



Growing Opportunity with West Virginia Farm to School

2020-2025 Strategic Plan

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Letter in Support of West Virginia Farm to School

Farm to School is an important fixture in the state of West Virginia, both for the schools and students who participate in the program and for the state’s agricultural community. Farm to School provides a market outlet for West Virginia farmers and food producers who can sell food they’ve grown to schools in local areas, while providing an educational experience and enhanced nutrition for students around the state.

It is important that state agencies are committed to advancing the Farm to School program, to ensure there are adequate resources to build on past successes and continue to grow the program into the future. The West Virginia Departments of Agriculture and West Virginia Department of Education support the enclosed plan, and are happy to work with stakeholders throughout the state who have been leading Farm to School to date, to help replicate and scale past successes, but also to bring new partners into the fold to enhance and augment the program.

The action items in this Farm to School Strategic Plan will be instrumental in advancing the goals of the partner organizations that are working tirelessly to expand the Farm to School program in West Virginia. The fundamental steps - both strengthening existing informal partnerships by formalizing a Farm to School Alliance, as well as creating a dedicated staff position within the West Virginia Department of Agriculture to support the Farm to School Facilitators within the West Virginia Department of Education Office of Child Nutrition - will help expand the state’s capacity to pursue additional Farm to School opportunities for the benefit of farmers and students throughout the state.

West Virginia is in a great position to provide opportunities for students and producers with the Farm to School program. It will take collaboration and coordination to fully realize those opportunities, but we are confident that through the implementation of this plan and working together, we will see the success of its participants and continued growth of agriculture in the Mountain State.

Regards,



Kent A. Leonhardt
West Virginia Department of Agriculture



W. Clayton Burch
State Superintendent of Schools
West Virginia Department of Education

Executive Summary

The Farm to School Program in West Virginia has had great success over the past decade due in large part to the hard work of dedicated leadership and the strength of on-the-ground relationships throughout the state. From 2013 to 2014, for example, schools nearly doubled the amount of food purchased from local sources, totaling \$650,000.¹ Farm to School leaders in West Virginia work with producers, educators, and school nutrition directors to integrate local products into school meals, incorporate agricultural, and nutrition education into classrooms throughout the state, and support production and processing via school gardens and culinary and entrepreneurial career and technical training. In order to expand upon and scale these previous successes, it is important that Farm to School leaders define a **strategic vision and roadmap for moving forward together**.

The vision statement, outcomes, and goals that follow were developed in partnership with the West Virginia Department of Education, West Virginia University Extension Service, and the West Virginia Department of Agriculture in order to guide West Virginia toward an even more impactful Farm to School Program over the next five years.

Vision Statement

The following vision statement describes the ideal future that West Virginia hopes to see through enacting this plan’s recommendations, strategies, and tactics.

“Meet the needs of schools and create viable market opportunities for farmers, by coordinating and scaling activities and building on the progress of the West Virginia Farm to School Community Development Group and its partners throughout the state.”

Desired Outcomes

The following outcomes, if realized, will contribute to reaching the desired vision statement above.

1. Agencies and organizations working to implement the Farm to School program in West Virginia coordinate collaborative activities to create **a holistic and robust farm to school system**
2. **Producers are informed, motivated, and coordinated** to market and sell their food to schools

¹ [West Virginia Department of Agriculture Farm to School Division](#)

3. **Improved understanding of the requirements and constraints of marketing and selling local food to schools**, from the viewpoint of the schools who buy it, to the farmers who supply them
4. Producers meet the needs of schools with **consistent and increased production**
5. **Increase the amount of food grown, processed, and sold within the schools by students** through supported, sustained, and scaled in-class food programming, agriculture and nutrition education, and food-based career and technical training

Goals

Achieving these goals is key to realizing the desired outcomes.

1. **Develop and support a formalized multi-agency network or alliance to support the exchange of information among** agencies, partner organizations, producers, and consumers
2. **Enhance farmers' understanding** of the market opportunities, requirements, and mechanics of selling to schools
3. **Improve the working relationships and communication** between producers and schools to increase understanding of needs and expectations
4. **Increase local production** and marketing of the 10 most used crops identified by schools and communicated to producers
5. **Build support for farm to school** using school gardens, career and technical training, and nutrition education in schools as a rallying points

Foundational Recommendations

The two foundational recommendations that follow are critical building blocks for achieving the goals outlined above.

1. **Farm to School Alliance**
Strengthen informal networks and partnerships by formalizing a Farm to School Alliance, including the existing members of the Community Development Group and expanded membership.
2. **Farm to School Coordinator**
Create a Farm to School Coordinator position within the West Virginia Department of Agriculture. The West Virginia Department of Agriculture Farm to School Coordinator will support the Farm to School Coordinators within the Office of Child Nutrition in the Department of Education, expanding their capacity to grow existing and future farm to school opportunities.

Tactical Strategies to Achieve Goals

Once the foundational recommendations above have been enacted, implementing the following tactics will move West Virginia towards accomplishing their vision and goals for the Farm to School Program over the next five years. The accompanying timeline shows approximate recommended staging of each item.



