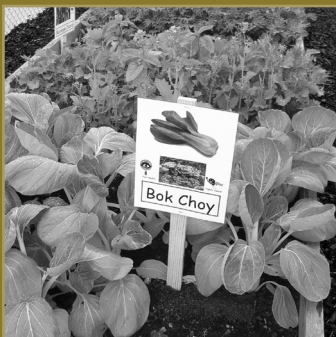


The Impacts of **Farm to School** **Programming** on Students and Communities



WASHINGTON STATE
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Background

Daily fresh fruit and vegetable intake is essential for the health and growth of children. The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act was implemented in 2010. This act opened the door to educate and encourage students to eat the fruits and vegetables that are now required on their school lunch trays. It also provides funding for Farm-to-School (FTS) efforts across the nation. FTS programs promote and serve locally produced food in school cafeterias and provide viable markets for local producers. Many FTS programs work to increase fresh fruit and vegetable intake with impressive results.¹

Public Health Impacts

FTS activities aim to provide children and their families equitable access to healthy, local food and food education. Such access and knowledge can empower children to maintain and improve their health and well-being.

- Local foods incorporated into the school food environment, along with experiential nutrition and agricultural education helps build healthy cultural attitudes about food.
- Access to healthy, local foods can potentially play a role in helping to prevent chronic diseases.³
- Families may be encouraged to grow, safely prepare and cook healthy foods on their own.
- Improvement of school meals can have a direct impact on a child's health; for many, school meals may be their only meals consumed throughout the day.
- FTS activities can strengthen the school nutrition program's efforts to address child and family food insecurity by increasing interest in school meal programs.

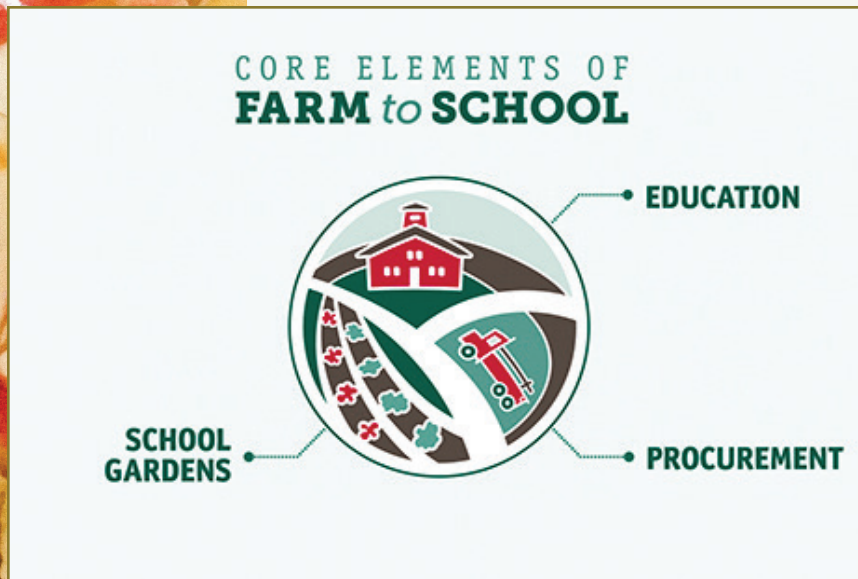
FTS programs improve healthy food choices for children.

- FTS programs increase child interest and willingness to try and eat new vegetables.^{4,5}
- Elementary students participating in FTS programs increase their daily intake of fruits and vegetables.⁶
- Students from low income schools showed better recall of healthy food choices after a visit from a mobile farmers market.⁷

Educational Impacts

In an evaluation framework publication for FTS, educational research was reviewed, and the following outcomes were found.⁸ FTS programs:

- Enhance schools' curricular, physical and social learning environments;⁹⁻¹¹
- Increase students' knowledge of specific content areas and promote academic and cognitive skills such as inquiry, critical thinking, ordering and communication;¹²
- Support student social and emotional development such as motivation, improve students' attitudes toward school and learning,^{8,9,13,14} increase student engagement and reduce absenteeism;¹⁰
- Potentially increase test scores and general achievement;^{13,15,16,17,18,19-22}
- Increase achievement in science, math, botany, ecology, nutrition or food systems content areas;^{11,14,17,20,23-28}
- Improve student and teacher knowledge and attitudes about foods;^{13,29-38}
- Garden learning environments and outdoor green spaces could provide temporary reduction in behavioral disorder symptoms.³⁹⁻⁴²



Social Capitol Impacts

“Community connectedness” allows a society to function effectively, builds trust, unity and reduces social isolation and stress.⁴³ The social capital created from FTS Programs helps:

- Build communal skills, self-confidence, esteem and work ethic of youth;^{6, 17, 26-28, 42}
- Serve as an entry point to encourage parent engagement with schools through visits to district school farms and school gardens.³⁸
- Foster relationships and develop trust among food growers, processors and buyers. These relationships encourage economic development, create community pride, increase fruit and vegetable consumption and support farmer and processor development of professional, social and economic skills.⁴⁴
- “Support of local farmers” is a primary benefit of FTS Programs which helps provide economic viability for farmers, aids the local economy, enhances public relations, and improves food quality and family meal preparation.⁴⁴

Community Economic Development Impacts

In a 2016, Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) Farm to School Survey, school districts cited, “School meal programs supporting the local economy,” as the top benefit of engagement in FTS Activities. \$17,440,300 has been invested in local food in Washington with an average school district spending 9% their budget on local products. School spending on local food, stimulates over \$1 billion in local economic activity.⁴⁵

The state of Oregon provides an example of how to maximize FTS economic benefits. A research review and economic analysis of the Oregon House Bill (HB) 2800 (funding for FTS purchasing and nutrition education) found that FTS funds would:⁴³

- Create and maintain jobs for residents.
- Increase student participation in school meal programs.
- Improve household security.
- Strengthen connections within the state’s food economy.

Additional support from the following agencies make FTS efforts easier to enact:

- National—The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Services (FNS)
- Washington State—The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) FTS Program
- Pierce County—FTS Work Group, part of the Puyallup Watershed Initiative (PWI)



Recommendations

Schools and their communities benefit when they optimize support for FTS, district school farms, and school gardens. To increase capacity for this:

1. Hire a coordinator to facilitate procurement from local farmers.
2. Encourage and support local farms in Pierce County to meet school district buying practices such as Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Training.
3. Create opportunities for School District Nutrition Services Directors to engage with local farmers.
4. Provide parent education about FTS to increase participation in school lunch programs.
5. Provide education to students in the classroom and lunchroom to encourage fresh, healthy, local food choices for lunch.
6. Seek funding to subsidize the purchase of local food.
7. Develop clear policy for use of school garden produce in school cafeterias.

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