



# Bring Fresh, Local Food to Louisiana Schools

## First Steps

Last year, the state of Louisiana passed a resolution - unanimously - supporting farm-to-school programming in Louisiana schools. While there is no single definition of what a “farm to school” program is, and each individual program may vary based on what makes sense locally, generally, farm-to-school (also known as “F2S”) programs always include one or more of the following:

- Schools offer more local food: Local foods are purchased, promoted and served in the cafeteria or in the classroom for a snack or for taste tests;
- Education: Students participate in educational activities related to agriculture, food, health or nutrition; and/or
- School Gardens: Students engage in hands-on learning through gardening

Last year, our state joined 40 states and the District of Columbia in passing some form of F2S laws. <sup>1</sup>

**It’s a great start, but now in Louisiana, we need to take the next steps!**

## Next Steps

**1. Create and maintain a database of farms and schools able and willing to participate in a F2S program so they can connect with each other!**

Many of Louisiana’s children depend on school meals for their daily nutritional needs.

- 68.2% of Louisiana public school students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.
- In Avoyelles, Claiborne, and Franklin Parishes more than 82% of public schools students are eligible for free or reduced price meals in the National School Lunch Program. <sup>2</sup>

- In Orleans Parish that number increases to 83.8% <sup>3</sup>
- In East Carroll and Tensas Parishes, over 90% of students are eligible for free or reduced meal pricing through the National School Lunch Program <sup>4</sup>
- In the East Baton Rouge school district nearly 100% of their students qualify for free or reduced price meals! <sup>5</sup>

Creating a database that is easy to read and searchable would be a great tool for everyone involved in farm to school programs – those buying the food and those providing the food - to connect with each other easily. Developing a database is easy and inexpensive to do – other states are already doing it, so we have good models to follow. <sup>6</sup>

## **2. Increase what’s known as the “small purchase threshold” to allow Louisiana schools to buy more food from local farmers.**

In Louisiana, our schools have to follow specific rules to buy food. Food above a certain price, known as the “small purchase threshold”, must go through a formal bidding process – allowing food providers to “bid” on how much money they will accept to provide food for a school. Schools are required to take the lowest bid for the food – no matter where it comes from.

This formal bidding process can make it difficult for schools to get seasonal and local foods, because contracts to buy food from a provider are generally awarded by the price of food for a full school year, not by the season. Also, it is often challenging for smaller-scale, local farmers to participate in formal bidding, as it can be difficult and lengthy, with specific paperwork and process requirements.

Louisiana’s small purchase threshold is now only \$25,000 - the federal small purchase threshold is \$150,000. This means that any purchase a school makes larger than \$25,000 is subject to a formal bid. Louisiana needs to increase the small purchase threshold to the federal limit so that schools and school districts and growers and producers can more easily work together in providing food for students in our schools.

**HB 730/SB 184– good for our children, our local economy and our planet!**



### **Good for our children**

1. Louisiana has a population of 805,495 or 17.4%<sup>7</sup> school-aged children, and a rate of 35.9% are over-weight or obese<sup>8</sup> which results in breathing difficulties, increased risk of broken bones, high blood pressure, early markers of heart disease, diabetes and psychological effects<sup>9</sup>. F2S programming can help address Louisiana’s high childhood obesity rates by teaching children to make healthier choices. <sup>10</sup>

2. Fruits and vegetables grown for local markets are likely handled by fewer people, are less likely to be damaged



during shipping, and are usually sold within 24 hours after harvest, at its peak freshness and ripeness,<sup>11</sup> plus many farmers that grow for a local (and especially a direct) market favor taste and nutrition over shipability when choosing what kinds of plants to grow, which is better for the eater too!<sup>12</sup>

### Good for our local economy

1. Buying local fruit and vegetables often means buying what is “in season”<sup>13</sup>, and eating fruit and vegetables that are “in season” can mean lower cost and more freshness
2. Buying directly from the farmer makes it more likely that money gets put right back into the local community<sup>14</sup>, when farmers use what they make to buy groceries, and other items from local businesses. Re-circulating money – school to farmer to community and back again - leads to increased local economic activity.<sup>15</sup>
3. For every job created by school districts purchasing local foods, additional economic activity would create another 1.67 jobs for a total of 2.67 jobs created.<sup>16</sup>



### Good for our planet

1. Transporting food over long distances burns fossil fuels, polluting the environment. For example, California strawberries travel 1,975 miles<sup>17</sup> to reach Louisiana schools generating 3.233 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub><sup>18</sup>; whereas local strawberries may only travel 51 miles generating 0.083 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.<sup>19</sup> (That's 96% less CO<sub>2</sub> emissions!)<sup>20</sup>
2. Produce sometimes travels for up to two weeks before it arrives in grocery stores! It usually requires additional packaging and may have been genetically modified<sup>21</sup> or sprayed or injected with chemicals in order to survive the trip..
3. Local fruit and vegetables don't have to use preservatives to keep the food fresh, require less packaging, and emit far less CO<sub>2</sub> during transport because they come from closer to home and travel shorter distances to get to our plates.<sup>23</sup>

## The Louisiana Farm to School Alliance Supports HB 730/SB184

### How you can help?

Spread the word about F2S: Contact your state legislators – tell them to support Farm to School legislation! You can call them by contacting the Louisiana House switchboard (225-342-6945) or the Senate switchboard (225-342-2040) and asking for your Senator and Representative. Let them know that you support F2S. Don't know who your state legislators are? Go to <https://www.legis.la.gov/legis/FindMyLegislators.aspx> for a list based on your address.

**Contact Emily Posner at [eposner@recirculatingfarms.org](mailto:eposner@recirculatingfarms.org) or Katie Mularz at [kmularz@louisianafarmentoschool.org](mailto:kmularz@louisianafarmentoschool.org) with any questions or to learn more about how you can help make F2S happen in our Louisiana schools!**

## References

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20. Percentage Calculator found at [http://percentcalculator.com/?gclid=Cj0KEQjwifWnBRCB5PT57KSVw-kBEiQASV7aRPjCnXEWnIkNxxWWyAqQ4LBTyamTOPiFF60M\\_UjysAaAqnK8P8HAQ](http://percentcalculator.com/?gclid=Cj0KEQjwifWnBRCB5PT57KSVw-kBEiQASV7aRPjCnXEWnIkNxxWWyAqQ4LBTyamTOPiFF60M_UjysAaAqnK8P8HAQ), last visited Mar. 10, 2015).
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