1. Facilitate additional opportunities for producers, food service directors, and the agencies that support them to **connect, share knowledge and successes, build relationships, and collaborate at existing and/or new events and trainings**, supported by the Alliance.



2. **Develop and make widely available** resources that clearly document and ease participation in the program, such as standard forms, templates, and operating procedures, product lists, pricing sheets, and purchasing agreements.



3. Create a two-year pilot program around 2-5 key crops consistently used by schools **to scale existing and develop new co-ops, thereby increasing farmer coordination** on planning, aggregation, and distribution of key farm to school crops. Assess the outcomes of the pilot and adjust as needed.



4. **Build a coalition of educators and supporters** to deliver expanded agricultural, nutrition, and science-based education programs including school gardens, food production, processing, and selling by students, and other school-based food-focused entrepreneurial ventures.

| | | Years | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|-------|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Foundational Recommendation 1 | Farm to School Alliance | | | | | |
| Foundational Recommendation 2 | Farm to School Coordinator | | | | | |
| Strategy 1 | Share Knowledge and Expertise | | | | | |
| Action Steps | List events that could incorporate Farm to School programming | | | | | |
| | Publish and distribute events | | | | | |
| | Facilitate training relationships | | | | | |
| Strategy 2 | Document Practices and Processes | | | | | |
| Action Steps | Replicate and adapt existing successful WV models | | | | | |
| | Create toolkits for producers | | | | | |
| | Create tools for Food Service Directors | | | | | |
| Strategy 3 | 2-year Pilot to Increase Coordination & Production | | | | | |
| Action Steps | Determine 2-5 key crops | | | | | |
| | Identify 2-5 highly motivated counties | | | | | |
| | Recruit up to 10 producers | | | | | |
| | Develop and disseminate necessary materials | | | | | |
| Strategy 4 | Build Coalition of Farm to School Supporters | | | | | |
| Action Steps | Convene supporters | | | | | |
| | Collect testimonials | | | | | |
| | Identify policy and issue areas to address | | | | | |

Introduction

There has been a long history of successful farm to school activities in West Virginia. “West Virginia Wednesdays” is one example, where one day a month, every county across the state incorporates local products into their school lunches. Even before formal affiliation with the National Farm to School Network, producers, institutions, and intermediaries have been working creatively for over a decade to supply the West Virginia population with fresh and nutritious local food.

In 2011 the West Virginia Department of Education, along with the Department of Agriculture, the West Virginia University Extension Small Farm Center, New Appalachian Farm and Research Center, and the Collaborative for the 21st Century Appalachia formed the West Virginia Farm to School Community Development Group to collaborate and coordinate farm to school activities across agencies and initiatives. In 2017 the West Virginia Department of Education became the formal state-wide lead with the West Virginia Department of Agriculture as supporting partner as part of the National Farm to School Network

As with any complex, multi-stakeholder activity, there are challenges to overcome and opportunities to embrace in order to increase collaboration. In the past, challenges have been addressed through relationship-building and shared learning in informal networks. Building on past success of this tactic, a new level of engagement is needed to prepare the next generation of leadership to amplify Farm to School in West Virginia. This is especially true as West Virginia finds itself in a moment of transition, with several long-standing leaders approaching or entering retirement over the last year.

In order to support and build upon the forward momentum of the past decade, the West Virginia Department of Agriculture applied for and received an Implementation Grant from the USDA in 2018 to create a five year strategic plan for Farm to School in West Virginia.

The grant’s objectives were four-fold:

1. To seek the input from government, non-government and community-based organizations, agricultural producer groups and other community partners to establish goals and a guiding vision for the Farm to School Program;
2. Create an asset map of Farm to School assets using Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping tools;
3. Increase local food products available on the menu of West Virginia schools; and
4. Host a statewide Farm to School Summit to provide educational activities and networking opportunities for stakeholders.

These tasks are at various stages of development: the report herein represents the first of these four steps.

This plan will also help partners throughout the state adhere to the West Virginia Fresh Food Act, passed in 2019, which aims to expand the use of local foods within the state's schools and state-led institutions. The Act, HB 2396, requires beginning July 1, 2019 that all state-funded institutions purchase a minimum of 5 percent of fresh produce, meat, and poultry products from West Virginia producers.² The idea behind the legislation is to support West Virginia farmers and allow them to expand, as well as boost access to healthy, fresh food. By enhancing demand from state-led institutions and schools, which alone purchase \$100 million worth of food from out-of-state sources according to the West Virginia Farm Bureau, the hope is the bill will stimulate the state's agricultural economy.

Additional opportunities and initiatives in the state are also underway that directly respond to and will build upon tactics described in this plan, including the five year, statewide strategic plan for West Virginia agriculture, released in April 2019. That plan, "A Shared Agenda for Growing West Virginia's Agricultural Economy," focuses on several areas that connect directly to Farm to School, including connecting producers to market opportunities, creating infrastructure needed to grow the agriculture economy, and developing the next generation of agricultural industry leaders.³

Methodology

In 2019, a Steering Committee made up of leaders from the West Virginia Department of Education, the West Virginia Department of Agriculture, the West Virginia University Center for Resilient Communities, and the West Virginia University Extension Service engaged Fourth Economy Consultants in a six month planning process to help them define their common goals and how they might work together to achieve them.

