

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	3
Introduction	4
How to Use the Toolkit	5
What is Farm to School and Why Farm to School Matters	6
State Farm to School Networks across the United States	7
Defining State Farm to School Networks	8
Why State Farm to School Networks Matter	8
U.S. Map of State Farm to School Networks	9
Network Models and Development	10
Key Elements to a Successful Social Movement and Movement Building	11
Stages of Group Development	12
Six Types of Cooperative Efforts	13
State Farm to School Network Best Practices and Analysis	14
Identifying and Engaging Stakeholders	17
Establishing a Robust Network Structure	21
Setting a Strategic Vision and Direction	25
Raising Awareness	30
Advocating to Advance and Institutionalize the Movement	33
Developing Shared Metrics and Evaluating Impact	34
Case Studies	35
Vermont	36
Mississippi	38
California	40
Challenges for State Farm to School Networks	42
Future of State Farm to School Networks	44
References	45



Acknowledgments

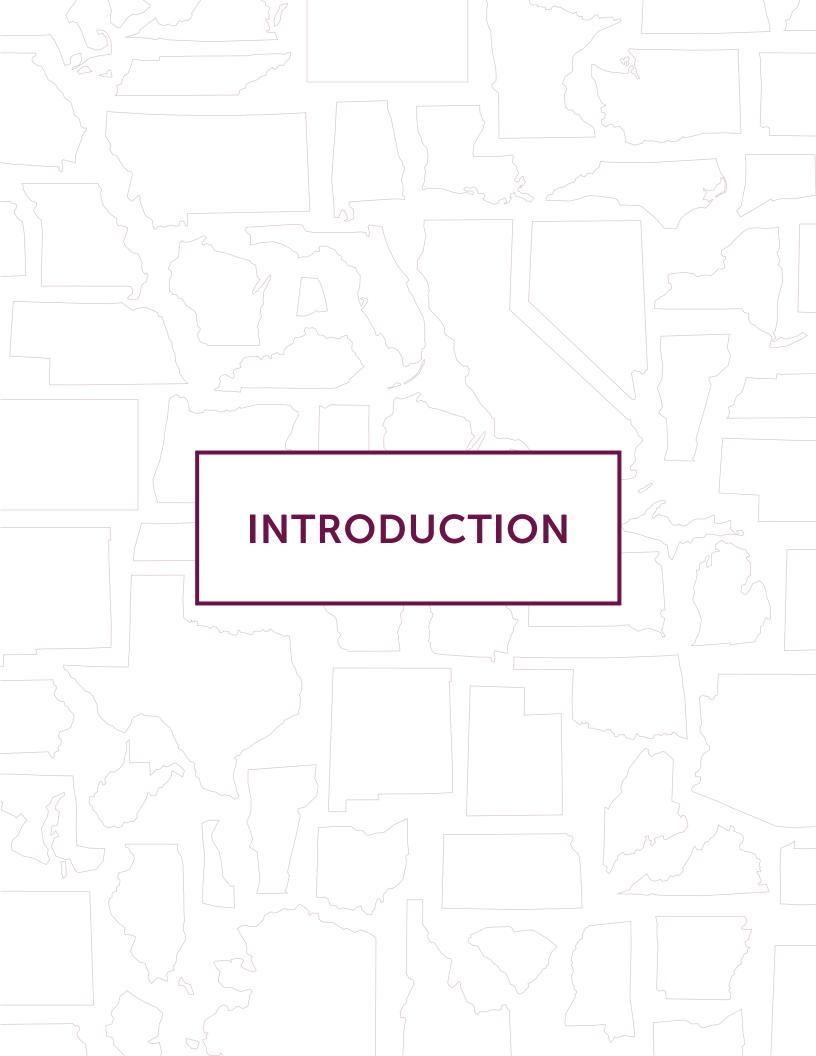
This toolkit was developed with information and inspiration provided by National Farm to School Network Core and Supporting Partners who serve as leaders in farm to school efforts in states and territories across the country. The state farm to school networks featured in this toolkit include information collected by the National Farm to School Network through March 2019, though the authors acknowledge there may be changes and additions since that time. This edition of the toolkit reflects updates from the original April 2018 publication.

