

USDA Announces New Support to Help Schools Purchase More Food from Local Farmers

Farm to School Grants Help Schools get Healthy Local Food, Strengthen Local Economies

PHILADELPHIA, Dec. 2, 2014 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced more than \$5 million in grants for 82 projects spanning 42 states and the U.S. Virgin Islands that support the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) efforts to connect school cafeterias with local farmers and ranchers through its Farm to School Program.

Regional grants include:

- **Kansas State Department of Education, Topeka, Kansas**, will host four farm to school networking and training workshops throughout the state to increase the availability of quality local foods in the school cafeteria by strengthening local farm to school supply chain networks, knowledge of food safety requirements, and school based procurement processes. The regional workshops will plant the idea to move beyond fruits and vegetables and explore options and opportunities across the school breakfast and lunch tray. Workshops will address the need for production, processing, and handling safety, and provide networking opportunities for local producers and school personnel.
- **Columbia Public Schools in Columbia, Missouri**, will partner with University of Missouri Extension to expand and integrate its farm to school program through the following key activities: extend the use of local products by preserving the farm to school goods purchased for consumption during the non-harvest seasons; increase the amount of farm to school items served in the cafeterias by seeking additional opportunities to purchase local goods; extend the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program initiative to grades 6-7 in order to allow student tasting at all six middle schools; extend learning into the classroom through outside gardens that conserve on space and hydroponic gardens for inside use in the winter; promote a growing contest among middle school students to enhance learning; increase curriculum emphasis on the scientific aspects of growing produce and the health contributions of eating produce.
- **University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri**, will partner with the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Missouri School Nutrition Association, Missouri Department of Agriculture, Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, Springfield YMCA, Opa! Food Management company, Joplin Head Start, the Missouri Foundation for Health, and the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City to host a statewide farm to school conference. The goals of the one-day conference are to reduce barriers that prevent schools from procuring local products and to increase opportunities for schools and producers to establish mutually beneficial partnerships that result in increased access to local products in Missouri schools.
- **Inter-tribal Ag Council, Billings, Montana**, will promote farm to school efforts in American Indian communities by including an expanded farm to school component as part of their annual membership meeting. This meeting draws hundreds of tribal food producers, agricultural professionals, and Native youth from across the nation. In addition to promoting enhanced understanding of farm to school programs and effective approaches for food service professionals, this event will allow targeted direct technical assistance and networking

opportunities. An innovative multimedia youth project as part of the national event will engage high school students in the farm to school conversation and allow them to share their unique perspectives on food and agriculture with peers and food service professionals. Regional meetings will supplement this national event, allowing further opportunity for recruitment, outreach, and networking.

- **Inter-Tribal Buffalo Council in Rapid City, South Dakota**, will assist schools on Tribal Reservations throughout South Dakota, including the Oglala Sioux Tribe, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe, Yankton Sioux Tribe, Lower Brule Sioux Tribe, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and Crow Creek Sioux Tribe. The project will focus on strategic planning and infrastructure assessments to determine schools' capacity to increase access to local and regional foods, with an emphasis on locally raised bison.
- **Utah State Office of Education in Salt Lake City, Utah**, will provide intensive two-day training to school nutrition directors and managers, focusing exclusively on farm to school topics. The primary goal of this training is to increase the competency of food service directors from across the state of Utah in sourcing, procuring, marketing, and serving local foods in the school meals programs.
- **Wyoming Department of Education, Cheyenne, Wyoming**, will connect Wyoming producers with Wyoming schools. The Wyoming Department of Education Child Nutrition Programs will work with schools, producers, and other related entities (Wyoming Department of Agriculture, Wyoming Business Council, Ag in the Classroom, and the University of Wyoming Agriculture Extension Office) to provide training and technical support in a continuing effort to improve access to local foods in eligible schools across Wyoming. The training and technical support will provide education and information through regional training sessions, and webinars.

