the Farm to School connections.** Educate your stakeholder groups about the Virginia Farm to School Program. Whether you work with farmers, industry groups, school system groups, health associations, or other community-based organizations, we recommend that you inform these individuals and groups about the Virginia Farm to School Program.
2. **Learn how VCE programs compliment Farm to School.** Educate yourself about the potential benefits, challenges, and opportunities to supporting the Virginia Farm to School Program. Three great websites that can help you learn more about Farm to School are the Virginia Farm to School Program website (<http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/marketing/farm.shtml>), the National Farm to School Network website (<http://www.farmentoschool.org>), and the USDA Farm to School Program website (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmentoschool>). While exploring the Virginia Farm to School Program website you can learn which local schools in your community or region are interested in buying Virginia-grown and other local or regionally-grown foods. This website also provides information about how you can support the annual Virginia Farm to School Week.

3. **Become familiar with school food procurement regulations.** Educate yourself and have a basic understanding of current school nutrition menu planning and purchasing regulations and practices. This will allow you to more effectively work with both school nutrition directors who are exploring purchasing local and regional foods and farmers who are exploring selling to local and regional foods to schools.
4. **Get involved with Farm to School activities.** There are a number of ways for Virginia Cooperative Extension to get involved with local efforts. These include helping local and regional farmers connect to schools as a new marketing opportunity, helping schools develop school gardening programs, asking farmers to be part of school presentations to students to learn about local agriculture and food production, coordinating local food and nutrition education classes and taste tests in schools, or teaching food preservation classes so more local food products are available year-round.
5. **Promotion and outreach for your county and region.** Ask your local newspaper and/or television station to do a story on a local Farm to School event. A 2011 survey of Virginia school nutrition directors found that one of the top potential benefits of Farm to School programs was that they enhanced the school division public relations. With your support, both you and the school system can receive positive media attention while increasing awareness of local agriculture and food production.
6. **Locate national Farm to School programming opportunities.** There are many great resources throughout the U.S. that are available about Farm to School. We recommend connecting with both national and other states resources to learn more about Farm to School. These resources can be utilized when developing local or regional Farm to School programs or when looking for research to support your involvement in Farm to School. Both the National Farm to School Network and USDA Farm to School Program websites are great starting points.
7. **Be the glue for Farm to School program growth.** Work with local agriculture, food, and school system stakeholders as a resource when they may be applying for a USDA Farm to School Grant. The USDA Farm to School Grant Program can be a great way to plan or implement local and regional Farm to School programs. Your involvement can bring different stakeholders together to apply for this grant. You may also be able to receive funding or additional resources through their Farm to School grant application to assist with local or regional Farm to School activities or programming efforts.

Kenner Love, Rappahannock County Extension Agent, supporting a local Farm to School program.



Key Farm to School Resource Organizations

Virginia Farm to School Resource Organizations

When developing local and regional Farm to School programs in Virginia, it is important to partner and collaborate with others organizations and groups that can support your efforts. Below is a list of organizations that have been involved with supporting Farm to School programs and activities, and that you may want to contact for additional information, resources, and support.

Virginia Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services

The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is charged with coordinating the Virginia Farm to School Program. VDACS manages the official Virginia Farm to School Program website and also serves a resource to answer questions about Farm to School in Virginia. The Virginia Farm to School program is an effort to increase the amount of fresh and nutritious Virginia Grown products offered in schools and to promote opportunities for schools and local farmers to work together. Ms. Leanne Dubois currently serves as the Virginia Farm to School Coordinator and can be reached by email at leanne.dubois@vdacs.virginia.gov or by phone at (804) 225-3663.

Virginia Department of Education

The Virginia Department of Education is charged with administering the school nutrition program in Virginia. Through this effort they help coordinate the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, afterschool snack programs, the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, and the Summer Food Service Program. Through school nutrition programs, 681,505 lunches, 196,987 breakfasts and 7,240 afterschool snacks are served on a typical day in Virginia public schools (Virginia Department of Education, 2013). The Director of the School Nutrition Program, Ms. Catherine Digilio Grimes has been a strong supporter of the Virginia Farm to School Program. Catherine can be reached by email at Catherine.Digilio-Grimes@doe.virginia.gov or by phone at (804) 225-2074.

