

Farm to School Strategic Plan

Overall Program Goal: Having product produced and/or harvested in Alaska available in the school food environment and youth in a position to take advantage of it.

Objective: Increase the procurement and use of food grown in the state by public schools

The success of farm to school programs nationwide is dependent on the flexibility of the program to meet the diverse needs of the geography, community, and culture within a given state. Places with such extreme climatic and geographic conditions like Alaska need to be especially creative and resourceful while promoting Alaska's unique agricultural bounty.

How do we define Farm to School in Alaska?

The Farm to School Program (FTSP) in Alaska includes any activity that connects students, teachers, and the school food service with product grown and produced in Alaska. This includes, but is not limited to, increasing Alaska grown food sales to the school meal programs, providing information for school garden development, promoting Alaska Agriculture in the Classroom curriculum/education, participation in programs that educate youth about the food system, promoting farm visits, facilitating discussion between school food service and food producers, state-wide contests promoting farm to school activities, harvest of the month promotions, resource / marketing development, and regional meat / fish to school efforts.

Alaska's FTSP is housed within the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Agriculture, and collaborates with a number of state and university agencies: the Department of Health and Social Services, the Department of Education & Early Development, the Cooperative Extension Service, and the Department of Administration. The Alaska FTSP has an advisory committee, consisting of members from these departments, who will serve as the task force.

The strategic plan is an important part of developing a direction for the program and a good way to introduce collaborators and stakeholders to the program's goals and the types of activities that will be pursued. A timeline for the initial roll out of the FTSP strategic plan is below:

March 4th: Send introductory email to collaborators

March 11th: Send draft strategic plan to collaborators for feedback

March 25th: Deadline to receive comments on strategic plan

April 24th: Have a press release for Farm to School Summit

April 26th: Present the strategic plan for public input at Farm to School Summit

It will be important to revisit the strategic plan. We propose that after the advisory group and task force is identified, there be a monthly teleconference to assess progress toward the goals and areas of need. To effectively address the strategic plan, advisory members will be

assigned involvement on key tasks, the Farm to School Coordinator will be the lead on the overall movement of the plan. A farm to school listserv will be created to keep all stakeholders informed of activities and events.

The strategic plan draft has been developed in collaboration with Information Insights, Sylvan Robb, and guided by House Bill 70 legislation that funded the FTSP. The goals reflect the tasks outlined in the legislation and the wording for those tasks has been highlighted as objectives.

Goal #1: Having statewide data about schools and districts engaged in Farm to School activities for baseline and ongoing evaluation

Objective: Establish an accurate baseline assessment of Farm to School in the state and the capacity for potential growth of the program

Task 1: Conduct the Farm to School census survey in Alaska utilizing the National Farm to School Network (NFSN) census survey developed by NFSN in collaboration with the USDA Economic Research Service

- Who: Farm to School Coordinator and Child Nutrition Services (CNS) program coordinators
- When: start--April 1, 2011, complete—TBA deadline from NFSN
- Measurement: 80% response rate from Alaska school districts
- Barriers: Getting responses from school districts, timing of district staff availability, and making sure the survey reaches all the right people.
- Assumptions: This survey will measure Farm to School activity in Alaska. That districts care about FTS and will complete the survey.

Task 2: Gather data from various stakeholders on descriptive characteristics Alaska has or does not have to facilitate utilization of Alaska grown or produced foods

- Who: Division of Agriculture (DoAg) staff, Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) staff, and CNS program coordinators
- When: start--April 1, 2011, complete—January 2013
- Measurement: Data collected from 80% of school districts, 4 distributors, 4 processors, and 5 food producers
- Barriers: Interviewees having sufficient time to talk, interviewer having sufficient time to conduct interviews, cooperation of stakeholders and their willingness to share potentially proprietary information
- Assumptions: That these interviews will yield a representative sample for Alaska and that these interviews will accurately identify facilitators and barriers to utilizing Alaska grown and produced foods.

Goal #2: Having necessary resources and tools to facilitate the availability of Alaska grown or produced foods in the school food environment

Objective 1: Coordinate with school procurement officials, buying cooperatives, and other appropriate organizations to develop uniform procurement policies and procedures as well as materials and practical recommendations to facilitate the procurement and use by public schools of product produced and/or harvested in Alaska; these policies, procedures, materials, and recommendations shall be made available to school districts to adopt at their discretion (HB 70, AS 03.20.100, Section 2, Article 2, b. 1)

Objective 2: Assist producers, harvesters, distributors, and food brokers in marketing food grown in the state to public schools by informing school districts of food procurement opportunities, bid procedures, purchasing criteria, and other relevant requirements (HB 70, AS 03.20.100, Section 2, Article 2, b. 2)

Objective 3: Assist public schools in connecting with local producers and harvesters, by informing the schools of the resources and availability product produced and/or harvested in the state (HB 70, AS 03.20.100, Section 2, Article 2, b. 3)

Task 1: Create a resource guide for schools that includes relevant information for use of school garden or local produce in school meals.