The program helps schools purchase more food from local farmers and ranchers in their communities, expanding access to healthy local food for school children and supporting local economies. According to USDA's first-ever [Farm to School Census](#) released earlier this year, school districts participating in farm to school programs purchased and served over \$385 million in local food in school year 2011-2012, with more than half of participating schools planning to increase their purchases of local food in the future.

“USDA is proud to support communities across the country as they plan and implement innovative farm to school projects,” said Vilsack. “These inspiring collaborations provide students with healthy, fresh food, while supporting healthy local economies. Through farm to school projects, community partners are coming together to ensure a bright future for students, and for local farmers and ranchers.”

Secretary Vilsack made this announcement at Common Market, a pioneering food hub in Philadelphia that connects wholesale customers to farmers in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware. Common Market is receiving a grant to support their "An Apple a Day" Program. The facility will act as a bridge between Pennsylvania Family Farms, a small Pennsylvania value-added processor, and public charter schools to provide food safety, product development, packaging, educational, marketing, planning, ordering and delivery support to farm and school food service partners.

Together, Common Market and the other selected projects will serve more than 4,800 schools and 2.8 million students, nearly 51 percent of whom live in rural communities. A few additional examples include:

- **Tift County School System in Georgia** will build on its current efforts to provide agriculture and nutrition programs that are experiential, educational and better connect students to local and regional food. Proposed activities include retrofitting a school bus to serve as a farm bus/rolling classroom, retrofitting a canning plant to preserve local tomatoes, and irrigating the school farm to expand the growing season and increase yield.
- **Colonial School District in Delaware** will have students and staff directly engaged in the entire process of planning, growing and processing foods, creating new menus, and placing healthy foods directly into school nutrition programs. At the Historic Penn Farm, high school students will grow crops for both the school's breakfast and lunch programs.
- **The National Future Farmers of America Organization (FFA)** will connect local youth producers/FFA members to school food buyers and host a series of webinars focused on developing state level partnerships.

For a complete list of FY15 Farm to School grant recipients, please visit:

http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/FY_2015_Grant_Award_Summaries.pdf

USDA's Farm to School Grants help schools respond to the growing demand for locally sourced foods and increase market opportunities for producers and food businesses, including food processors, manufacturers, and distributors. Grants will also be used to support agriculture and nutrition education efforts such as school gardens, field trips to local farms, and cooking classes. USDA Farm to School Conference and Event Grants support regional, state, and national conferences, events and/or trainings that have a specific emphasis on developing supply chain relationships by connecting local producers to school food buyers, along with events and trainings that provide technical assistance or other programming in the area of local procurement, food safety, culinary education and integration of agriculture-based curriculum.

USDA's [Farm to School Program](#) is made possible by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, which authorized USDA to provide grants and technical assistance to help schools gain better access to local foods. Since 2012, USDA has awarded \$15.1 million in grants to 221 Farm to School projects in 49 states, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands. The Farm to School program is a core element of the USDA's [Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Initiative](#), which coordinates the department's work on local food systems.

USDA is focused on improving childhood nutrition and empowering families to make healthier food choices by providing science-based information and advice, while expanding the availability of healthy food.

- America's students now have healthier and more nutritious school meals due to improved nutrition standards implemented as a result of the historic [Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010](#).
- USDA's MyPlate symbol and the resources at ChooseMyPlate.gov provide quick, easy reference tools for parents, teachers, healthcare professionals and communities.

- USDA awarded [\\$5.2 million in grants to provide training and technical assistance](#) for child nutrition foodservice professionals and support stronger school nutrition education programs.
- Since 2009, USDA has provided [\\$160 million in kitchen equipment funding](#) to states and schools. The President's fiscal year 2015 budget requests an additional \$35 million for kitchen equipment grants. These grants are one of several ways that USDA is supporting schools as they implement the updated nutrition standards.
- USDA recently launched a pilot project, called [Team Up for School Nutrition Success](#), which is working with schools to identify challenges, provide free, customized training, and match schools with mentors who have successfully addressed similar challenges.

Collectively these policies and actions are helping to combat child hunger and obesity, while improving the health and nutrition of the nation's children. For more information on USDA's Farm to School Program, please visit www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool.

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