The planning process involved a kickoff meeting with the Steering Committee and interviews with key stakeholders from around the state who have worked directly with the Farm to School program. These individuals were able to highlight for the consulting team the historical accomplishments and current challenges of the program. In addition, two ideation sessions with practitioners were held to brainstorm potential solutions to the program's major barriers. The input received from these groups are reflected in the strategies and recommendations enclosed in this plan. A list of these stakeholders can be found in the appendix. Finally, the consulting team researched promising practices and case studies from West Virginia and around the country that could be scaled or adapted and replicated to bolster Farm to School in 2020 and beyond.

² [HB 2396 - West Virginia Fresh Food Act](#)

³ [A Shared Agenda For Growing West Virginia's Agricultural Economy](#)

The Building Blocks: Foundational Recommendations

The following Foundational Recommendations are meant to **support and scale the existing Farm to School activities that are already occurring throughout the state of West Virginia**. They can be considered the ‘building blocks’ of a new era of highly coordinated, efficient, and streamlined processes that will best prepare producers and consumers for farm to school activities. The following two Foundational Recommendations should be jointly carried out by the partners and leadership of the West Virginia Department of Agriculture, the West Virginia Department of Education Offices of Child Nutrition and Career Technical Education, the West Virginia University Center for Resilient Communities, and the West Virginia University Cooperative Extension Service and Small Farm Center. These Foundational Recommendations should be in place prior to the four Tactical Strategies that are described below. In doing so, these partners will ensure that the rest of the plan has the resources, capacity, bandwidth, and direction to have sustained success over the next five years.

RECOMMENDATION #1: Farm to School Alliance

In 2011, the West Virginia Department of Education, West Virginia Department of Agriculture, West Virginia University Cooperative Extension Small Farm Center, New Appalachian Farm and Research Center, and the WV Collaborative for 21st Century Appalachia, formed the West Virginia Farm to School Community Development Group which aimed to advance farm to school efforts across the state. The group met regularly for a number of years and achieved remarkable early successes which continue into today. Over the past few years, activities have continued in an ad hoc manner as membership has become less structured.

In order to grow the successful existing activity scattered throughout the state, the original partners of the Community Development Group should reconvene and invite a broader group of stakeholders to the table. Renamed the West Virginia Farm to School Alliance, this group will be critical to advancing the goals outlined in this plan. The Alliance must have well-defined, mission-oriented objectives and mandates so that members are clear about their purpose for participating and what the group hopes to achieve. The group should support the exchange of information and relationship building among its members.

One of the initial activities of the Alliance should be to share institutional knowledge, current ongoing initiatives, and best practices from farm to school experiences internally among members, to make sure everyone is up to speed and on the same page. This will set the foundation toward developing a holistic and robust farm to school system. Members of the Alliance will undoubtedly be able to help pull together a large body of useful information from the Farm to School Network, including resource guides and trainings to share with a broader network of partners and stakeholders, particularly new and enterprising farmers. The coming together of

industry leaders represents a unique opportunity to compile that knowledge and distribute it more widely to current and potential practitioners throughout the state.

It will be important for each participating member to signify their commitment to the goals and desired outcomes of the Farm to School Alliance. Clearly outlining the expectations of time, resource commitment, roles and responsibilities of each party will minimize potential conflict and set the course for productive, efficient working relationships. These expectations should be documented with a set of MOUs detailing governance and commitment expectations (see best practices). Finally, each member should have a clearly defined way to contribute to the group's efforts, to create a sense of ownership and shared sense of accomplishment.

Desired outcomes of the Alliance include building trust and strengthening relationships, sharing and developing new resources, and designing projects to build collaborative capacity among partners. It should seek to achieve early wins to build momentum and collaboratively celebrate those wins by promoting them through the members' various public relations, marketing, and communications teams.

Promising Practices and Case Studies

Promising Practice: Georgia Farm to School Alliance

The [Georgia Farm to School Alliance](#) was founded in 2009 and is comprised of a number of non-profit, private, and government entities, including local foundations, healthcare providers, Georgia 4-H, University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service, USDA, and the Georgia Department of Agriculture, Department of Education, and Department of Public Health. The Alliance, which is coordinated by the non-profit organization, Georgia Organics, has a [2017-2020 Strategic Plan](#), in which objectives and measurements of success are identified along with key partners and stakeholders' unique roles. Georgia Organics is also the chair of the Georgia Farm to Early Care and Education Coalition; the Farm to School Alliance and the Farm to Early Care and Education Coalition jointly host an annual Farm to School summit held in different locations throughout the state each year. The Alliance also released a 2018 annual report, which quantified the collective impact of 12 Alliance members.

