

What is Farm to School?

Rewind to 2015's [Where Food Access and Community Development Merge](#) post, we reiterate that a community food system isn't just about connecting local growers to a farm market or boosting seasonal tourism. It's about the triple bottom line and improving health, wealth and social impact. One way to build community through food system development begins with field (or even the playground) and ends on students' forks. Over the last decade, there has been increasing acknowledgement of the connection between physical education and school lunch programs as an opportunity for a one-two health-economy punch. Combating childhood obesity, diabetes and other nutrition-related disease can start in the classroom and extend to the family as students are educated and then empowered to make healthy food choices. The key word being *empowerment*. Students must have the option of making healthy food choices along with education regarding their impact. Nationally, this connection is being drawn by Farm-to-School programs that are providing youth with healthy food access; encouraging lifelong healthy eating habits, supporting local farmers, reducing negative environmental impacts, preserving rural communities and promoting awareness of how empowered choices make impactful outcomes.

Farm to School Network

The [National Farm to School Network](#) (NFSN) empowers children and their families to make informed food choices while strengthening the local economy and contributing to vibrant communities. NFSN provides vision, leadership and support at the state, regional and national levels to connect and expand the farm to school movement, which according to their data collection, has grown from "a handful of schools in the late 1990s to approximately 42,000 schools in all 50 states as of 2014". Within the mitten, [Michigan Farm to School](#) (MFS) at the [Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems](#) (CRFS) focuses statewide efforts to serve local foods in school, early childcare and education food programs. To learn about specific programs contact Farm to School Specialist Abigail Harper at harperab@anr.msu.edu.

Challenges and Opportunities

In May of 2016, the CRFS released its report [MI Farm to School Grant Program: The First Three Years](#) noting influences and barriers to local food purchasing as well as product ranking, funding opportunity and advice for programming. Findings indicated that across the state the top motivating factors for local procurement were supporting the local economy, helping MI farms, offering access to fresher food and that of higher quality as well as increasing student consumption of fruits and vegetables. At the same time, findings also indicated that many cafeterias find sourcing seasonally a barrier, run into budget constraints, find federal and state procurement regulation to also be a barrier and lack enough local regional producers to meet demand.

Addressing this through fall of 2016, the MFS will offer trainings to support sourcing, seasonal menu development, provide lessons from school champions and practical tools to initiate or expand programming. Primary audiences for these information sessions include food and/or nutrition directors, early childhood program and school teachers and staff as well as those in supporting roles for farm to school. These trainings are free and to be held:

September 20, 2016 – Boyne Falls Public School, Boyne Falls

September 22, 2016 – Baxter Community Development Center, Grand Rapids

September 27, 2016 – Drew Farms at Detroit Public Schools, Detroit

Healthy Food Access to Combat Lead Poisoning

Within Mid-Michigan, the [Michigan Farmer's Market Association](#) and the CRFS recently announced a new local food procurement grant opportunity that will support up to \$2,000 to purchase and provide local, nutritious product to food programs that serve children in Flint affected by the water crisis including: summer food service program sites, early childcare centers, and licensed group children care homes and schools or programming participating in National School Lunch Program and Child and Adult Care Food Program. The [US Environmental Protection Agency](#) recommends iron, calcium and vitamin C-rich foods to [protect youth from lead poisoning](#) such as lean red meats, dairy, green leafy vegetables and plenty of fruits. A commitment of \$20,000 is available for these grant awards, please see the application now available online here: http://foodsystems.msu.edu/activity/farm_to_school/mi-fts-grant.

Connecting Intention with Product in Lansing

With so many varying factors and requirements to be taken into account from budget, volume and regulations to food safety practices, logistics and more, sometimes the local food system supply chain can become a tangled web without dedicated farm to school staffing. Therefore, [One-Community Consulting](#), [Michigan State University Eli Broad College of Business Executive MBA](#) Class of 2017 and the MSU [Product Center](#) are working together to develop a model for the [Lansing School District](#) (LSD) to source healthy, fresh and affordable product through the [Allen Market Place](#) as a

gateway to many small and mid-sized producers within the Tri-County area. Beginning with schools on the north side of Lansing (a designated USDA Food Desert) this project will look at sourcing, staffing and distribution to make farm to school a reality scalable to serve all LSD cafeterias over the course of several years. For additional information on this and other farm to school updates, please contact One-Community Consulting founder, Mary ZumBrunnen at mary.zumbrunnen@gmail.com or call (810) 553-7389 for more information.