Virginia Cooperative Extension

Virginia Cooperative Extension brings the resources of Virginia's land-grant universities, Virginia Tech and Virginia State University, to the people of the commonwealth. Virginia Cooperative Extension is a dynamic organization that stimulates positive personal and societal change, leading to more productive lives, families, farms, and forests as well as a better environment. Extension programs are delivered through a network of faculty at two universities, 107 county and city offices, 11 agricultural research and Extension centers, and six 4-H educational centers. Virginia Cooperative Extension has been active in supporting the Virginia Farm to School Program. Local Extension agents are a good resource to help connect local foods to local school nutrition programs and identify other resources available to develop local and regional Farm to School programs. More information about Virginia Cooperative Extension can be found at their website, <http://www.ext.vt.edu>.

Virginia Agriculture in the Classroom

The Virginia Agriculture in the Classroom Program is coordinated by the Virginia Farm Bureau. The Virginia AITC Program is a statewide educational program that provides teachers with staff development and resources designed to bring Virginia's Standards of Learning alive through real-world applications. AITC helps teachers integrate the study of Virginia agriculture and natural resources into their curriculum. The mission of AITC is to educate Virginia's children about the importance of agriculture. AITC has been a long-time supporter of the Virginia Farm to School Program, and can be called on to provide educational resources about Virginia food production and agriculture for school teachers or provide professional development opportunities for Virginia's educators about Virginia food and agriculture. For more information about the Virginia AITC Program, please contact Tammy Maxey at tammy.maxey@vafb.com or visit their website, <http://www.agintheclass.org>.

Virginia Farm Bureau

Virginia Farm Bureau is a lead organization promoting agriculture in Virginia. It works with policymakers to create an environment where agriculture can prosper and improve the lives of all Virginians. The staff of the Virginia Farm Bureau Commodity and Marketing department continues to help strengthen Virginia's local and regional food systems through technical assistance, speaking at educational programs, and supporting food system initiatives that help Virginia farmers connect to Virginia's markets. For more information about Virginia Farm Bureau is available online at their website, <https://vafarmbureau.org>.

Virginia Food System Council

The Virginia Food System Council is a board of 24 volunteer directors, representing all aspects of the food system from local producers and consumers, social justice and environmental non-profit organizations, to dietitians and statewide organizations. The Virginia Food System Council envisions a sustainable food system contributing to the health, economic vitality and social well-being of all Virginians by working to advance a nutrient-rich and safe food system for Virginians at all income levels, with an emphasis on access to local food, successful linkages between food producers and consumers, and a healthy viable future for Virginia's farmers and farmland. Their board members may be a resource for you when developing or expanding your Farm to School programs. For more information, please visit their website, <http://virginiafoodsystemcouncil.org>.

Virginia Foundation for Agriculture Innovation and Rural Sustainability

The mission of the Virginia Foundation for Agriculture Innovation and Rural Sustainability is to "assist rural Virginians in developing and advancing their agricultural, economic, and social interests to enhance their quality of life." As part of its mission, its goal is to "offer assistance in rural areas to promote cooperative and business development." VA FAIRS has supported the development of the Virginia Farm to School Program through helping fund educational programs and strategic planning meetings since its beginning. It also provides business development consultation and assistance for several entities involved with Farm to School in Virginia and may be a resource for helping you market and distribute local foods to Virginia school divisions. Mr.

Chris Cook is the executive director of FAIRS and can be reached by phone at (804) 290-1111 or by email at ccook@vafb.com. More information about FAIRS is available at their website, <http://www.vafairs.com>.

Virginia FFA Association & Virginia Association of Agricultural Educators

The Virginia FFA (Future Farmers of America) Association and Virginia Association of Agricultural Educators are two organizations that support agricultural education at public schools across Virginia. You may want to contact individuals at these organizations for help introducing agricultural education in schools or growing local foods through school garden and greenhouse activities. For more information about the Virginia FFA, visit their website, <http://www.vaffa.org>. For more information about the Virginia Association of Agricultural Educators, visit their website, <http://www.aee.vt.edu/vaae/VAAE-index.html>.