Why this works:

- It is coordinated by a membership-based non-profit organization (i.e., there is fiscal responsibility and buy-in)
- Representation from diverse stakeholder groups
- They have a Strategic Plan with clear goals, responsibilities, and measurements of success
- An annual report broadcasts Farm to School accomplishments
- They work closely with equally diverse statewide network (the Early Care and Education Coalition) to host intersectional activities that encourage conversation and collaboration

- The annual summit brings stakeholders together to discuss pressing Farm to School topics and encourages collaboration

Promising Practice: Memorandums of Understanding and Roles and Responsibilities

Delaware’s Farm to School partners jointly [created an MOU](#) that was signed by the Department of Education, Department of Agriculture, and Department of Health and Human Services. In their MOU, they explicitly define goals and objectives to be achieved by each independent agency, as well as initiatives to be pursued together with unique responsibilities.

Similarly, Massachusetts detailed a [Roles and Responsibilities](#) document that describes expected time commitment of Farm to School leadership.

Action Items

1. Identify and convene partners in early 2020 and establish a common understanding of the goals, expectations, and commitment of each member and the group.
2. Share knowledge and define lessons learned from the industry experiences of Alliance members, in order to develop training and resources that will be shared with a broader network of stakeholders, as well as with new leadership that has joined the Farm to School network over the last few years and as several long time staff members from several organizations retire this year.
3. Determine roles, responsibilities, and governance of each partner, in order to build consensus and get everyone on the same page. Document this in an MOU that all partners sign. Revisit the MOU yearly, reworking and re-signing as needed.
4. The Alliance should meet **quarterly**, at minimum, to build relationships and share resources. **Monthly or bi-monthly sub-committee meetings** should be held to work on projects that build collaborative capacity among partners
5. In the long term, consider exploring a fee structure that is nominal but can signify buy-in by all partners, and which can be used to co-fund mileage for travel and lunch for meeting-goers to remove barriers to and incentivize participation. See the Georgia Farm to School Alliance case study above for more information about this best practice.

Partners: WVDA, WVDE Office of Child Nutrition, WVU Extension Service, WVU Center for Resilient Communities, West Virginia Farm Bureau, West Virginia Bureau of Public Health, NRCS, West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition, Value Chain Cluster Initiative, FFA, 4H, other stakeholders involved in Farm to School, local farmers

Timeline: Short term (Year 1)

RECOMMENDATION #2: Farm to School Coordinator

In order to add capacity to the Farm to School Program, it is essential that there is a dedicated staff member within the West Virginia Department of Agriculture whose full time commitment is to support the program’s goals. To date, the Department of Agriculture has been leveraging limited staff with additional full-time duties to work on Farm to School periodically as needed. Hiring a Farm to School coordinator within the West Virginia Department of Agriculture can help scale and expand the reach of current coordinators at the Department of Education Office of Child Nutrition who are working to connect schools and producers.

The job description, training, and geographic area this coordinator serves should be developed with guidance from the Farm to School Coordinators at the West Virginia Department of Education Office of Child Nutrition. The coordinator can complement and support those Coordinators, as well as help formalize, document, and scale successful Farm to School efforts to date. Training resources should include documentation around what a successful Farm to School interaction looks like, so that the coordinator can learn from day one what the expectations are.

Promising Practices

Promising Practice: Staffing Farm to School

Examples of successful Farm to School programs across the country have dedicated [Farm to School coordinating positions](#) in each affiliated state agency. Some state agencies, such as in Oregon, have full-time positions in the Department of Education and the Department of Agriculture. Other states, such as South Carolina, Georgia, and Vermont, maintain Farm to School representation from a variety of state agencies in addition to the Department of Agriculture and Education, and have dedicated Farm to School positions in the Department of Public Health and Department of Environmental Services. Not all positions are necessarily full time - they might only be part-time, or have job responsibilities split between multiple people. The **broad representation across multiple agencies facilitates collaboration and shared responsibility of the Farm to School programming.**

In West Virginia, if there were dedicated employees for Farm to School coordination (as described above) across multiple agencies (e.g. the Department of Agriculture), there would be more support to help grow successful Farm to School activities around the state.

Action Items

1. Design job responsibilities, training protocol, and geographic service area in partnership with the Farm to School Coordinators at the West Virginia Department of Education Office of Child Nutrition, who currently serve statewide as liaisons between farms and schools. The coordinator position should help support the Coordinators by providing complimentary services to farmers interested in selling to local schools, leveraging existing agency field staff positioned geographically throughout the state who have established working relationships with producers.
2. Recruit and hire a Farm to School coordinator to support and work in conjunction with the West Virginia Department of Education Office of Child Nutrition Coordinators by interfacing with producers and food service directors and providing technical assistance described in the strategies that follow.

Partners: WVDA, WVDE Office of Child Nutrition Farm to School Coordinators, West Virginia Bureau of Public Health

Timeline: Short term (Year 1)

Tactical Strategies

The strategies outlined here include tactical actions that the Alliance from the above recommendations can lead.



STRATEGY 1

Exchange Knowledge and Build Relationships

Use the Alliance to leverage existing events, workshops, and training to provide opportunities for producers and food service directors to connect, share successes, exchange knowledge, and collaborate, as well as provide opportunities for farmers to learn from peers experienced in Farm to School.

In order to enhance relationships between and among producers and schools, it's important to strengthen informal networks so they can hear from one another, build greater trust and mutual understanding, and formalize partnerships to better understand each others' needs, expectations, and constraints. There are few venues where farmers and school purchasers interact, and as busy people who are fully engrossed in their own work, there is little exposure to the reality in which the other lives.

