Connecting New Hampshire farms and schools by integrating production, school food procurement, and school curriculum.

Collaboration works!

“Get Smart Eat Local” resounds in every crisp crunch of fresh apple munching heard in the corridors, classrooms and cafeterias of New Hampshire’s schools. The New Hampshire Farm to School Program’s (NH FTS) motto speaks to its accomplishment of creating a business and educational connection between NH farms and NH schools by focusing on a single local product: apples.

Working with apple growers, school food service directors, and produce distributors, NH FTS re-established a trade connection between NH apples and NH schools that had been missing since the 1950’s.

Today more than half of NH’s schools—some 120,000 students—have the opportunity to crunch on NH-grown Mac’s, Gala’s or Empire’s, and drink NH apple cider, all available from their school cafeteria. Equally important, NH students have the opportunity to learn about nutrition and sustainability: how to make healthy food choices; where food comes from; and why eating local is smart!

Making the Link

“As one of the charter schools working on the NH Farm to School Program, I am excited to be able to order New Hampshire apples and cider for my cafeterias.” -Harlene Batchelder, Food Service Director, Oyster River School District

Recipe for Success

Start with the familiar: working with existing systems used by schools and growers made ordering NH apples easier for schools and farmers.

A cup of Collaboration
A cup of Trust and Respect
A cup of Communication
A cup of Dedication

Mix well with heaps of Enthusiasm and Inspiration!

All these ingredients are essential for a program to succeed. Like apples and children, they require ongoing cultivation to thrive.
Start with the system

Working with existing apple distribution and school procurement systems was integral to the success of the NH FTS pilot program. Offering schools small, NH-grown, 140-count apples and later, cider, created a cost effective entry point for farmers and schools to make a market connection: farmers got a fair price for an undervalued product and a steady, easily accessible market, and schools got a nutritious, locally grown food and an educational opportunity.

Three wholesale producers and one retail grower agreed to launch the program; in practice, one grower was supplied apples from other producers, which then went to a school produce distributor for delivery to 11 school districts. The program was designed to continue through the winter as long as quality supply was available, with schools receiving start-up and closedown notices.

**IMPACTS AND OUTCOMES OF NH FTS**

- Four large apple growers developed schools as a new wholesale market, one regional apple wholesaler launch a new product for schools, one grower expand his cider operations, and three smaller growers make local farm to school connections;

- Food service directors were provided with a simple way to make a desired change, enabling over half the schools in the state to purchase NH apples and cider;

- Educational materials that could be easily integrated into on-going activities in the classroom and the cafeteria were created and collected.

And, because the economics of this program worked for everyone—schools, distributors, and growers—NH FTS is both successful and sustainable.

This three-year pilot program is a collaboration of the University of New Hampshire’s Office of Sustainability and the New Hampshire Coalition for Sustaining Agriculture. It was funded by Northeast Sustainable Agriculture, Research and Education (SARE), a program of the USDA’s Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES). Annual project reports are available at www.sare.org. For free downloadable promotional materials, curricula, farm visit guides, and other resources for food service providers, parents, farmers, administrators, students, and community members, visit our website www.nhfarmtoschool.org.
What did we learn?

START WITH THE FAMILIAR
Working with existing food distribution systems used by schools and growers made the first change—supplying and ordering NH apples—easier. Once benefits were experienced, success was acknowledged and other changes became easier.

CHECK YOUR TIMING
Timing is critical. Growers were looking for profitable markets, and schools were looking for ways to boost nutrition through healthy foods and education. NH FTS fit within a national conversation about improving the nutritional foundations of school food service programs, within concerns about the economic stresses affecting the state’s apple industry, and within emerging public understanding about the multiple benefits of buying local.

BUILD TRUST AND RESPECT
A foundation of trust and respect leads to positive changes. By listening carefully to each other’s needs and proceeding thoughtfully, schools, growers, and distributors found common interests, made minor adjustments to individual ways of operating, created relationships, and used the power of pride in their accomplishments to energize, expand and sustain the program.

ENCOURAGE PEER TO PEER COMMUNICATION
Peer to peer communication is powerful in spreading change. The testimony of early adopters, both growers and schools, led others to join the program and began a snowball effect. NH FTS worked with food service and apple industry leaders to create opportunities for success stories to be shared.