Lulu's Local Food

Lulu's Local Food is an organization that helps entrepreneurs start food hubs that connect farm products from small and medium sized farms to household, retail, and institutional markets. It does so by developing an online farmer's market system where customers can purchase foods from Virginia-based farmers. In Virginia, Lulu's is the parent company of four local food hubs including Local Roots Food Co-op, Fall Line Farms, Coastal Farms, and Mountain Foods. Lulu's Local Food Hub has been a long-time supporter of the Virginia Farm to School Program and has connected Virginia farmers to school divisions and their cafeterias across the Commonwealth. More information about Lulu's Local Food can be found at their website, <http://www.luluslocalfood.com>.

The Local Food Hub

Local Food Hub is an innovative non-profit based in Charlottesville, Virginia working to connect farms, families, and food grown close to home. Local Food Hub provides aggregation, distribution, and marketing services that enable institutions, schools, and hospitals to easily access and purchase fresh, locally grown food. Local Food Hub works with 75+ farmers who produce fruits, vegetables, meat, eggs, and value-added goods in wholesale quantity and quality. By creating "one number to call" for local food and working closely with cafeteria managers and school nutritionists, Local Food Hub has removed institutional barriers to purchasing local. Today, Local Food Hub delivers fresh local food on a weekly basis to more than 50 public and private K-12 schools and universities in Central Virginia. Local Food Hub has also created a unique "bridging the gap" program that leverages donations from community members to help offset the higher price of certain local foods for school meals (for example, ground beef). This, along with in-school tastings, educational materials, and local food delivery, is part of Local Food Hub's effort to support the annual Virginia Farm to School Week. More information about Local Food Hub's involvement in the Virginia Farm to School Program, visit their website, <http://localfoodhub.org>.

Other Virginia-based Local Food Hubs

There are several other Virginia-based local food hubs that help farmers aggregate their products together for increased supply and distribution of local foods. They food hubs are scattered throughout the state and may be able to help school divisions find the supply needed for a local Farm to School program. Virginia-based local food hubs that can be called on to help fill a Farm to School order can be found at the USDA Food Hub website, <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/foodhubs>.

National Farm to School Resource Organizations

National Farm to School Network

The National Farm to School Network envisions a nation in which Farm to School programs are an essential component of strong and just local and regional food systems, ensuring the health of all school children, farms, the environment, economy and communities. The National Farm to School Network supports the implementation of Farm to School in all 50 states and the District of Columbia through focused work in the following priority areas: 1) policy development; 2) training and technical assistance; 3) information development and dissemination; 4) networking; 5) media and marketing; and 6) research and evaluation. Their network includes national staff, eight regional lead agencies, 50 state leads who serve as local points of contact for information and resources, and thousands of Farm to School advocates and community leaders from all over the country.

Based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania at The Food Trust is the National Farm to School Network Regional Lead for the mid-Atlantic region. More information about the National Farm to School Network is available at their website, <http://www.farmtoschool.org>.

USDA Farm to School Program

The USDA Farm to School Team includes national staff and seven regional staff across the U.S. These individuals are available to help facilitate implementation of Farm to School programming and answer any questions you may have about the USDA Farm to School Grant Program or federal policies and regulations governing the purchasing of local foods by Virginia school divisions. The USDA Farm to School team works in conjunction with several individuals in each state including those at the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Service and Virginia Department of Education. State-based Farm to School contacts can be found online, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/f2s/contacts.htm>. The National Director can be reached by email at farmtoschool@fns.usda.gov. For more information about the USDA Farm to School team and USDA Farm to School Program visit their website, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool>.

Virginia Farm to School Profiles

Across Virginia, many diverse farmers and special school nutrition directors are supporting the Virginia Farm to School Program by selling or buying local and regional foods for inclusion in school meals. Below are a few profiles of these hardworking individuals who are helping farmers access new markets and students enjoy fresh, local foods.