Both operate in a world of constraints: for farmers this might include seasonality, unpredictable weather, pests and disease, proximity to markets, and more. For school food service directors, this might mean budget constraints, kitchen and staff capabilities, nutrition mandates, and billing cycles, among other things. A first step to accommodating these constraints is understanding them, which is where providing opportunities for producers and schools to connect and get to know each other comes into play.

There are events, trainings, workshops, and other mechanisms that the Farm to School Program could take better advantage of so that resources required are minimized and there is no program repetition. Extension agents, farm to school liaisons, and other farmer-educators should be at these meetings to deliver information and guidance to the participants about the mechanics of marketing and selling to schools. Panels or presentations can feature both schools and producers who are active in Farm to School to share their own experience and answer questions. Formal matchmaking or informal networking can lead to business partnerships, even if only on a pilot basis.

These events can create space for producers to connect with and learn from other producers who have participated in the Farm to School program. People are most influenced by their peers who can share the benefits and pitfalls of their first hand experience. Selling to schools isn't for everyone, and it is important to start with the facts and let producers make informed decisions about their ability to successfully engage in this market opportunity.

Promising Practices and Case Studies

In West Virginia, the Farm to School Program can take advantage of and add onto existing conferences, workshops, and events including the following:

- **Conferences:** Farm to School Network Conference, WVU Small Farms Conference, Women in Agriculture Conference, NCRS Vegetable Production Meetings, West Virginia State Fair
- **Workshops for farmers** like those provided by Sprouting Farms, Refresh Appalachia, Grow Ohio Valley, WVU Extension Service, WVU Food Safety Training Team
- **Collaborative events** like Refresh Appalachia’s “Local to Local: A Food & Farm Expo”

New modules, lessons, and activities should be considered to build up the Farm to School network and encourage relationship building between and among producers and food service directors. One example to consider is a Farm to School Showcase. EcoTrust created a [Farm to School Showcase Toolkit](#) to provide guidance and best practices for hosting showcases that West Virginia should replicate. In addition, the West Virginia Farm to School Program would benefit from holding [formal matchmaking events](#) (page 10), like those facilitated by the Addison County Relocalization Network (ACORN) in Middlebury, VT.

Action Items

1. Compile a complete list of existing agriculture-focused or school nutrition-focused workshops, classes, networking events, and conferences that occur in the region that are quality venues to add a Farm to School component. If one is attended by a stakeholder group, determine with the organizers how others might find value from attending and propose sessions or modules geared toward a mixed Farm to School audience.
2. Publish all events on a central West Virginia Farm to School website and distribute to all partners in the Farm to School Alliance, ensuring that all stakeholders are invited and actively engaged in these learning opportunities.
3. Work with Farm to School Alliance to facilitate relationships and training opportunities between industry leadership and enterprising producers.

Partners: WVDA, WVDE Office of Child Nutrition, WVU Center for Resilient Communities, WVU Extension Service, West Virginia Farm Bureau, West Virginia Bureau of Public Health, NRCS, West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition, Value Chain Cluster Initiative, FFA, 4H, other stakeholders involved in Farm to School, local farmers

Timeline: Short term (Year 1-2)



STRATEGY 2

Document Practices and Streamline Processes

Develop and share resources that clearly document important Farm to School information, such as product lists, pricing sheets, packaging guidelines, and sample contracts and purchase orders. Create Standard Operating Procedures with tools and forms that both producers and schools can follow to help facilitate participation in the program.

Barriers to a productive Farm to School program include the lack of published, available information to help guide the sale and purchase of local food, as well as consensus or understanding among producers across the state about the key crops, price ranges, and specifications required by schools. Without known price ranges, producers are unsure if they will receive the revenue from the school that covers the cost to produce the product and make a profit. It is worth noting that though many producers are happy to support their communities by providing food they've grown to school children, understandably, generally none are willing to do it at a loss. The economics need to be clear and transparent to give producers the peace of mind that their return on investment will be at least modest.

In addition, though anecdotally some producers may know what schools are willing to buy, there is no published guide that details the 5-10 most often purchased foods that schools could reliably source from local farms, how much they buy and when, and in what quantities and packaging. Uncertainty around basic guidelines leads to confusion, as well as lost time, effort, and money.

Once coordination among producers is established (Strategy 3), it will be important that farmers and the coordinators supporting them have a clear sense of direction and confidence that the food they are producing will meet school standards. To that end, **resources should be developed that outline common products and product specifications that are generally consistent across schools.** This information should be published online in an easy to access and central place.

Of course, there is variability among schools when it comes to things like volumes, purchasing schedules, and the price ranges they are able to pay. These details should be captured from each school (or county food service director) annually **using a standard form that is developed as a part of this action item.** These forms can be available to the coordinators as they help producers learn more about the schools in nearby counties, encourage cooperative aggregation among several local producers, and enable them to make informed decisions about what should be grown and where they might sell their products. Since farmers must be a "county vendor" in order to sell to schools, the process of becoming a county vendor should be streamlined so that producers are set up to be able to sell to all nearby counties long before they are ready to begin doing so.

