



SCIENCE FOR GEORGIA

Farm to School:

An overview of the Farm to School Program and How Policymakers and School Systems can increase participation

Farm to School Programs

Farm to School Programs bring locally grown food into schools and daycares. This brings healthy food options to children and supports the local economy.

About **1 in 8** Georgia residents are considered food insecure, more than **377,000** are children

Farm to School programs provide meals to hungry children, education for their entire family on nutritious food choices, and demonstrate where food comes from.

[Click here: USDA Farm to School Census](#) most updated Statistics for Farm to School across the U.S.

Implementing a Farm to School program has shown an improvement in nutrition related knowledge, increased self-efficacy in selecting healthier food choices, and a willingness to try new fruits and vegetables. Including staff and family in farm to school activities promotes engagement and better understanding of the benefits of Farm to School and buying local produce.

In Georgia, Farm to School is administered separately between [Early Childhood Education](#) and [K-12 Education](#).

[Food insecurity](#) is the lack of consistent food resources for a healthy life. This can be caused by many things including, insufficient funds, limited access to food due to location or transportation, and an inability to afford nutritious food. Food security is necessary for individuals to live a healthy life. Children are most at risk when food insecure due to decreased cognitive function, increased anxiety, risk of anemia, and nutrient deficits.

It is important to use early child education to introduce healthy food habits; the negative effects of food insecurity can start as early as [2 years old](#)

About **879,000** Georgia school children rely on the National School Lunch Program throughout the school year

Georgia is 4th in the country for fruit and vegetable production but [80%](#) of income is spent on food produced outside of the state.

Getting Started

How To Build a Farm To School Program

Many schools in Georgia are already participating in Farm to School.

There are many ways schools can participate in a Farm to School program. Programs can range from providing education about local foods, to growing a school garden, to sourcing some portion of school meals from a local farm. Starting small and building is the best way to not get burned out.

1 Start Small

Participate in a food of the month program.

[Georgia Organics](#) and [Georgia Department of Education](#) both host a food of the month program, which is a great way to get started on a Farm to School program and connect to local farmers.



2 Make Connections

Connect with neighboring schools and farms.

Reach out to the [Early Childhood Education](#) and [K-12 Education](#) programs to see if they can connect you to local farms and/or neighboring care centers or schools to get local context.

2

3 Involve Community

Create a community event to gather support.

Have a Farm-to-School day. Invite local farmers, families, and members of the community to drive interest in Farm to School programming and further connections made.



4 Understand Impact

Complete an evaluation to see improvements.

Look at statistics and impact a farm to school event or program has had in your community. An increase in excitement, local procurement and school attendance rates can indicate impact.

4

Farm to School Facts from 2019

- 68 school districts participating in Farm to School programming
- 1406 school gardens existed
- 119 million local meals were served, which was a 67% increase from 2016

Supporting expansion of Farm to School

There are many barriers to entry into starting or expanding a Farm to School program. There is State and Federal funding and resources, but additional resources were recommended, such as those listed below, that would remove obstacles and enable broader and more lasting participation.

1 Regional Farm to School Coordinators

Hire someone to make connections.

A regional Farm to School coordinator can provide guidance on grants, purchasing, invoicing, and troubleshooting issues that may arise. They can foster the relationships between schools and farmers.

2 Staggered Grant Application Periods

Schools miss out on funding due to application deadlines

One grant application timeframe per year may not coincide with district planning. Three deadlines, such as a fall, spring, and summer timeframe, may enable greater participation.

3 Create a standard evaluation plan.

Having predetermined metrics can simplify reporting

There is often not enough time or budget to allow individuals helping with a FTS program to create and implement an evaluation plan. Providing pre-existing evaluation plans can alleviate that time and responsibility.

4 Kitchen equipment and infrastructure grants

Remove preparation as an obstacle.

Most school cafeterias are heat and serve, where food is made elsewhere and warmed and distributed at the school. They lack equipment to prepare and serve fresh food.

5 Increased nutrition education requirement

Hands-on learning can be more efficient.

Updating curriculum requirements to focus on hands-on learning, may spur more school systems to invest in getting kids out into the garden.

If Georgia residents spent \$10 each on locally grown produce annually, 1.9 billion dollars would be put back into the GA economy.

Existing Resources

Many organizations have toolkits and guides that can be used to get started.



[USDA Farm to School Planning Toolkit](#)

[Georgia Dept of Education Harvest of the Month](#)

[Georgia Organics Farm to School Month](#)

[School Special Nutrition Program Funding Guidelines](#)

[Georgia Farm to Early Care and Childhood Education Guide](#)

[School Garden Q&A](#)

[Growing Socially, Emotionally Healthy Learners](#)

[Composting Guide](#)



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Suggested Evaluation Metrics

Evaluation

Assessment of programs contribute to better understanding and continued success. Prior to implementing a new Farm to School program or resource, determine why it is being implemented, what it is aiming to change, and how to measure progress. Collecting baseline metrics is essential. The following are recommendations for metrics that can be used in order to evaluate the effectiveness of a Farm to School program. A majority can be found [in this Colorado Toolkit](#).



Meals Served that Contain Fresh Food

A measurement of meals that have been provided due to the Farm to School program.

Participation

The number of school children, families, employees and community members involved.

Absenteeism

More nutritious meals have a positive effect on health. The rate of absenteeism should decrease.

Knowledge

Assessment of both children's and family's knowledge about nutritious eating habits.

Local Food Sales

Changes in the sale of food by local farms, suppliers, and / or stores.

Procurement

Amount of food purchased by schools via Farm to School vs. traditional channels.

Food Waste

Sourcing and preparing local foods should eliminate food waste. If waste goes up, there may be a preparation issue.