School Nutrition Directors

Harrisonburg City Public Schools Andrea Early – Director of School Nutrition

Our Farm to School program was initiated during the 2007-2008 school year. What began with lettuce purchases from a local farmer has expanded to 8-10% of total food dollars being spent each school year on locally grown and produced foods. Initially our program's focus was on inclusion of local products on lunch menus, but efforts have expanded to include more educational opportunities including farm visits, classroom education through the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, and school gardens at two elementary schools.



As we moved forward with Farm to School, we were met with the typical challenges – price, distribution, and labor needed to prepare local foods. These challenges have been met through what I would call a hodge-podge approach. Many of the local foods purchased cost a bit more than their conventional counterparts, but we have been able to absorb these costs through increasing participation and by cooperative purchasing for the majority of our food and supplies. Distribution is accomplished through our standard distributors and by direct deliveries to schools by farmers. Our maintenance staff has been a vital component in deliveries from a central school to all other schools. By menuing local foods alongside less labor intensive items, we are able to serve local products without significant increases in labor costs.

Partnerships have been an important part of our Farm to School success. Participation in our area's local foods workgroup allowed us to make connections with local farmers and producers and to get our interest in purchasing locally "out there". An area non-profit group has helped to initiate and support our school gardens. Virginia Cooperative Extension has developed nutrition education materials for use in our Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program.

My continued advice to those who are interested in initiating a Farm to School program is to start small so that it is not overwhelming. If you are interested in including local food in school meals, look at your existing menu to see if there are one or two items that might be available locally at a price you can afford. If education is your initial focus, find a teacher or two who may be interested in doing container gardens with students. Expand your program at a pace that is comfortable for all involved. Celebrating small successes will guarantee that your program will continue to grow!

Goochland County Public Schools
Lisa Landrum – Supervisor of School Nutrition

We began planning in December 2008 and implemented our first “local purchase” in March of 2009. Since that time we have gone from serving a *Virginia Grown* item monthly on our lunch menu to serving a *Virginia Grown* item daily. We have expanded to our breakfast program as well with fresh seasonal fruit and sausage.



Partners from past and present include our local Extension office, a local foods co-op and a host of local farmers.

I would like to highlight our Farm to School Week menu. At least one day of the annual Farm to School Week, we serve a complete local menu with our entrees consisting of grass-fed beef and pork, seasonal veggies and fruit (usually Fuji and Red Delicious apples- YUM!). I feel like every day that we can bring really fresh food to our students is a great success.

There have definitely been challenges. This includes things from purchasing practices to delivery followed by packaging, pricing, availability and staff training. My best advice would be to contact your state lead or the VDACS Farm to School Coordinator when you hit a roadblock. Don't give up! Someone in the state has met these challenges and can help you.

My hope for the Virginia Farm to School Program is to get all school districts participating. I think one of the best ways to accomplish this is to get more distributors and farmers connected. This would take a lot of the “guesswork” out of the mix as well as make the whole process flow more smoothly.

Rappahannock County Public Schools
Trista Grigsby – Director of Nutrition Services

Planted at Rappahannock County High School in 2004, the Farm-to-Table (F2T) program has branched out and now provides fertile soil for learning to students in both classrooms and cafeterias throughout the district.

Through F2T, students gain an appreciation of Rappahannock County’s agrarian culture and how agriculture, food, and nutrition are inter-related elements of wellness. The program helps students make the connection between what they choose to eat, how it gets to their tables, and how food affects their health and the health of the community.



Farm-to-Table is a partnership between Headwaters, Rappahannock County Public Schools, and other community organizations such as the Rappahannock County Farm Bureau, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Piedmont Environmental Council, Williams Orchard, and Waterpenny Farm. Generous support from several local family foundations funds the school gardens’ creation and maintenance, the seasonal and local food tastings, and the hiring of student interns in the summer. Waterpenny Farm administers the “Food For Thought” fund, which helps offset the cost of purchasing local foods for school cafeterias. In addition, Waterpenny Farm grows food especially for school purchase and sells items such as cosmetically blemished butternut squash at an affordable price to the schools.