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The National Farm to School Network is an information, advocacy, and networking hub for communities working to bring local food sourcing, school gardens, and food and agriculture education into schools and early care and education settings. Learn more at



Introduction

The farm to school movement has grown from a handful of schools in the late 1990s to over 42,000 schools in all 50 states, D.C., and U.S. Territories, and expanded to 1,516 preschools in school districts across 49 states.¹ Responding to the rapid growth and interest in farm to school, the National Farm to School Network's 2017-2019 Strategic Plan prioritizes building the capacity of National Farm to School Network partners to advance farm to school at the state (and territory) level through three complementary strategies: (1) state network development, (2) state policy advocacy, and (3) state agency and university Extension engagement.

Mirroring NFSN's success in growing the farm to school movement at the national level through collaborative network building, farm to school networks have been vital to the growth and institutionalization of farm to school in states. State farm to school networks are key to bringing together diverse sectors and stakeholders and creating a united voice and set of priorities to propel the movement. In states across the country, farm to school networks leverage membership to create awareness and interest in farm to school, spearhead advocacy to advance

farm to school legislation, and secure funding for farm to school positions and activities. From coast to coast, state networks are building momentum for farm to school and expanding adoption of the three core elements of farm to school - local procurement, school gardens, and food and agriculture education.

Just as farm to school is not a one-size-fits-all model, nor are state farm to school networks. While each state farm to school network is unique, many share a set of best practices that facilitate growth at the state level and in turn support the national movement:

- Identifying and Engaging Stakeholders
- Establishing a Robust Network Structure
- Setting a Strategic Vision and Direction
- Raising Awareness
- Advocating to Advance and Institutionalize the Movement
- Developing Shared Metrics and Evaluating Impact

1 See U.S. Department of Agriculture.

How to Use this Toolkit

NFSN strives to support its partners and members by providing up-to-date, high-quality knowledge products and resources to advance robust state farm to school networks. This toolkit is a compilation of information from numerous external sources on collaborative networks, as well as interviews and fact finding from existing state farm to school networks. The toolkit is designed to demonstrate best practices and lessons learned from existing state farm to school networks and to provide users with key strategies and approaches for developing and sustaining state farm to school networks.

The toolkit includes a primer on general network models and development, a deep dive into state farm to school network best practices, case studies highlighting successful tools and tactics, and an analysis on challenges for and the future of state farm to school networks. Also included are resources to showcase network examples and generate ideas. In addition, this resource includes an interactive map of state farm to school networks. For networks with websites, clicking on that state will allow the reader to see that state's website. Other resources are linked throughout.

What is Farm to School?

Farm to school implementation differs by location but always includes one or more of the following:



Why Farm to School?

Farm to school benefits everyone involved—children, farmers, and communities.



KIDS WIN.

Farm to school provides children with nutritious, high quality local food so they are ready to learn and grow. Farm to school activities enhance their education through hands-on learning about food, agriculture, and nutrition.



FARMERS WIN.

Farm to school can serve as a significant financial opportunity for farmers, fishers, ranchers, food processors, and food manufacturers by opening doors to an institutional market worth billions of dollars.



COMMUNITIES WIN.

Farm to school benefits everyone from students, teachers, and administrators to parents and farmers, providing opportunities to build family and community engagement. Buying from local producers and processors creates new jobs and strengthens the local economy.

For more information, review the Benefits of Farm to School fact sheet.



State Farm to School Networks across the United States

Defining State Farm to School Networks

NFSN defines a "state farm to school network" as a collection of individuals and organizations that come together with a shared goal of expanding and institutionalizing farm to school in their state through collaborative efforts. A network may go by other names such as a coalition or task force, but the defining characteristics are common goals and collaboration. This definition was developed from feedback solicited from NFSN Core Partners in 2017 and 2018. The existence of a network in a state and the presence of the "six seeds of a successful state farm to school network" outlined in this toolkit were determined by reports submitted in 2017 by NFSN Core Partners.

Why State Farm to School Networks Matter

Farm to school sits at the intersection of multiple sectors, including education, public health, economic development, and the environment.

While this allows for buy-in and support from diverse stakeholders, this broad appeal and impact can create a

challenge in promoting a unified message and prioritizing action at the state level. A state farm to school network creates a platform for these varied voices and perspectives to come together around the shared goal of expanding farm to school opportunities to realize the triple-win benefit to children, farmers, and communities.

The structure and coordination that a network creates allows stakeholders to leverage their organizational capacity and resources to work towards common goals and reduces the duplication of efforts. Importantly, state farm to school networks create a sense of community support and shared responsibility that encourages longevity and sustainability in the farm to school movement.