FIND CHAMPIONS
Champions are powerful change agents. The State Department of Education School Nutrition Program Director, a Food Service Director, a distributor, the State Department of Agriculture, Food and Markets, and an apple grower’s commitment to the mission of NH FTS helped make the program successful.

KNOW YOUR PARTNERS
Understand and respect institutional parameters. Operating a school food service program is very difficult: demands are great; budgets are tight; and regulations are complex. Likewise, farmers must contend with multiple challenges, including seasonality and product availability, fair pricing, and distribution of products.

GO SLOW AND CELEBRATE SUCCESSES
Change comes incrementally and in different, site-specific ways. Go slow, listen, and be creative. NH FTS gave directors a simple way to make a desired change. While other changes may be more difficult, with one success accomplished directors are willing to explore other ideas. Many schools are now ready to try new products and work directly with farms as vendors. Perceived barriers, such as a widely held belief that it was somehow not possible for schools to buy local products and that local products could not be cost effective, were transformed.
What’s so smart about eating local?

Eating local strengthens farms and communities
When we choose to buy local foods, we support local farms and we keep our dollars circulating in the community, thereby enhancing local economies and helping preserve our state’s open spaces and rural, working landscapes. Eating local decreases the miles food travels to our table and all the associated energy costs and emissions, reduces packaging, increases consumption of fresh products, and creates important community relationships. When schools buy from local farms the added benefit is the opportunity to educate students about healthy eating, food sources, wise food choices, local agriculture, local economies, community sustainability, and more.

Eating local supports healthy kids initiatives
Research on nutrition education methods suggests a strong link between long term healthy eating behaviors and experiential learning that begins early in life. The more a child is involved with healthy food, either through gardening, farm visits, cooking, or other "real life" food experiences in and outside the home, the more likely he or she will adopt healthy eating behaviors as a life long practice.

Eating local enhances education
Local food connections afford schools a unique opportunity for educating students about how and where food is produced: teachers can have students meet the farmer either in the classroom or on the farm, can integrate food and agriculture knowledge with standard science, math and social studies curricula, and can develop creative, interdisciplinary, and engaging lessons on a wide range of topics. Local farms, because of their proximity, variety, and accessibility, extend the teaching impact of the school.
What’s Next: 
Get Smart Eat Local 10-District Project

NH FTS learned from our apple program that food service directors need models, peer support and professional validation in order to make changes. Farmers do too. Thanks to support from the Josephine A. Lamprey, Otto, and Thanksgiving Funds of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, NH FTS will next launch a pilot project to model farm to school connections at the community level in ten Rockingham and Strafford County School Districts. Combined, these school districts include over 15,000 students.

Growing business, sustaining agriculture, supporting health and nutrition

Direct farm-to-school market connections add income, provides for diversity of sales, and allows for expansion and opportunity for new farming ventures. The two counties contain some of the best agricultural soils in the state, and while experiencing the greatest pressure for development, have seen a growth in the number of small farms focused on direct marketing. Increased purchasing of local foods enables schools to provide students with more fresh, healthy options in the cafeteria. It also allows teachers and food service staff a tangible teaching tool to foster good eating habits and awareness about their food and community.

CONTACT US

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New Hampshire Farm to School engages farmers, distributors, food service directors, teachers, health educators and administrators in adopting farm to school practices.

**How do we do this?**

**NH FTS:**
- helps negotiate simple, affordable systems for local purchasing;
- creates and distributes support materials for schools, including flyers and posters;
- conducts educational workshops and presentations;
- creates and collects educational materials tailored for nurses, teachers, parents, food service and others;
- serves as a resource to provide information on how to integrate farm to school into the school curriculum and facilitate connections.

**OUR STAFF**

**Nathan Duclos**
Our Program Coordinator extraordinaire, Nathan works closely with NH FTS constituents to connect farms and schools. He is the point of contact for all things farm to school in the state.

**Elisabeth Farrell**
Elisabeth is the Office of Sustainability’s Food and Society Initiative Program Coordinator and helps manage the NH FTS Program.

**Lynda Brushett**
Lynda is our NH FTS Program Consultant. She is the facilitator for the NH Coalition for Sustaining Agriculture.
Connecting New Hampshire Farms and Schools
HIGHLIGHTS

the

NH FARM TO SCHOOL Program

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