Since 2006, F2T has sponsored 18 seasonal, local food tastings in cafeterias. This collaboration brings volunteers, farmers, culinary arts students, horticulture students, and cafeteria staff together to educate students about nutritional content, the value of trying new foods, and how delicious real food can taste. When students take recipe cards home with local vendor information, the demand for good food hits home. And it works: one student demanded beets and parsnips after trying the roasted root vegetables. A fourth grader said “I usually don’t eat beets, but these are awesome! I want more leaves. I feel like a brachiosaurus!”

Over 4,000 pounds of produce has been grown by students in the school gardens using organic methods. About half of this produce has been used in the school cafeterias and about half has gone to the Rappahannock Food Pantry, to the students themselves, and to special community events.

The program has matured to provide education in the classrooms and cafeterias. Using student-grown food and promoting it with point-of-sale materials and student ambassadors has helped increase salad sales. Meeting food safety guidelines when using student-grown food in the school

cafes proved to be a challenge. Additionally, building the gardens was not enough to get teachers interested in using them. It took buy-in at the administrative level, integration with classroom SOL objectives, parent support, and student enthusiasm to cultivate a successful multi-disciplinary approach to learning about food, farming, and nutrition in schools.

This year, 12.6% of the total produce purchased for the school cafeterias was grown locally. As recipients of a USDA Farm to School planning grant in conjunction with Page and Orange County schools, the goal is to increase local food use by 5% next year and to 25% in five years. With increased food costs due to National School Lunch Program guidelines and existing budget constraints, the increased cost of local foods seems like it could be a stumbling block. However, there are other ways to save money in cafeteria operations. Reducing disposable product purchases, increasing efficiency through skills training and proper equipment use, and buying products during peak season at lower prices and freezing or processing for later use are examples of ways to make local food purchases a financially sound decision. If these efforts create healthy, nutritionally savvy students and a more sustainable local food system, the extra effort is worth it.



Trista Grigsby and students enjoying some tasty local food!

Farmers

David Sours – Public House Produce

We began by providing Page County Schools with 6-7 dozen eggs per week. This was a small start, which allowed us to establish a working relationship with Diane Dovel, the Page County Public Schools (PCPS) Food Service Director. We began providing items from our farm like lettuce, spinach, and kale. Currently, we grow several additional items for the school as well as aggregate other crops from local farmers year round.



David and Heather Sours taking a stroll on their farm

Our relationship with the Page County School system has been fostered by our involvement with Page County Grown. This organization has allowed relationships to develop between PCPS and Page County farmers. During many of the Page County Grown meetings, other farmers expressed that delivering to PCPS was difficult due to their off farm employment. This allowed us the opportunity to aggregate products other farms in our county and the Shenandoah Valley.

I am very proud of the accomplishments of the Page County Farm to School Program. It's hard to believe that we started with six dozen eggs a week and then moved to 50-60 lbs. of spinach and now we are providing PCPS with all of their eggs and apples as well as other produce. The biggest success came this past school year when we were told that PCPS was leading the state of Virginia in the percentage of local foods used in their system. PCPS sourced 37% of the produce they used in the 2012-2013 school year locally. That is a big number and we are very proud of this achievement! We hope this percentage will continue to grow so that children receive even more fresh, local produce.

Starting something new takes time and persistence. It was frustrating in the beginning, but with open communication and quality products we eventually made headway with getting our produce into school meals. Distribution was an issue in the beginning due to the small orders. However, with some special Farm to School days that featured local foods and with the help of students requesting more local foods things began to change. Once the children noticed a difference and were telling their teachers, families, and most of all the cafeteria staff, that is when things started to change. So my advice is to start small with a few items, get those items in front of the children, keep your head down, work hard and the rest will come!

We have worked very hard to get our produce in PCPS. This success has helped our farm expand and we plan on being able to provide additional items for PCPS this coming school year. It is also very rewarding to see children in our county enjoying eating locally grown foods and it's great to hear them tell everyone how much better the vegetables taste. With the support of our community, school system, and the local farms, I believe the sky is the limit for local foods in Page County.