Additionally, state farm to school networks can be a catalyst for employing other farm to school strategies at the state level, including establishing farm to school positions in state agencies and university Extension and advancing state farm to school policy advocacy. Convening and collaborating at a state level around farm to school has impacts on the institutionalization of farm to school through position creation and the advancement of farm to school through supportive policies.

Four Key Sectors of Farm to School



Education



Public Health



Economic Development

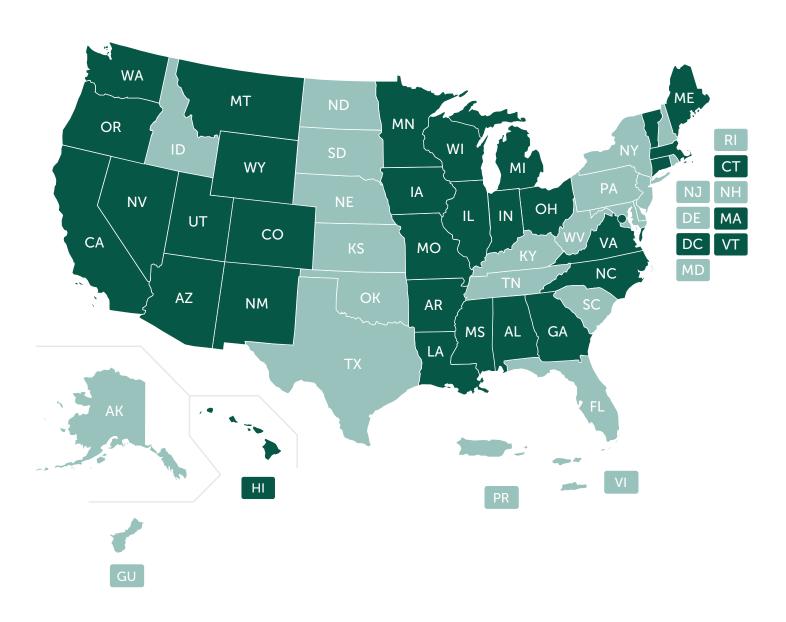


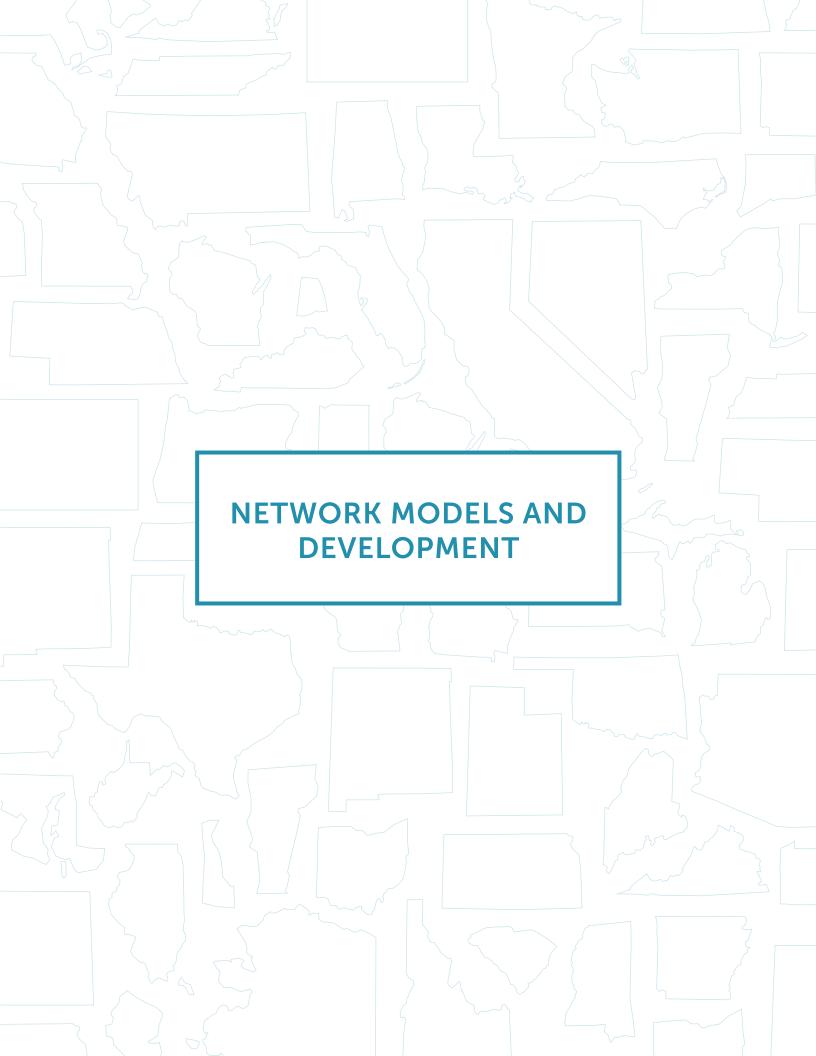
Environment

Map of State Farm to School Networks

This map indicates the presence or absence of a farm to school network in each state and U.S. territory as of April 2018. Click on any state with a network to explore its farm to school website, if available.