Finally, a training resource should be developed for coordinators and others who facilitate relationships between farms and schools that outlines what an effective interaction looks like, so that this type of knowledge can be passed on to new leaders from those who have done this successfully.

Promising Practices and Case Studies

Case Study: University of Wisconsin Farm to School toolkits for farmers and schools

The [University of Wisconsin Center for Integrated Nutritional Services](#) provides extensive Farm to School resources for producers and school nutrition programs on their website. The toolkits, which were supported by a grant from the CDC, were made possible by collaboration between the University of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, the Department of Health Services, and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

- Business resources for producers include examples of **product pricing and availability worksheets, food safety guidelines, and sample purchasing agreements and invoices.**
- For schools, resources include guidance on new vendor meetings, **a serving to pounds calculator**, and recommendations for kitchen equipment.

Promising Practice: West Virginia produced resources, guides, and standard operating procedures for local food producers and processors

In West Virginia, resources that are specific to local producers and schools should be developed collaboratively between informed and engaged entities. These resources should be particularly informed by the relationships and networks built by Farm to School coordinators within the Department of Education Office of Child Nutrition, food hubs and cooperatives that are working on the ground like Preston Growers Co-Op and Turnrow Appalachian Farm Collective, and the Food Service Directors who are aware of the constraints and needs of schools that purchase local foods.

One such example is the recent West Virginia C.H.I.P. (Commercial/Home/Incubator-kitchens and Food Producers) Project, which will build upon existing statewide training on produce safety rule training to engage a multi-disciplinary team of WVU University, WVU Extension, and WV Department of Agriculture (WVDA) Business Development Staff stakeholders to develop, deliver and evaluate a customized food safety education and outreach program for extension agents, WV commercial-kitchens, home-kitchens, incubator-kitchens and food producers. This Project aims to address a knowledge gap in labeling, processing, and local supply chains by developing a hands-on experience in food hub activities from production, processing, labeling, marketing, and distribution of local foods. The objectives of this project are to develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for services related to WV Food Processors including but not limited to: food safety, food processing, product development, labeling, nutrition facts/allergens labeling, and

process control for direct and indirect markets in commercial, home, and incubator kitchens. Other objectives include establishing an online information portal for food producers, as well as a Kitchen Cooperative Network to grow food hubs and incubator kitchens in the state.

Action Items

1. Study existing successful models, such as those in Cabell and Mason Counties, replicating or adapting the materials they provide to producers for use in other counties.
2. Create toolkits that can be made available to producers and those who work to educate producers that outline information such as: products that are in demand from schools, packing and packaging specifications, and volume guidelines.
3. Work with food service directors to develop tools that can be used to help schools track local purchases.
4. Work with the CHIP Project to develop and deliver SOPs for producers and processors interested in marketing and selling to schools.
5. Develop training documents that guide new leaders to facilitate relationships between farms and schools that outlines what an effective interaction looks like.

Partners: WVDA Planning Coordinators, WVDE Food Service Directors, Office of Child Nutrition Farm to School Coordinators, WVU Extension Service, WVU Center for Resilient Communities, West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition

Timeline: Short term (Year 1-2)



STRATEGY 3

Increase Farmer Coordination

Develop a two-year pilot program around 2-5 key crops to scale existing, or develop new co-ops, thereby increasing farmer coordination on planning, aggregation, and distribution.

The biggest challenge cited by the Steering Committee and nearly all the stakeholders consulted as a part of this planning process was the volume of food required by schools on a daily basis and the inability for most producers in West Virginia to be able to supply that on their own. A solution to that challenge is to facilitate producers working together to pool their product and sell collectively to the schools. This benefits the schools, who prefer to make purchases from a single vendor (as opposed to interfacing with multiple producers who make up a single order) and benefits the producers who then don't need to interact directly with the schools, but can elect a sales person (or entity) to transact on their behalf.

Coordination would begin long before the sales process, starting with agreements amongst a group of committed producers that detail who grows what, how much, at what specifications. This includes a level of production planning, facilitated by Extension Agents, WVDA Planning Coordinators, the WVDA Farm to School Coordinator, non-profits that are coordinating the same efforts such as Turnrow, Grow Ohio Valley, Refresh Appalachia, andwell as the Office of Child Nutrition. etc, to ensure that the right varieties are selected, that crops are grown in optimal conditions, and are ready for harvest within a predictable timeframe.

Before the growing season producers should also come to an agreement about which person or entity is going to interact with the school and convey any information received from the buyer back to the producer group. Details about preparation, packaging, pickup/delivery, and terms of payment should also be sorted out before growing begins, so that producers are prepared and know what to expect during the pilot. This requires a strong “middleman” that has the time, capacity, and resources to serve in this intermediary role, similar to the role of the current Office of Child Nutrition Farm to School Coordinator.

To work toward this goal, a pilot program should be developed that focuses on two to five key products that schools use regularly that can be purchased locally. It is important to start with a small number to prove the concept and limit the variables that might lead to problems. Schools use such a large volume of food that even one product purchased locally would make a significant impact on the local farm economy.