David and Heather Sour's daughter and her chicken "Sugar"

Chris and Sarah Guerre – Maple Avenue Market Farm

The 2013-2014 school year will be the fifth year that Chris and Sarah Guerre of the Maple Avenue Farm Market sell locally-grown foods to Arlington County Public Schools as part of the Arlington County Farm to School Program. Since the beginning, coordinating and participating in the Farm to School program has been a rewarding experience for Chris and Sarah, as well as Amy Maclosky, the director of school nutrition for Arlington County. Maple Avenue Farm Market, (historically known as Hidden Springs Farm) is located in Great Falls, Virginia, and is one of very few working farms in the area.



A mutual friend who was serving on the Arlington County Food Service Advisory Committee first initiated the connection by helping introduce Chris and Sarah to Amy. Maple Avenue Farm Market sells a wide variety of organically-grown fresh produce to Arlington County schools including different types of lettuces, carrots, beets, kale, broccoli, cauliflower, tomatoes, radishes, and turnips. They also sell different colored eggs and edible flowers to Arlington County schools. The blue, green, and brown colored eggs are a

favorite of the students. Schools are one of three markets for Maple Avenue Farm Market. Chris and Sarah also sell their produce and other farm products at nearby farmers markets, and their retail store located in Vienna, Virginia. During the 2012-2013 school year, approximately 30% of all of the produce that Arlington County Public Schools purchased was from local farmers.

Chris and Sarah Guerre not only sell their locally-grown foods to Arlington County but also spend time in schools such as Jamestown Elementary helping students learn about local food production and the importance of eating fresh locally grown foods. This has been extremely rewarding for them and the students! They believe that farm-based education is helpful for Farm to School programs to go beyond just serving local foods. One major success for them has been seeing student's excitement in going back for two and three servings of lettuce and eating more salad than they thought any student would (or could) consume.

Chris and Sarah recognize that price can be a challenge for some farmers who would like to work with schools as a market and suggest finding innovative solutions as soon as possible when such challenges present themselves. A long-term challenge that Chris and Sarah experience is trying to change the habits and behaviors of students so they eat healthy food for their entire life and make it part of their regular diets. However, they are committed to making sure that students in Arlington County have access to fresh local food through Farm to School!



Amy Maclosky (center), director of school nutrition for Arlington County Public Schools talks with Chris and Sarah Guerre at their Maple Avenue Market Farm. The fields behind them will produce much of the locally grown foods that Amy purchases for the 2013-2014 school year.

Glossary of Farm to School Terms

Aggregation: The collection of agricultural products from a number of area farms at a central hub. Delivery to customers from an aggregation hub can be more efficient than point-to-point distribution from farms to customers.

Cash Reimbursements: The money USDA provides schools to help pay for the cost of school meals. During the 2012-2013 school year, schools received \$2.92 for each free lunch served, \$2.52 for a reduced-price lunch and \$0.33 for each full price lunch sold.

Farm to School: A program that connects schools (K-12) and local farms with the objectives of serving healthy meals in school cafeterias, improving student nutrition, providing agriculture, health and nutrition education opportunities, and supporting local and regional farmers (National Farm to School Network, 2013).

Food Hub: A centrally located facility with a business management structure facilitating the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and/or marketing of locally/regionally produced food products. ^{xxi}

Good Agricultural Practices: More commonly referred to GAPs. A set of recommendations that can help improve the quality and safety of the produce grown. These general guidelines can be adapted and/or incorporated into any production system. GAPs focus on four primary components of production and processing: soil, water, hands, and surfaces. ^{xxii}

Geographic Preference: A ruling that allows institutions receiving funds through the Child Nutrition Programs to apply an optional geographic preference in the procurement of unprocessed locally grown or locally raised agricultural products. According to the final rule, the definition of “unprocessed” means those agricultural products that retain their inherent character. ^{xii}

Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP): A system which identifies, evaluates, and controls hazards which are significant for food safety.

HACCP Plan: A document prepared in accordance with the principles of HACCP to ensure control of hazards which are significant for food safety in the segment of the food chain under consideration.