Network Models and Development

The section that follows introduces general concepts of network models and development. These tools can guide newly developing networks in determining what structure best fits the needs of the network and community, and in navigating the network formation process. Additionally, the concepts address effective network coordination and group participation.

Key Elements to a Successful Social Movement and Movement Building

As outlined in "Making Change: How Social Movements Work and How to Support Them," groups can come together to support movements in a variety of ways, and there are key elements to successful movements.²

A Vision and a Frame: Social movements are based on a vision and a frame that starts at a grassroots level and moves up, not from the top down. A vision and a frame allow groups to have a focal point in their work. Farm to school includes three core elements around which networks can develop goals that drive the movement forward.

An Authentic Base: Although policy and systems are important in social movements, it is the communities who are most affected and invested that make up the base and that will push things forward, because communities have the greatest investment in a movement's success. At its core, Farm to school is a community-based, grassroots movement that relies on students, families, educators, and farmers - those most directly impacted by farm to school - to drive the movement.

Long-Term Commitment: Groups working for a social movement must understand that their work is a long-term commitment. Often a problem - including the diversity of social problems addressed by farm to school - is caused by a long-term injustice in various social and economic systems. Groups will want to find ways to continually reinvigorate themselves to keep the movement strong and moving forward.

A Strong Economic Model: Groups need to be able to prove that the results of their movement will encourage communities to economically flourish. Farm to school has a robust advantage in this arena with documented economic benefit to farmers and communities.^{3,4}

Highlighting these benefits will ensure continued support from community members as well as garner attention and support from other groups.

Strong Research: Necessary background knowledge includes an understanding of different communities' backgrounds, why a certain social condition needs to change, and viable ways of making that change happen. An important part of creating a social movement is to have the data to prove that change is needed, and to prove that collaborative work underway is making a difference. NFSN's Benefits of Farm to School fact sheet showcases the growing body of research demonstrating farm to school's impact.

Viable Policy Solutions: One of the most important end goals of a social movement is to make systemic change, often in the form of policy. Groups should work toward having a viable policy plan that can help move missions forward. NFSN's State Farm to School Legislative Survey features model policies from across the country.

Scaling Up: In looking back at well-known movements such as the Civil Rights Movement or the Women's Movement, it is easy to forget that they were initially small, grassroots efforts. Organizations started small and used various methods from collaboration to networking to policy to scale up their movements. No matter how big or small your movement, continuously work to scale up its reach and impact. At the national level, farm to school has grown from a handful of schools in the late 1990s to over 42,000 schools in school year 2013-2014.5

Networking with Other Movements: Farm to school is at the intersection of diverse sectors and social issues and can bring stakeholders together with a unified goal. An impactful way for social movements to advance is through networking and collaborating with other movements, combining resources, and working together to find solutions that can address more than one need in a community.

- 2 See Pastor.
- 3 See National Farm to School Network (2017, April).
- 4 See National Farm to School Network (2017, September).
- 5 See US Department of Agriculture.

Stages of Group Development

Organizations come together in a number of ways and for a number of reasons, and these can help a group determine their structural needs and goals, a plan to accomplish goals, and more. Before a collective impact can be made, a group must form and develop into a cohesive team. The following information is adapted from the Institute for Conservation Leadership (ICL) "Working Together: A Toolkit for Cooperative Efforts, Networks and Coalitions."

Forming: In the first phase of group formation, people are getting to know one another and figuring out what they will gain from being a part of the group as well as what they will be able to contribute. Members are excited to move the work forward, but it is important to allow the group to get to know one another and build a stronger sense of trust.

Storming: As group development continues, conflicts or tensions may arise as members express their individual or organizational needs and desires. This phase is crucial for network development because it allows members to express their own needs while hearing those of others. During this phase, the group will be determining communication strategies, leadership structure, and roles, and systems for accountability. The conflict in this phase allows the group to address big picture needs, but resolution of those conflicts is necessary to establish a common understanding and a common ground to propel the network forward.