Two to five counties that have active prostart programs and/or highly motivated food service directors who would like to increase their local purchasing should be identified to participate by increasing their farm to school purchases. Up to ten producers located near each of those counties should then be recruited to commit to growing the agreed upon product(s).

Farm to School Coordinators and Coordinators will work with the producer groups throughout 2020 to assist with production planning, packaging and aggregation, and payment and delivery. Arrangements should be documented and acknowledged by all participating parties, in preparation for the 2021-2022 school year. These plans can be written into schools’ Fresh Food Act exemption plan for future purchasing. Materials developed in Strategy 2 (pricing sheets, purchase orders, sample contracts, etc) should be utilized here to test their usefulness and adjust as needed.

Promising Practices and Case Studies

There are a lot of lessons to be learned from the existing efforts of food service directors and producers. Already in West Virginia there are examples of successful and productive cooperatives, food aggregation centers, and distributors that can be looked to as models to replicate or worked with to scale. For example, the Center for Resilient Communities will be

launching a Food Farm Link website that maps resources for those interested in Farm to Institution in the spring of 2020. Additionally they will host on site training and speed networking to encourage farmers and purchasers to form new business relationships in August of 2020.

Local resources like the [Value Chain Cluster initiative](#) from Natural Capital Investment Fund should be utilized when possible, and national resources like the National Good Food Network's guide on [Building Successful Food Hubs](#) should be used to pull out best practices to follow as well.

Action Items

In order to increase farmer coordination on planning, aggregating, and distributing, a pilot should be organized to scale existing co-ops and possibly develop new ones.

1. Determine no more than 2-5 key farm to school crops to center a Farm to School pilot around (beef, apples, lettuce, cherry tomatoes, peppers, honey, eggs, root vegetable packets).
2. Identify 2-5 counties that are highly motivated to participate in a Farm to School Pilot for the 2021-2022 school year. This might include Lincoln County, where there are producers who are ready to participate, as well as a committed ag teacher; Mason County, where there is a robust farm scene and an active food service director; Putnam County, an early adopter of Farm to School that is ready to do more; or other counties that demonstrate their willingness to expand.
3. Recruit up to 10 producers per county identified who will commit to participating in the pilot by producing one or more of the key crops.
4. Develop materials, tools, and processes described in Strategy 2 to support the pilot participants. Collect county specific information regarding each county's price ranges and volumes from each Food Service Director.
5. Evaluate the pilot after year 2 and continue, discontinue, or make adjustments to the approach as needed.

Partners:

- Preston Growers Co-op has been identified to facilitate pilots in the northeast corner of the state, including in Preston, Lewis, Harrison, Taylor, Randolph, Tucker, and Hardy counties
- Turnrow Appalachian Farm Collective has been identified to facilitate pilots in the southwest and southeast corners of the state, including in Kanawha, Putnam, Mason, Cabell, Wayne, Mingo, Logan, Lincoln, as well as Greenbrier and Monroe counties
- County Food Service Directors who are highly motivated to start or scale their local food purchasing will be recruited

- Extension Agents, WVU Center for Resilient Communities, WVDA Planning Coordinators, Farm to School Coordinators, and other educators that work directly with producers will help facilitate the pilot

Timeline: Short/medium term (Year 1, 2, 3)



STRATEGY 4

Increase Agriculture- and Nutrition-based Education

Build a coalition of educators and supporters to deliver expanded agricultural, nutrition, and science-based education programs including school gardens, food processing by students through ProStart, and other school-based entrepreneurial ventures.

For many young people, their first experience with Farm to School is as a student, learning about the farmer who grew the local items on the cafeteria salad bar, transforming raw vegetables into meals as part of a cooking club or class, or helping to grow things in a school garden. These vital elements are how thousands of kids, parents, and teachers learn the value of incorporating agriculture into the classroom. Anecdotally, students who were exposed to West Virginia’s Farm to School Program in these ways have gone on to farm and sell to their school district after they’ve graduated. Nationally, school gardens have been used to improve learning, especially in nutrition, science, entrepreneurship, and reading, and are thought to build team building skills, environmental stewardship, and a sense of community development.

In West Virginia, 43 schools throughout the state have a ProStart program through which over 1000 students participate in “simulated workplaces” like cafes or events-catering businesses where they learn real-life job skills that are transferable to certifications or college credit. ProStart classes can help add value to local produce when there is an abundance - for example, excess produce can be cryovaced and stored for either purchase by schools for use in lunches, or for use in ProStart classes throughout the winter and spring. In the 2017-2018 school year, ProStart programs spent over \$229,000 on food for use in their programs. One goal of the Farm to School program should be to increase the percentage of that spending that is local.

Since agriculture- and nutrition-based education are fundamental “gateways” into Farm to School, they are a vital mechanism to build momentum and advocacy for the Program statewide. In order to sustain agriculture- and nutrition-based learning, and garner resources to support Farm to School, stakeholders who recognize and cherish the benefits of the program should come together to form a coalition of supporters, who can advocate for policies to support and scale the positive impacts it brings. This should at a minimum include former and current students who have participated in Farm to School; parents of students who can speak to the benefits that Farm to School brings to their children and community; teachers and instructors who work in the schools delivering lessons and providing direct support; and representatives from 4H and FFA who will take agriculture based learning forward. This coalition may be a committee of the Farm

to School Alliance (see recommendation #1). Its mandates and policy agenda will be set by its members. This group could be responsible for a statewide marketing campaign that celebrates success and markets the program in schools across the state.