Local Food: There is no generally accepted definition of local food. In a 2011 survey of Virginia school nutrition directors, the majority of respondents believed that local food included “food raised or produced within Virginia.” With passage of the 2008 Farm Bill, Congress defines local food as a food product that is consumed less than 400 miles from where it was produced or consumed within the state it was produced. ^{xxiii}

Meals/Labor Hour: A measure of efficiency for school nutrition programs. A lower number is acceptable if a greater number of raw or unprocessed items are included.

National School Lunch Program: A federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. It provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to children each school day. The program was established under the National School Lunch Act, signed by President Harry Truman in 1946.^{xxiv}

New Meal Pattern: A new set of school meal requirements for school nutrition directors participating in Child Nutrition Programs developed and implemented because of the 2010 Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act.

Procurement: The act of buying food for a school lunch program.

USDA Foods (i.e. commodities or entitlements): Foods that the USDA provides to schools to use for breakfast and lunch programs. These foods typically make up 15-20% of each school lunch. Schools are entitled to receive 22.25 cents for each lunch meal served.



Photo courtesy of USDA Farm to School Program

Appendix

Virginia Farm to School Program Resources

Virginia School Nutrition Program

<http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/nutrition/index.shtml>

This website provides information about the Virginia School Nutrition Program as well as contact information to the state director and other state personnel.

Local School Nutrition Program Contacts (By School Division)

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/nutrition/resources/nutrition_programs_dir.shtml

This website provides contact information for each of local school nutrition directors. Farmers may want to visit this website as way to help communicate with nearby Virginia school nutrition directors.

Virginia Grown

<http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/vagrown>

This website provides information about Virginia grown farm products and includes a search engine that allows users to search by farm type, product, and location. This website can help food distributors and school nutrition directors locate possible sources of Virginia Grown foods.

Virginia Buy Fresh Buy Local Program

<http://www.buylocalvirginia.org>

This website provides information about Virginia farmers who produce local food for school meals as part of a local or regional Farm to School program. You can search for local food by product category, farm type, marketing outlet, or location.

Virginia Grown Farm to School Product Availability Calendar

<http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/marketing/pdf/farmproducechart.pdf>

See page 35 and 36 of the resource guide to view the full calendar.

Virginia Farm to School Recipes

There are a large variety of Virginia grown/raised foods that can be included in local and regional Farm to School programs. In 2010, the Virginia Food Systems Council documented that 36 different Virginia foods were included in the 2009 Virginia Farm to School Week.^{xvii}

Through a survey of local school nutrition directors, respondents were asked to list which Virginia grown/raised foods they had included in school meals. Below is the list of the reported products.

Table 1. List of Products Sold or Purchased for the Virginia Farm to School Program

Fruits	Vegetables	Meats	Other Foods
Apples	Broccoli	Onions	Butter
Blackberries	Cabbage	Peppers	Cheese
Cantaloupe	Carrots	Radishes	Eggs
Honeydew	Collard greens	Spinach	Flour
Nectarines	Cucumbers	Squash	Milk
Peaches	Eggplant	Sweet potatoes	
Strawberries	Green beans	Turnips	
Tomatoes	Kale	White potatoes	
Watermelon	Assorted lettuces	Winter squash	

Virginia Local Foods Cookbook

<http://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/3001/3001-9027/3001-9027.html>

Virginia Cooperative Extension has compiled a local foods cookbook featuring recipes that can be made using local foods. This resource cookbook can be downloaded from the Virginia Cooperative Extension website under “Publications and Educational Resources” or by clicking on the Extension Homepage quick link Community Food Systems under “Foods, Nutrition, and Health”.

Kidchen Expedition: Oklahoma Farm to School Cookbook

<http://www.kidchenexpedition.com>

The Oklahoma Farm to School Program has put together a wonderful resource for school food professionals and other individuals interested in using local and regional foods in school meals. It includes different sections by product type as well as information about food safety and other Farm to School tips.