Norming: During this phase of group development, the group comes to terms with differing needs and wants and starts working together. Group members decide on direction and intended results, group needs, roles for different individuals in the group, and next steps. Group dynamics begin to normalize, leading to consistent and clear communication and strong planning. During this stage, members align their goals and begin taking action.

Performing: The performing stage of group development is where things truly get done. Team members work together, there is high participation and unity, trial runs of different ways of solving problems, feedback and assessment, adjustment and transformation in the plans, and goal achievement. A group culture of its own will develop, leading to more positive environments, more collaboration, and higher quality performance. The network will be achieving its goals and looking toward what the next goals of the group will be.

Transforming: As the goal is close to being achieved, a time of transformation within the group occurs. There may be reduced productivity from some members who see the end is near and increased productivity from others who want to meet a deadline. Some members may become withdrawn, and a bit of conflict is not uncommon due to the possibility of the network dissolving. If framed correctly, however, a group can become reinvigorated with a new idea or a new goal, even if it means change within the group.

6 See Rusmore. Credit: David Tavani

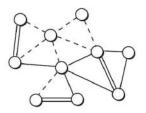


Six Types of Cooperative Efforts

Networks are formed in a number of ways, and the types of collaborative efforts listed below are not an exhaustive list. Also adapted from ICL's toolkit,⁷ these examples of collaborative efforts can be helpful for general network formation. Though not specific to state farm to school networks, they can help stakeholders identify the model best tailored to a state's needs.

Network

Networks are formed to share information and learning on an issue for which each organization has some level of investment. The connections vary from very strong to weak, with partners from many different types of organizations on many different

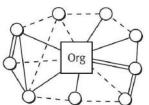


Source: Institute for Conservation Leadership, www.icl.org

levels of partnership. Costs for being in the network are usually taken on by individual organizations in the network.

Association Model

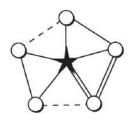
This model brings together organizations and nonprofits that have common needs under one formal umbrella organization. Associations help provide certain services to member organizations, from administrative needs to assistance with policy or legislation.



Source: Institute for Conservation Leadership, www.icl.org

Coordinated Project Model

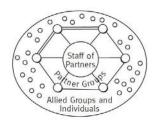
This model focus has at least two organizations that share work and information that affects the two groups, with other organizations more loosely associated with them.



Source: Institute for Conservation Leadership, www.icl.org

Campaign Coalition Model

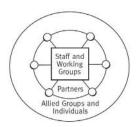
This model is meant to bring together organizations who are committed to jointly working on a specific issue, and each organization provides staff to be directly involved in the work.



Source: Institute for Conservation Leadership, www.icl.org

Ongoing Partnership Model

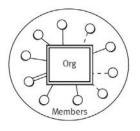
This type of formation is formal, ongoing, long-term, and aims to have the most strategic alliances for collective efforts. There is a high level of integration in this type of collaboration where each member is very involved in fundraising, programmatic planning, and responsibilities.



Source: Institute for Conservation Leadership, www.icl.org

Multi-Stakeholder Model

This model has a goal of bringing together many different types of organizations, with differing goals and even perspectives on the same or a similar issue. The organizations are meant to come together and work to find common goals and then potentially work on a project together.



Source: Institute for Conservation Leadership, www.icl.org

Given that state farm to school networks are not one-size-fits-all and form both organically and intentionally, they can take on one or a hybrid of these types of collaboration, integrating features from multiple frameworks into their structures. Clear structure supports organization and concise work-flow, leading to an effective and sustainable state farm to school network. The structure a developing network chooses does not have to be finite nor determined before development begins. Sometimes the best type of organizational structure will present itself as the collaborative is developing.

7 See Rusmore.

Source of Cooperative Efforts information and graphics: Institute for Conservation Leadership, www.icl.org.



