

Community FARE (Food.Advocacy.Resources.Education) & Frederick County Public Schools, Farm to School



Planning Team Kick-Off Meeting

Date: Wednesday, November 7th, 2018

Location: FCC – The Monroe Center

200 Monroe Avenue

Frederick, MD 21701

SUMMARY NOTES

History of F2S – Karen Fedor. Maryland Department of Agriculture.

- In 2009 the MD Farm to School Program began. It has expanded into school gardens and education programs.
- Maryland ranks 9th in the country for local products in school meals.
- We encourage Food Directors to work with Food Distributors to put LOCAL in purchasing contracts.
- Region-wide there is an active F2S program. It comes down to price point.
- MD Homegrown Lunch Week in September is a partnership with Maryland Department of Education.
- Farm to School programs vary widely.
- Some school systems process in school kitchens in summer months and freeze to use during school year.
- DC buys more local food because they have more money to buy local food. They used a (plastic) Bag Tax to fund food and two positions for a Farm to School Coordinator and Farm to School Program Director.
- An ongoing challenge is making the connection from cafeteria to the classroom.
- Are there any resources in that network to help farmers? Yes, there will be a big grant to help train farmers coming out soon. Farmer's operations are so varied. They need to talk directly to the buyer for specifics. It's the relationship that builds between farmer and buy. In MD it's up to each school to figure out what works.

Frederick County F2S

- **Steve** – Once we get the kids involved, and they see where the food is grown, it creates excitement. Seeing the kids relate and learn about food is a great experience.
- **Janice** – 90% of our food is outside of Frederick County. Only .06% of acres are fruits and vegetables. Community FARE is focused on accessing institutions. Challenges: Cropland to produce enough fruits and vegetables. Distribution of food from local farmers. We need to start small. We learned in our Feasibility Study that if Farmers had access to markets then they would produce more.
- **Alysia** – Shared the 2018/2019 Planning Grant Goals and Objectives. We need to do this well for 5 schools and in the process be thinking about how we can scale this work up to cover the FCPS District. We are talking to other Districts and learning best practices and tips.

Data Walk –

- **FCPS Demographic Data:**
 - Where did you get the FARM %? Answer: From each schools' school profile found on the FCPS website.
 - How many schools have cooking facilities? Answer: All schools have heat and serve capabilities.
 - What are the typical cooking facilities in schools? Answer: We will tour a kitchen at our next meeting.
 - Why isn't Food Pro engaged in this? Answer: Will talk to FCPS and inquire.

- **FCPS Menu Data:**
 - A lot of processed foods (and too much sugar). **(4 counts)**
 - A lot of packaging, trash, styrofoam lunch trays. **(2 counts)**
 - How much is composted? Can you feed to pigs? What is the volume of food waste? **(2 counts).**
 - I see very limited variety. Is that all the kids' want?
 - Are these "cups" of fruits?
 - How does FCPS handle foods and product storage?
 - Define 'scratch' cooking. Could this be increased? Is it a training issue? Or equipment and time? How about "speed scratch"?
- **Local and Non-Local Charts:**
 - I'm surprised greens are so much more than other vegetable purchases because they seem the most perishable and not as popular for kids?
 - How fast does FCPS pay? Is it fast enough for farmers?
 - March, April and May is a tough to produce in this region.
 - It would be interesting to know more about production cost of foods? For example water and workers needed to grow specific foods?
 - Are the tomatoes purchased as fresh or processed as sauce? Answer: They are not processed as sauce.
 - FCPS should define "local" in produce RFP. Answer: Definitely. FCPS is working on this.
 - Seasonality Chart should be in classrooms. Answer: Will include with Garden projects.
- **UMD EXT Small Farm Data:**
 - We aren't growing nearly enough.
 - Local food is limited by local labor.
 - FYI: Federal regulations for nursing homes allow food from gardens and includes some basic guidelines.
 - I know of one state that offers local incentives, for example Kentucky. This state offers tax credits. I don't know if there is incentive for not for profit.

Panel Discussion -

- **Tony Brusco – South Mountain Creamery CEO**
 - Building a business from the ground up takes time. What are some of the most important factors that has led to your success? Luck. Good timing. We kept grinding at it. Stories picked up on us. The 'Buy Local' market picked up. We work with 150-200 farmers each year.
 - How do you build relationships with farmers? Farmers are looking for the money right away. If they grow it, we will pay for it, we will sell it. You must build a reputation. Our network needs to be strong. We just started partnering with a local school in PA. The school was trying to find local farm foods. We agreed to partner with them to learn from it and see if it's something we can actually do.
- **Janice Wiles – Community FARE and Farm to School Director**
 - Are there any policies that would facilitate having more local foods in the schools? Yes, Strive for 25. If a school district buys 25% of NY State farm food, they get 25 cents per every meal that they sell.
 - What about food grown in school yard gardens? Can students eat the foods they grow in the school cafeteria? We need to learn more about foods grown in a school gardens.
- **Steve O'Brey – FCPS Procurement Coordinator**
 - There are many reasons to buy locally grown foods. What do you believe are the advantages of offering local foods in the school meals? The economic impact of buying locally and giving money back to the local farmer is a huge benefit. We'd love to buy it. We want to support the county and the local economy.
 - How hard will it be to push the mindset and buy local? In Harford County a farmer went from going to Baltimore daily to sell his produce to selling to the schools. It became a consistent sell, reduced the time he spent on the road and the money spent on fuel to go up and down the highway. We have to find ways here in Frederick County to support the school and our needs and the farmer and their needs.

