



How Would the Farm to School Grant Program Work?

Background: The 2004 Child Nutrition Act included one provision on Farm to School (section 122): a seed grant program with \$10 million in discretionary funding that failed to receive an appropriation. In this Child Nutrition Reauthorization, the National Farm to School Network requests that **Congress enact \$50 million in mandatory funding for section 122.** This could fund 100-500 projects per year up to \$100,000 to cover start-up costs for Farm to School programs.

DIGGING DEEPER:

1. What is Farm to School?

Local foods salad bar, harvest of the month nutrition activities, and garden based learning are a few ingredients. Farm to School enables every child to have access to nutritious food while simultaneously benefiting communities and local farmers. In addition to supplying nourishing, locally grown and produced food in schools, Farm to School programs offer nutrition and agriculture education through taste tests, school gardens, composting programs, and farm tours.

2. What is the Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR)?

The Child Nutrition Act determines what kids eat in school. The current Child Nutrition Act expires September 30, 2009, meaning it's up for reauthorization, and in that process we have a chance to really improve on how food for our smallest citizens is funded, sourced, defined, and prioritized.

3. Why is federal funding in the CNR necessary for Farm to School?

USDA data has shown that only 2% of children meet the Food Guide Pyramid serving recommendations. This lack of nutritious food has fueled the childhood obesity epidemic where now one out of three children is obese or overweight. These children, which are more likely to be from minority groups, are now developing diseases in childhood, such as Type 2 Diabetes, high blood pressure, and high blood lipids before only seen in adults.

Farm to School programs can improve children's health and help alleviate these conditions. Programs have shown to increase children's consumption of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains - the building blocks of children's health. Kids eat more healthy foods because local farm fresh foods taste better than highly processed foods. Kids also eat more healthy foods because Farm to School programs often have school gardens and education curriculums coinciding with the foods served in the cafeteria. And finally, the foods the children are eating more will have increased nutrient levels because they are harvested locally at optimal ripeness with little transportation or storage time.

More than 30 million children eat school food five days a week, 180 days a year. If school food can improve the health of kids, develop new marketing opportunities for farmers, and support the local economy, it's a win-win for everyone.

4. What's in this for farmers?

Farm to School programs can open up the expansive school food market, estimated at more than \$10 billion per year, to local farmers. Did you know that farmers and ranchers receive only 20 cents of every food dollar that consumers spend on food? In Farm to School programs, the farmer return may be 60 to 75 cents of each procurement dollar.

5. How would the Farm to School grant process work?

The details of the grant process are in the development phase. At this point in time, the matching grants will be awarded on a competitive basis cognizant of regional balance and equitable treatment of urban, rural, and Tribal communities through three types: 1) implementation, 2) training and technical assistance, or 3) planning grant. The award shall not exceed \$100,000 for an implementation or training and technical assistance grant and \$25,000 for a planning grant.

6. What could the money be used for?

These competitive, one-time grants are intended to assist in developing a sustainable Farm to School program. For example, the funds could be used to develop vendor relationships with nearby farmers, plan seasonal menus and promotional materials, start a school garden, or develop hands-on nutrition education to demonstrate the important interrelationship of nutrition and agriculture. The proposed projects should aim to:

- ⇒ Make local food products available on the school menu
- ⇒ Benefit local small and medium-sized farms
- ⇒ Incorporate experiential nutrition education
- ⇒ Serve schools and eligible institutions with a high proportion of children who are eligible for free and reduced price lunches
- ⇒ Demonstrate collaboration between schools or institutions, non-governmental and community-based organizations, farmer groups, and other community partners
- ⇒ Demonstrate the potential for long-term program sustainability

7. Who can apply?

Schools and non profit government entities may apply for the federal money.

8. Why do we need a federal Farm to School grant program if these programs are already happening successfully?

There are over 2,000 programs in 40 states, but the degree to which schools are able to participate in Farm to School programs varies greatly, based on resources, local knowledge and existing funding. Most schools require assistance from a community organization or government entity, like a state department of agriculture, to facilitate Farm to School programs. This is especially true for larger school districts. While a few schools (roughly 11% in the U.S.) are currently conducting some local purchasing, many of these are fledgling efforts in need of further resources and information in order to be effective.

9. Doesn't the Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program cover this?

The focus of the Community Food Projects (CFP) grant program, which is seriously underfunded, is the overall community food environment. The CFP grant program only funds 15 – 25% of proposals received in any give year.

10. What groups support Farm to School?

Major health groups like American Public Health Association as well as nutrition groups like Child Nutrition Forum, Share our Strength, School Nutrition Association, and the Congressional Hunger Center are supportive of the Farm to School approach. Agricultural groups, such as the United Fresh Produce Association support Farm to School as well.

******GET INVOLVED******

Join the Network! Register on the www.farmtoschool.org website to be notified of funding opportunities, events, policy, and more. Contact us at info@farmtoschool.org.