Integrating Farm to School in School Wellness Policies
Farm to School programs connect K-12 schools 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.*

In recent years the mission has grown to include community integration, and expanding sustainability efforts in schools and the communities that support them. Local purchasing, school gardens and other farm to school activities are a relevant component of a comprehensive wellness policy that works to prevent obesity, assure that school meal programs meet nutritional guidelines, and teach students where their food comes from.

*From the NH Farm to School website*
What are the Federal Requirements for School Wellness Policies?

In 2004, Congress passed the Child Nutrition and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children Reauthorization Act (Sec. 204 of Public Law 108-265), requiring all local educational agencies (LEAs) participating in the National School Lunch Program or other child nutrition programs create local school wellness policies by School Year 2006-07. Compliance required by June 30, 2017 (Local School Wellness Policy).

- Permitting parents, students, representatives of the school food authority, teachers of PE, school health professionals, school board, administrators, & general public to participate in development, implementation, review, and update of policy.
- Identifying wellness policy leadership of one or more LEA and/or school official(s) who have authority to ensure each school complies with the policy.
- Informing and updating the public(including parents, students, and community members) about content and implementation of the local wellness policy.
- Ensuring the wellness policy includes all of the required components.
- Policies for foods and beverages available on the school campus during the school day, including classroom snacks brought by parents, or other foods given as incentives.
Where Does Farm to School Fit in Wellness Policies?

Start with Existing Opportunities

Identifying classroom and cafeteria activities that already exist in your schools is the easiest way to integrate FTS into policy, identify goals, and build upon those activities.

- Do seed starting or food preparation activities already occur in some classrooms?
- Is there an existing school garden on site, and interested participants on staff and family/community volunteers? Are principals and custodial staff on board? Is there access to water and other needed resources?
- Do relationships exist between the school and outside organizations or businesses (ie- community gardens, restaurants, rec departments, compost companies, etc)?
- Do your students visit farms or orchards on field trips already?
- Does school food service purchase from any local farms?
- Do educators teach nutrition curriculum already? Utilize NH Harvest of the Month?
- Are building trades or culinary programs able to be engaged in farm to school?
• Set goals for nutrition education, physical activity, and school-based activities promoting student wellness.
  ○ Plan school gardens around the NH Harvest of the Month Program and utilize established lesson plans within the school curriculum Schedule classroom garden visits for maintenance within lessons.
  ○ Plan tastings of garden produce and surveys of ‘likes’ to incorporate into grade-level math lessons.
• Establish nutrition guidelines according to USDA Nutrition Standards for all foods available on campus during the school day.
  ○ Sampling of school grown produce to reduce consumption of less nutritious competing foods
  ○ School grown or harvested produce included in cafeteria menu
• Establish a plan for measuring impact and implementation of local wellness policy.
  ○ Student surveys of new foods sampled including likes or dislikes
  ○ A stipended individual in each school to carry out sampling and surveys
• Involve parents, students, representatives of the school authority, the school board, school administrators, and the public in development of the local wellness policy.
• Build buy-in for school gardens, composting initiatives, local food purchasing, and other FTS activities first at building administrator level.
• Invite parents to volunteer for garden maintenance and food waste sorting.
• Invite School Board members to visit schools actively engaged in FTS initiatives.
• Present to schools boards, city councils, select boards.
• Document document document! Take photos--share on social media, school & community newsletters and bulletin boards, local newspapers.
• Host a community dinner featuring local foods, and participation from culinary programs, local restaurants, and/or cafeteria staff.

Farm to School Sample Language to Consider

• The school district will support the development of farm to school programs to help students eat more nutritious foods and promote healthier lifelong eating patterns; support the local economy and local farmers; and teach students about the origins of their foods and how their food is grown.
Farm to school programs provide students with the opportunity to eat healthy, locally grown foods and be exposed to a variety of fresh produce that reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of the student population. Nutrition Services will develop and implement a plan to integrate local produce into meals served as part of the school meals program. The plan will identify specific strategies and goals to increase the use of local produce. Nutrition Services will plan menus to accommodate the seasonality of local agriculture according to availability of produce from local farms and school gardens. Teachers will use the Farm to School program to promote awareness of how food choices affect our health, communities, and environment. Staff will integrate experiential education activities—such as gardening, cooking demonstrations, farm and farmers’ market tours—into existing curricula for all grades. Meals served within the federally reimbursable meal program must be designed to feature fresh and minimally processed fruits and vegetables, from local sources, to the greatest extent possible.
Colebrook (SAU 7) added Farm to School to district Wellness policy (December 2017).

“The Colebrook school district recognizes that school gardens and farm visits offer physical education opportunities, as well as nutrition and agricultural education, by engaging students in activities such as planting, harvesting, weeding, food preparation, and taste testing and sampling. Teachers and students are encouraged to take advantage of these physical activity opportunities during the school day as well as through field trips and after-school activities. Farm-to-school programs provide interactive, experiential education activities that strengthen and reinforce nutrition education efforts.”

SAU7 full Wellness Policy

Oyster River Cooperative School District: Durham, Madbury, Lee (revised 9/4/19)

“The ORCSD is committed to sourcing local fresh foods to maximize nutritional value with an eye toward sustainability.” Full ORCSD Wellness Policy
Portsmouth NH (Revised and Approved: July 9, 2019):

“Our school district is committed to serving healthy meals to children in accordance with the Portsmouth School Board School Nutrition policy (EFE). The District will implement at least four of the following five Farm to School activities:

- Local and/or regional products are incorporated into the school meal program
- Messages about agriculture/nutrition are reinforced in the learning environment
- School garden activities
- Field trips to local farms
- Promotions or special events (i.e.—tastings) to highlight regional products.”

In 2015, Portsmouth schools added sustainability goals as well as nutrition/education activities to their policy, recognizing the urgency to address climate change on a local level. Full policy
Farm to School programs around the country have played a significant role in improving the quality of school meals and expanding nutrition education, and thus have an important role to play in school wellness policies. These additional resources will help schools and districts make Farm to School programming easier to implement into district Wellness Policies.

- USDA FTS Planning Toolkit
- NH Farm to School
- USDA FTS grant programs
- Local School Wellness Policy Checklist
- Rethinking School Lunch
- Farm to School Evaluation

Contact the NH Department of Education Nutrition Services Department for any questions about Wellness Policies