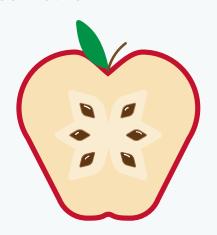


State Farm to School Network Best Practices and Analysis

This section offers a detailed look at the six best practices of state farm to school networks:

6 Seeds of a Successful State Farm to School Network

- Identifying and Engaging Stakeholders
- Establishing a Robust Network Structure
- Setting a Strategic Vision and Direction
- Raising Awareness
- Advocating to Advance and Institutionalize the Movement
- Developing Shared Metrics and Evaluating Impact



Identifying and Engaging Stakeholders

Representing Multiple Sectors

Acknowledging Partners

Creating Space for Equity and Diversity

Facilitating Network Development

Hosting Events and Conferences

Establishing a Robust Network Structure

Developing Leaders

Organizing Internal Communications

Solving Problems

Maintaining Accountability

Developing Memorandums of Understanding

Planning for Staff Transitions

Coordinating Multiple Statewide Networks

Setting a Strategic Vision and Direction

Creating a Mission and Vision

Developing a Strategic Plan

Implementing the Logic Model

Implementing the Collective Impact Model

Implementing the Aligned-Action Model

Utilizing Working Groups and Committees

Fundraising Collaboratively

Raising Awareness

Leveraging Logos and Branding

Building a Website

Using Social Media

Using E-newsletters and Listservs

Connecting with Media

Developing Key Messaging

Using Printed Materials

Exploring Additional Outreach Resources

Engaging Supporters

Advocating to Advance and Institutionalize the Movement

Engaging in Advocacy

Developing Shared Metrics and Evaluating Impact

Measuring Success

Developing Shareable, Qualitative Data

Developing Shareable, Quantitative Data

Mapping School Gardens

Network Trends State networks use a variety of strategies for implementing these best practices. Across the 31 states with farm to school networks, these are the most commonly used strategies. Has a Farm to School Website 65% Has a Listserv Has a Monthly or Quarterly Newsletter Holds other Events 55% Has a Mission/Vision 55% Hold Monthly or Quarterly Calls 52% Holds Farm to School/Cafeteria Conference 48% Has a Logo 48% Has a Strategic Plan 45% Participates in Advocacy/Policy Work 45% Has a Focus on Equity 16% 20 40 60 80 100

Credit: David Tavani



Identifying and Engaging Stakeholders

At the core and heart of every state farm to school network are the individuals and organizations involved.

This section focuses on how to engage diverse sectors and communities, recognize the contributions of partners, build a sense of community and camaraderie among your network, and facilitate connections amongst partners and with other stakeholders.

Representing Multiple Sectors

Connecting with stakeholders from across sectors and sustaining meaningful and productive partnerships can be challenging, but is vital to the success of a network. If only state agencies are involved in state farm to school efforts, for example, advocacy becomes difficult if not impossible. If only nonprofits are involved, capacity and sustainability may become an issue later on. The Mississippi Farm to School Network's Board structure is a good example of diverse sector representation.

Mississippi Farm to School Network Board Representatives

Department of Education, Office of Healthy Schools (two representatives)

Department of Agriculture and Commerce (two representatives)

Farm to early care and education representative

State University Extension representative

Delta Fresh Foods

(nonprofit representative, liaison to specific region of the state, and liaison to farmers)

Partnership for a Healthy Mississippi

(nonprofit representative)

FoodCorps

(nonprofit representative)

Tri County Agriculture Cooperative

(farmer representative)

National Center for Appropriate Technology (nonprofit representative)

Retired teacher

(liaison to educators and an expert in curriculum standards)

School district food service director

With potential partners, consider how farm to school intersects with various communities. Broadly, farm to school benefits kids, farmers, and communities, but there are extensive subgroups within these categories that could be represented in a network. This includes teachers, education support professionals (e.g., food service, paraprofessionals), parents and families, food processors or distributors, and farmer support organizations, just to name a few. Since farm to school sits at the intersection of multiple sectors, aim to ensure representation from education (K-12 and early care and education), public health, economic development, and environmental organizations. Also consider inviting funders to the group to strengthen their engagement and investments in the state's farm to school movement. As a state farm to school network grows and changes, set aside time to ask who is missing from the table. Identify whose voices are not being heard and consider ways of involving those stakeholders.

With a variety of partners comes a variety of needs. As the state farm to school network is hosting meetings and calls, consider the varied needs of your diverse partners. Farmers may be less available during the growing season. Educators and parents may not be able to attend meetings during the day but can give input through emails before meetings. If using a video conference, make sure the software is easy to download and use and that access to a device is feasible for everyone. Plan meetings at the most central location to make it feasible for all stakeholders and consider rotating locations to make meetings accessible across a large state. Consider employing a strategy like Virginia's farm to school regional kickoff meetings held in seven locations across the state to engage interested and diverse parties and increase visibility of the state's emerging network. As interest increases, look at Washington's farm to school network introductory webinar, used to promote the creation of the network to schools, agencies, nonprofits, and farmers.