- What do you think are the biggest challenges for prepping and serving local foods? We don't have the labor hours available to receive whole cases of broccoli and cut them and bag them, for each school in a timely manner. In Detroit an entrepreneur did a farm to freezer business to meet those processing needs between the farms and the schools.
- **Bob Black – Owner Catoctin Mountain Orchard**
 - Why did you go the extra mile to partner with FCPS? It works for me because the farmer has to be profitable or the farmer will not be here. FCPS put a video of us picking apples on their website. It was great marketing for us. We adapted our apples to grow smaller apples based on what the dietitian said they needed. An apple is the most versatile fruit that there is. Broccoli and tomatoes are harder to do.
 - What has been your biggest success or reward in doing this work? We gave FCPS Gala apples with a weekly delivery. We increased consumption because we gave them something good to eat. Those kids will hopefully be my customers for years after leaving the school system. With the schools we're able to get more sales. People aren't buying bushels of apples like they had in the past, so the schools are another market. We have a variety of apples to expose kids to. The kids are going to remember the logo and where they get the apple from. There are ways to specify in a bid the desire for local foods.
 - Are you organically certified? Our farm follows Integrated Pest Management practices.
- **Elizabeth DeRose – FCC Hospitality, Culinary & Tourism Institute Manager**
 - What types of farm to school opportunities have you included in your culinary curriculum? We partner with Hungary Harvest, a local CSA for farm foods and we work them into our curriculum. We also focus on teaching students social responsibility; understanding food waste and food security. We help students figure out what their role is with food? We offer cooking camps too. Our students can become advocates for the F2S program.
 - How do you see FCC fitting into this FCPS F2S initiative? We can provide skills training and education to FCPS staff on how to prepare foods. We can show them shortcuts for cooking methods; how to cook and prepare foods quickly. Also, we know how to build that excitement. We are great at growing excitement about the programs and building traction for students and families. We can facilitate fun activities (like apple pies with sampling stations) that also offer education. We partner well with restaurants and farmers and chefs. We bring students to farms. We see ourselves as a connector!

On the Wall Questions and End of Meeting Questions –

In one word or two, why are you interested in participating in the Farm to School initiative?

- Connect kids to food. Education. **(5 counts)**
- Health. Inspire kids to eat more plants for healthier diets. **(4 counts)**
- Connect kids to farming **(2 counts)**
- Local foods are the best quality foods and best tasting!
- Creating access to market for farmers.

What are your best tips for encouraging students to take and eat more fruits and veggies in schools?

1. Education in classrooms. (Teachers are busy. How do we do this?) **(2 counts)**
2. Parent Education. Connect from home to school. Translate surveys into Spanish. **(2 counts)**
3. Hands-on gardening activities. **(2 counts)**
4. Color! Bright, vibrant visuals. Taste with their eyes. **(2 counts)**
5. Farm field trips. **(2 counts)**
6. Only offer healthy whole foods. Menu planning. New recipes. **(2 counts)**
7. Getting creative with fun names, for example, 'tasty tree tops' for broccoli, x-ray vision carrots.
8. Weekly food events. Monthly food events.
9. Sliced produce. Offer with dips.
10. Make sampler plates. Offer variety. Food tastings.

11. Cooking lessons.
12. Find a celebrity or sports figure to endorse. Make it fun!
13. Incorporate into foods. For example, smoothies, quesadillas, omelets, burritos, pizza.
14. Mountainside Education and Enrichment can produce in school lessons on “harvest” as well as field trips. We have buses and drivers.

What do you believe are the biggest challenges for schools to partner with farmers?

1. Cost **(3 counts)**
2. Finding the right farmer with to meet needs **(2 counts)**
3. Writing menus without knowing what be or may not be available
4. Skill level of FCPS cafeteria staff
5. Seasonal availability
6. Lack of coordination
7. No cooking in cafeterias
8. Everything has to be packaged
9. Ability to further process foods

What do you believe are the biggest challenges for farmers to partner with FCPS schools?

1. Cost **(3 counts)**
2. Volume **(3 counts)**
3. Seasonality of crops **(3 counts)**
4. Logistics of aggregation for smaller farmers. Regulations and Certifications. Packaging.
5. Forecasting. Labor. Weather challenges.

To you, what are the most important components that should be included in a thriving F2S Program?

1. FCPS needs to understand Farmers’ challenges, offer flexibility (e.g. product, quantity, time, price.) **(3 counts)**
2. Getting students and parents excited (e.g. Kids and Parents need to like the product.)
3. Collaboration and Communication.
4. Benefits to students! Benefits to Community!
5. School gardens should be a feather in the cap of a school principal.

What aspects of F2S do we really need to think about deeply when considering program sustainability?

1. Educating students and their families about local foods **(2 counts)**
2. Simplifying logistics. What does FCPS need? What do Farmers’ need?
3. Building relationships between farmers and the schools.
4. How can we keep money in it so farmers can grow and thrive?
5. Seasonality.
6. Cost of packaging and shipping.

What are the partnership opportunities that we might not have considered?

- Hood College
- Mount St. Mary’s
- Local businesses – FCB and Plamondon