- Who: Farm to School Coordinator, advisory committee, regulatory agencies, and professional contracted services
- When: start--May 1, 2011, complete--June 1, 2011
- Measurement: When guide is distributed to all school districts
- Barriers: Advisory committee response time, covering new ground—may require approval through channels
- Assumptions: Schools want, need and will use resource guide

Task 2: Annually increase of two school or community gardens state-wide. The FTSP will assist with the planning phase, toolkit, and resource / curriculum development. FTSP will pilot a 'Garden to Cafeteria' project.

- Who: DoAg, two schools that apply for the project, CES, and CNS
- When: start--mid-May 2011, complete--August 2011 harvest
- Measurement: Successfully starting 2 gardens a year that include the necessary components. Toolkit made for how to get a school garden going, including a garden to cafeteria section.
- Barriers: Time, expertise, financial resources, and administrative support.

- Assumptions: Schools and kids will benefit from a garden, there will be adequate people to take care of it, and there will be willingness in community and school.

Task 3: Inform stakeholders of available resources to facilitate connections and assist with process. Information and assistance will be provided at conferences, through student projects, and as requested.

- Who: Farm to School Coordinator, advisory group, and potential graduate student
- When: start--April 1, 2011, complete--ongoing
- Measurement: 20 profiles created and number of collaborations started from resources
- Barriers: Cooperation of stakeholders and their willingness to share potentially proprietary information
- Assumptions: Resources will be used by stakeholders.

Task 4: Kick off the 2011-12 school year with *Seasonal Harvest* pilot project in the Mat-Su school district featuring produce from the Mat-Su valley farms. Provide marketing materials and curriculum to schools in the district and develop a media plan with the student.

- Who: DOAG, graduate student, food producers, school food service professionals
- When: start--mid-May 2011, complete--kick-off done by October 2011
- Measurement: Participation rates by students on days that items are featured, 'seasonal harvest' road-map development, and agricultural stats from participating farms
- Barriers: Marketing and educating target audience and logistics of supply, purchase, and incorporation of featured items
- Assumptions: Farmers want to sell to schools. Kids will eat it.
- Example: Student from Occidental College pursuing \$10,000 fellowship to help with *Harvest of the Month* and community engagement work

Task 5: Conduct at least two training workshops for stakeholders; food producers and school food service professionals. For the agricultural food producers a good agricultural practices (GAP) / good handling practices (GHP) certification workshops and for school food service training for handling fresh product.

Who: DOAG staff, contractor, school food service and agriculture producers

- When: start--May 1, 2011, complete--December 31, 2011
- Measurement: At least two workshops with at least three farms represented and five school food service staff
- Barriers: Expertise, availability of trainer/presenter, farmers' interest, and school food service interest.
- Assumption: Farmers want to know more about GAP/GHP certification and school food service want to learn how -to incorporate and handle fresh product.

Goal #3: Strengthened relationships between food producers/harvesters and school food services

Objective 1: Identify and recommend mechanisms that will increase the predictability of sales for producers and the adequacy of supply for purchasers (HB 70, AS 03.20.100, Section 2, Article 2, b. 4)

Task 1: Conduct tours of school food facilities for farmers and farm tours for school food service professionals in five regions (two of which will be rural)

- Who: Farm to School Coordinator , various farmers, various school food service professionals, Director of the Division of Agriculture
- When: start--March 7, 2011 complete—May 2012
- Measurement: Five school districts, five participating farms
- Barriers: Different communication styles, people have time to participate, weather, travel
- Assumptions: This will increase communication and facilitate Alaska food procurement by schools.

Task 2: Create a summary document about product needs, product availability, and priority needs to accomplish a match between the two.

- Who: Farm to School Coordinator, advisory committee, school food service professionals, and Alaska producers and harvesters.
- When: start—March 7, 2011, complete—August 1, 2011
- Measurement: Collecting product availability forms from 20 food producers and product need forms from 20 school food service professionals.
- Barriers: Food producers and school food service staff having enough time to provide input.

- Assumptions: Understanding availability and needs will lead to more food being sold to the schools. The summary document will reveal information that will help overcome the barriers preventing in state food sales. Schools will be able to afford the foods, producers will want to sell to the schools, and kids will benefit from eating food produced in state.