Acknowledging Partners

Lifting up and acknowledging partners elevates both individual and network efforts and fosters opportunities for network promotion. Some state farm to school networks have created maps of partners in order to help stakeholders find the closest point of contact to them and to recognize partner organizations' leadership in the movement. California's online map shows each of its partners and the regions those partners cover.

Other examples of mapping a state's farm to school partners include Arkansas, Oregon, and Vermont.

Arkansas's map of Participating Partners helps stakeholders connect easily with farms, schools, businesses, community organizations, Extension, government agencies, and others. Oregon's Farm to School and School Garden Resource People contact sheet makes partners accessible and allows for easy access to contact people based on their roles.

Vermont's map of regional partners is included in its "3 Step Guide to Starting and Strengthening Your Vermont Farm to School Program." Recognizing partners helps build trust and reinforces the organizational structure, promoting sustained partnerships.

Prioritizing Equity and Diversity.

Equity is a key tenet of farm to school, and farm to school is a promising strategy to advance racial and social equity, as outlined in NFSN's commitment to advancing equity. There are troubling racial and ethnic inequities that exist in our food system. Access to healthy food is a challenge, most pronounced in low-income communities of color, and disparities exist in the quality, variety, quantity, and price of food available. NFSN aims to make farm to school accessible and culturally relevant to all communities, with a particular emphasis on communities experiencing health and education inequities. Partnership and collaboration with communities throughout the stages of network development, decision making, and planning is vital to ensuring initiatives are founded in the needs and wants of the community and resources and initiatives are culturally reflective.

Equity and diversity within a group is crucial for good working dynamics, for more creative and sustainable

Map of Vermont's regional farm to school partners. Source: Vermont Farm to School Network.

solutions, and for making sure there is representation from the community you intend to serve. Differing perspectives and backgrounds allow for more holistic and impactful end results. "Best Practices in Achieving Workplace Diversity," ⁸ a resource from the U.S. Department of Commerce, lists best practices for increasing equity and appreciating diversity in group settings such as networks. Some of the best practices include:

Recruitment/Representation: When forming a network, it is especially easy for groups to reach out to the people they know. More often than not, people know, work, and communicate with people who look like themselves. Groups need to reach outside their own professional networks for potential members to find more diverse organizations to become members, ensuring a more equitable shared vision and thus more equitable outcomes. Forming networks should also consider their leadership and make sure that it reflects the people they intend to serve. As networks are reaching out to connect with diverse groups to join the cause, consider meeting others where they are, such as attending existing gatherings to reach new populations, rather than just inviting people to attend network events.

ROOTS CALEDONIA FRANKLIN ESSEX, & ORLEANS & GRAND ISLE CENTER CALEDONIA ADDISON SCHOOL M RBLE WINDSOR & ORANGE VALEY GROWS RUTLAND SOUTH WINDSOR, WINDHAM, & BENNINGTON arows BENNINGTON

⁸ See Best Practices in Achieving Workplace Diversity.



Credit: Dave Tavani

Taking Ownership and Communicating the Vision: Work to center all processes around equity, including strategic planning, group development, action plan creating, value forming, benchmark creating, and any other activity on which your network embarks. During planning, continuously ask, "How is this best serving everyone?" Together, the network members must collectively take on the task of making equity and diversity a part of everything they do. Top leaders must make it a personal priority to propel the group forward with this value.

Accountability: Create measurable goals and benchmarks and conduct regular assessments, such as this Race Matters: Organizational Self-Assessment that NFSN staff complete. Another way to stay accountable is to have monthly diversity, equity, and inclusion discussions among partners to increase knowledge and understanding of how equity relates to their work. As your network is working to address equity, consider using this Community Network Analysis Tool to help your group be more intentionally inclusive

Facilitation: Very few people have the expert knowledge it takes to facilitate discussions about equity, diversity, and inclusion. For this reason, it can be highly beneficial to bring an outside facilitator into the group for training, reflection, and accountability.

Throughout the network development process, state farm to school networks should reach out to state agencies and organizations that promote diversity and opportunity. For example, in the formation of their network, lowa connected with Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs, Commission of Latino Affairs, Commission of Person with Disabilities, Commission of Native American Affairs, and Commission on the Status of African-Americans. Identify and partner with the organizations that support the people who you want to support.

