

## Connecting Farm to School with Local Food Campaigns

Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project – Peter Marks

### Take-home message

Farm to School programs are positioned to better grow and thrive when they are in places where local farms have broad community support and there are strong connections between farms and local consumers. A Local Food Campaign is any effort to create these conditions. If you are trying to build a Farm to School program “in a vacuum,” you may struggle. It may be worthwhile or necessary to step back and work with others in your community on broader Local Food Campaign activities.

### Four questions to ask about your program and your community’s readiness to support farm to school

- 1. Do people in your community think about where their food is grown? If not, try these ideas:**
  - Create a bumper sticker or other simple message-bearer that gets people to consider the source of their food.
  - Work with local radio to do a weekly report on what’s fresh from local farms, and tell farm stories.
  - Generate a press release to newspapers/TV each month highlighting a farm that is offering product for local purchase. Collaborate with local retailers, cooperative extension, or farmer groups to identify appropriate content.
  - No more Wal-Mart party trays: whenever you hold an event of any kind, buy food from local farms (or ask the grocers or caterers to buy from local farms) and tell attendees where the food came from. Make this feature part of any media or calendar coverage of the event.
- 2. Do you know how food is distributed to schools and other businesses in your community? Do distributors currently carry locally-grown products? If not, try these ideas:**
  - Build relationships with restaurants and institutions (schools, hospitals, nursing homes, etc.) and ask them where they buy food. See if they share a common interest in sourcing locally-grown food.
  - Try to understand these distributors’ willingness and capacity to buy from local farmers. Make them part of your farm to school planning process and support them in the work it takes them to carry more locally-grown products: you can’t do it without them.
- 3. Do you know what is grown in your community, and whether there are farmers interested in reaching new markets? If not, try these ideas:**
  - Meet with cooperative extension, farm bureau, or other producer groups. Talk. Many farms are not well set-up to interact with schools and (if they are interested) need to learn how to adjust/adapt to make this possible.
  - Understand the differences between small farms and mid-size farms, and the different ways to work with them.
- 4. For a person in your community interested in buying locally-grown food, or even just visiting a farm, is it easy to find out where and how to do this? If not, try these ideas:**
  - Ask local “what to do” publications and websites to list farm destinations, farmers’ markets, and relevant events.
  - Support creation of a Local Food Guide in your area, and/or help ensure that local farms, markets, and businesses are listed in a regional or national Guide, and that any paper version is distributed in your community.
  - When you bring farmers to your school or schoolkids to a farm or farmers’ market, publicize this widely so that the general public learns about these people and destinations.

### Some resources for building Local Food Campaigns:

#### National

Buy Fresh Buy Local [www.foodroutes.org](http://www.foodroutes.org) A national network of local chapters sharing campaign materials and strategies.

Eat Well Guide [www.eatwellguide.org](http://www.eatwellguide.org) A national online directory of local farms, markets, and businesses.

## Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project

Book: *Where Does Your Food Come From? Recipes for Communicating Effectively about American Agriculture.* [foodroutes.org](http://foodroutes.org)

### **Regional**

Local Food Directories [attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/localfood\\_dir.php](http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/localfood_dir.php) List of local food directories, searchable by state. Many in the southeast. Most will lead you back to an organization running a local food campaign of some kind.

ASAP offers consulting on building local food campaigns.

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