Promising Practices and Case Studies

The Vermont Farm to School Network has action teams for specific topic areas:

- Demonstrating the Economic Value of Farm to School
- Demonstrating the Educational Value of Farm to School
- Make Farm to School Easy to Use
- Increase Demand for Farm to School
- Increase Supply of Local Foods in Schools

These action teams are able to conduct **capital campaigns and legislative campaigns**. In 2019, the action team, Demonstrating the Economic Value of Farm to School, otherwise known as the “campaign team”, helped advocate for Vermont to dedicate state funding for Farm to School school **grants and technical assistance**.

Action Items

1. Bring together supporters of Agriculture-based Education, including former and current students who have participated in Farm to School; parents of students who can speak to the benefits that Farm to School brings to their children and community; teachers and instructors who work in the schools delivering lessons and providing direct support; and representatives from 4H and FFA who will take agriculture based learning forward.
2. Collect testimonials from supporters.
3. Identify policy or funding initiatives to support and advocate for sustained and scaled agriculture- and nutrition-based learning, and garner resources to support Farm to School

Partners: WVDA, WVDE ProStart and school garden instructors, Office of Child Nutrition, WVU Extension Service school garden instructors, FFA, 4H, students, parents

Timeline: Long term (Year 3-5)

Conclusion

The recommendations enclosed in this plan do not address infrastructural challenges in West Virginia, like a lack of refrigerated storage, central warehousing, or trucking. Instead, the plan seeks to build on the success of West Virginia’s Farm to School program to date, by providing new tools and processes to those doing the work on the ground. The goal is that partners throughout the state who have been working on Farm to School for the last 10 years can be supported through these actions, their efforts amplified, grown, and scaled with additional resources from the Department of Agriculture.

The strategies in this plan also aim to help institutions throughout the state follow the purchasing requirements outlined in the Fresh Food Act, to increase the amounts of healthy, fresh food available to all children in West Virginia, and stimulate the state's agricultural economy by enhancing demand for locally grown food. The intention is to build on guidance provided by the statewide agriculture plan, including connecting producers to market opportunities, creating infrastructure needed to grow the agriculture economy, and developing the next generation of agricultural industry leaders.

The West Virginia Department of Agriculture looks forward to partnering with organizations throughout the state to collectively create a bright future for Farm to School.

Appendix

Interviews

Thank you to all who gave their time to help document the West Virginia Farm to School program as it currently operates.

- **Melinda Francis**, *Part-Time Coordinator, Office of Child Nutrition, West Virginia Department of Education*
- **Kacey Gantzer**, *Planning Coordinator, Northern Region, West Virginia Department of Agriculture*
- **Megan Govindan**, *Program Director, Community Leadership, Center for Resilient Communities, West Virginia University*
- **Jason Hughes**, *Former Lead Coordinator And State FFA Adviser, West Virginia Department Of Education*
- **Tami Maynard**, *Coordinator, Office of Career Technical Education, West Virginia Department of Education*
- **Rhonda McCoy**, *Director of Food Services, Cabell County Schools*
- **Danny Swan**, *Co-founder, Grow Ohio Valley*
- **Chuck Talbott**, *Putnam County Ag Extension Agent, West Virginia University Extension Service*

Ideation Session Stakeholders

Thank you to the following people, who graciously met to help imagine what the West Virginia Farm to School program could evolve into.

Middlemen Ideation Session, Charleston, WV, November 21, 2019

- **Fritz Boettner**, *Program Director, Food System Development, Center for Resilient Communities, West Virginia University*
- **Joey Aloï**, *Farm-Food Hub Marketing, Paradise Farms at KISRA*
- **Spencer Moss**, *Executive Director, West Virginia Food & Farm Coalition*
- **Joyce Shafer**, *Second Generation Co-owner, Shafer Heritage Farms*

Food Service Director Ideation Session, Huntington, WV, November 21, 2019

- **Brenda Arrowood**, *Director of Food Services, Wayne County Schools*
- **Kristy Bower**, *Coordinator, Office of Child Nutrition, West Virginia Department of Education*
- **Melinda Francis**, *Part-Time Coordinator, Office of Child Nutrition, West Virginia Department of Education*
- **Beverly Glaze**, *Director of Food Services, Mason County Schools*
- **Kerri Kennedy**, *Coordinator, Office of Child Nutrition, West Virginia Department of Education*
- **Bekki Leigh**, *Coordinator, Office of Child Nutrition, West Virginia Department of Education*
- **Kay Maynard**, *Director of Food Services, Mingo County Schools*
- **Rhonda McCoy**, *Director of Food Services, Cabell County Schools*
- **Diane Miller**, *Director of Food Services, Kanawha County Schools*
- **John Moy**, *Director of Food Services, Lincoln County Schools*
- **Stella Young**, *Director of Food Services, Putnam County Schools*



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