The 2013 Healthy Lunchtime Challenge Cookbook

<http://www.recipechallenge.epicurious.com>

This cookbook features 54 winning recipes from the America’s junior chefs and presented at the second annual Healthy Lunchtime Challenge & Kids’ “State Dinner.” First Lady approved!

Virginia Food Safety Information

Farm Self Help Form

http://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/FST/FST-35/FST-35NP_PDF.pdf

This is a great resource for farmers interested in inventorying their on-farm food safety practices or school nutrition directors and food distributors interested in learning more about a farms on-farm food safety practices.

Training and Certification Options

http://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/FST/FST-44/FST-44NP_PDF.pdf

This is a great resource for farmers selling locally and regionally-grown foods who are considering additional training and certifications in food safety including Good Agricultural Practices certification.

Transporting Produce Safely

http://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/FST/FST-43/FST-43_PDF.pdf

This is a great resource for food distributors who would like more information about transporting produce safely to ensure food safety standards, prevent contamination, and minimize the growth of harmful organisms.

Additional food safety materials and resources can be found on Virginia Cooperative Extension's website, <http://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/category/food-safety.html>.

Garden-Related Curriculum Resources

The Great Garden Detective Adventure: A Standards-Based Gardening Nutrition Curriculum for Grades 3 and 4

<http://teamnnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/gardendetective.html>

Discover what fruits and vegetables are sweetest, crunchiest, and juiciest through a series of investigations and fun experiences connecting the school garden to the classroom, school cafeteria, and home. This eleven-lesson curriculum for 3rd and 4th grades includes bulletin board materials, veggie dice, fruit and vegetable flash cards, and ten issues of Garden Detective News for parents/caregivers.

Dig In! Standards-Based Nutrition Education from the Ground Up for Grades 5 and 6

http://teamnnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/dig_in.html

Explore a world of possibilities in the garden and on your plate using ten inquiry-based lessons that engage 5th and 6th graders in growing, harvesting, tasting, and learning about fruits and vegetables.

Other Farm to School Resources

Farm to School Showcase Toolkit

<http://www.ecotrust.org/farmtoschool/showcase-toolkit.php>

Ecotrust has developed this guide for connecting local food suppliers with school food buyers at school nutrition tradeshow.

USDA Farm to School Resources and Fact Sheets

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool>

The USDA Farm to School Program has compiled a series of resources to assist schools and school districts in implementing Farm to School programs. The USDA has also developed a series of fact sheets to help connect schools with more local foods.

Virginia Grown Farm to School Product Availability Calendar

	VIRGINIA FARM TO SCHOOL www.virginiagrown.com PRODUCT AVAILABILITY CALENDAR											
	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY
BEETS												
BROCCOLI												
CABBAGE												
CARROTS												
CAULIFLOWER												
CORN												
CUCUMBERS												
GREEN BEANS												
GREENS/SPINACH												
FRESH HERBS												
ONIONS												
PEAS												
PEPPERS												
POTATOES, WHITE												
POTATOES, SWEET												
PUMPKINS												
SQUASH, YELLOW												
SQUASH, ACORN												
SQUASH, BUTTERNUT												
SWISS CHARD												
TOMATOES												
TURNIPS												
<i>HYDROPONICS</i>												
CUCUMBERS												
LETTUCE/GREENS												
TOMATOES												
<i>FRUITS</i>												
APPLES												
ASIAN PEARS												
BLACKBERRIES												
BLUEBERRIES												
CANTALOUPE												

	VIRGINIA FARM TO SCHOOL www.viriniagrown.com PRODUCT AVAILABILITY CALENDAR											
	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY
GRAPES												
RASPBERRIES												
PEACHES												
PEARS												
STRAWBERRIES												
WATERMELONS												
	<i>AVAILABLE ALL YEAR</i>											
BEEF												
CHEESE												
CHICKEN												
EGGS												
HONEY												
ICE CREAM												
LAMB												
MILK												
MUSHROOMS												
PEANUTS												
PORK/HAM												
SEAFOOD												
TURKEY												
YOGURT												

This chart shows approximate harvest periods. Harvests may vary by region and weather conditions.



FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAM

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Endnotes

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