Task 3: Hold tri-annual (January, April, and October) in-person and web based FTS summits in various locations

- Who Farm to School Coordinator, Division of Agriculture (DoAg) staff, and all interested stakeholders (e.g., school districts, food producers, state employees, university, and community advocates)
- When: start--January 2011, complete—June 2013
- Measurement: Number of attendees, increased participation over time (number of attendees), and number of summits held
- Barriers: Technology, seasonality of key stakeholders scheduled, weather
- Assumptions: People want these and find them useful and the meetings will facilitate networking among stakeholders.

Goal #4: Increased awareness of nutritional, environmental, and economic benefits of product grown and harvested in Alaska and that the FTSP is a networking hub for interested stakeholders

Objective 1: Assist public schools in connecting with local producers, by informing the schools of the nutritional, environmental and economic benefits of purchasing the product produced and harvested in the state (HB 70, AS 03.20.100, Section 2, Article 2, b. 3)

Objective 2: Identify and make available to public schools existing curricula, programs, and publications that educate students on the nutritional, environmental, and economic benefits of preparing and consuming product produced and harvested in the state (HB 70, AS 03.20.100, Section 2, Article 2, b. 5)

Objective 3: Support efforts to advance other FTS activities, including school gardens, school farms, and farm visits (HB 70, AS 03.20.100, Section 2, Article 2, b.6)

Task 1: Connect stakeholders and serve as a resource and information center

While the majority of this activity will be in response to requests, there are a number of activities FTS will promote. A list of these types of activities is below.

Sample activities:

1. Promoting Farm to School at the Alaska State Fair and regional fairs through a booth showing product produced and harvested in Alaska, offering samples, and soliciting feedback
2. Connecting master gardeners with school garden projects
3. Back to school promotion featuring local farmers through the *Know Your Farmer* program
4. Connecting interested parties for school garden tours for teachers, *Garden to Cafeteria* promotion, resource promotion
5. Promoting the *Agriculture in the Classroom* curriculum and program
6. Promoting indoor agriculture activities in schools
7. Present at conferences such as: Association of School Business Officers, Principals conference, Wellness Institute, AKSNA, and school nurses

- Who: DoAg staff and requestors
- When: start—January 2011, complete—June 2013

- Measurement: Networking -- resource and information distribution to 50 groups or individuals, FTS article in two-thirds of DoAg newsletters, 20 presentations about FTS, contact database of 200 individuals
- Barriers: FTS staff time is limited
- Assumptions: That people are utilizing the connections and information provided.

Task 2: Create a resource guide adapted from Vermont FEED publication *How Do We Feed Vermont's School Children* for schools, parents, and the general public

- Who: Potential graduate student, DoAg, and CNS
- When: start--when student is available, complete--TBA
- Measurement: Completed when guide is available for distribution
- Barriers: Manpower and pending regulations which change the information to be shared
- Assumptions: That there is interest in and desire for this publication

Task 3: Create fact sheets/talking points to educate for schools, parents, the general public about the benefits of using products produced and/or harvested in schools

- Who: Potential graduate student, DoAg, CNS, and DEC
- When: start--when student is available, complete--TBA
- Measurement: Completed when guide is available for distribution
- Barriers: Manpower
- Assumptions: That there is interest in and desire for this publication

Goal #5: Enhance program through grants and funding for state Farm to School program

Objective 1: As resources allow, seek additional funding to leverage state expenditures for the program (HB 70, AS 03.20.100, Section 2, Article 2, b.7)

Task 1: Apply for grants and help other stakeholders apply for grants.

- Who: DoAg staff and collaborators
- When: start—January 2011, complete—June 2013
- Measurement: If grants are awarded
- Barriers: Manpower, grant writing talent, availability of grants FTS qualifies for
- Assumptions: FTS is worth supporting

Task 2: Create a Farm to School Grant program that will provide funds to existing farm to school efforts around the state.

- Who: DOAG staff and applicants
- When: start—June 2011, complete—June 2013
- Measurement: Number of applicants, number of students reached, and amount of money used for resources that support farm to school efforts.
- Barriers: If funds for the program can be utilized in that way, informing stakeholders about grant opportunity, and the process of applying for the grant.
- Assumptions: FTS is worth supporting, grant will help existing efforts, and existing efforts want financial support.

Task 3: Utilize money from state agencies that provide funding to the farm to school program.

- Who: TBA
- When: start—January 2011, complete—June 2013
- Measurement: If money is given
- Barriers: Finding use for money on short notice, having staff to utilize the money
- Assumptions: Other state agencies have additional funds that qualify for FTS use and that the agencies think FTS is a good use for those resources
- Example: DHSS has \$5,000 from a CDC grant that it is giving to FTS to utilize