As your network strives to increase its focus on equity, go beyond including diverse voices in your network; increase resources in underserved communities, research and understand how your network's efforts will affect a certain community, and increase leadership opportunities for the diverse communities you serve. Equity should be reflected in the network's programming, policies, and partnerships. For additional resources, see the Center for Environmental Farming Systems Committee on Racial Equity in the Food System and University of Wisconsin-Extension Equity in Food Systems strategies.

Facilitating Network Development

During the first few phases of group development, it is beneficial to have an external facilitator for meetings to help establish group norms and expectations. Early on, group dynamics can be difficult to understand; leaders in the group may not have gained the respect of everyone yet, and conflicts may be difficult to find solutions to without an unbiased view. An external facilitator can serve as a neutral party and help build trust, encourage teamwork, develop strategies for structure and implementation, and foster an authentic group dynamic. An expert facilitator can also bring tools and strategies that might not otherwise be available to the group. Potential drawbacks of an external facilitator are that the their departure may cause group disruption or a scramble for power. In "Cross-Sector Collaboration: A Report from the Minnesota Farm to School Leadership Team," the important role of a facilitator enlisted during the team's first year played a critical role in increasing trust and fostering relationships.

Having an internal group member take on facilitation is also an option. Advantages to this strategy include a sense that the team is unified, reliant on one another, and can form in a way that best suits their needs, without an external facilitator potentially pushing in one direction or another. Drawbacks to this approach include the facilitator not acting as a neutral party or not fully participating in the forming of the group while serving as the facilitator.

New Mexico utilized a facilitator for the specific purpose of creating a state farm to school strategic plan. The facilitator was external to the group and conducted outreach to stakeholders, gathering input through individual conversations with each member. This input informed a one-day stakeholders' convening and then finalization of New Mexico's strategic plan for the NM Grown Fresh Fruits and Vegetables for School Meals Program, a longstanding policy advancing local procurement. Using an external facilitator is a common practice with newly forming state farm to school networks and has been implemented successfully by Connecticut, Indiana, Iowa, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, New Mexico, North Carolina, Vermont, and Washington, D.C.

Hosting Events and Conferences

One of the most visible and impactful ways for state farm to school networks to connect and grow is by hosting events and conferences. There are a variety of types of events that a network can host, from those focused on engaging students, targeting policymakers, or expanding network participation. Events like a state or region's Apple Crunch (e.g., Great Lakes, Michigan, Midwest, Pennsylvania) elevate the farm to school message by connecting children to fresh produce through a single collective action.



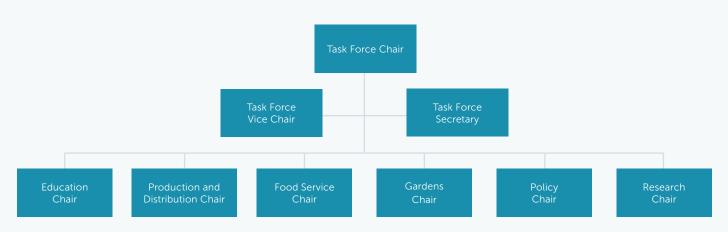
Other events, such as Massachusetts Farm to School Awareness Day and Vermont Farm to School Awareness Day held at their respective state houses, allow legislators to hear from and connect with farm to school stakeholders, advancing the conversation about the benefits of farm to school in a legislative setting.

Conferences such as New Jersey's Growing Healthy Communities Conference increase opportunities for network growth and cross-sectoral collaboration within a broader framework of food literacy education and social entrepreneurship. As many as 15 state networks hold farm to school or farm to cafeteria gatherings annually, or every few years. The D.C. Farm to School Network hosts an Annual Farm to School Stakeholders Gathering as well as a Regional School Garden Summit for stakeholders to gather and build capacity and expand their own state farm to school networks within the Mid-Atlantic region. These events and conferences bring more people into the movement both formally and informally, increasing network size and capacity and offering stakeholders opportunities to connect and learn about farm to school implementation. For more information on planning an event, take a look at Iowa State University Extension's Event Planning Checklist and NFSN's Best Practices for State and Regional Farm to School Conferences.

Establishing a Robust Network Structure

With key stakeholders engaged, the next step to building a successful network is establishing a robust and pragmatic internal structure. Considerations in this process include developing leaders, establishing systems for accountability and problem solving, having strategic internal communications, addressing transitions that arise, and working with multiple statewide networks. Processes addressed in this section are important to starting a network on steady footing and addressing structural needs.

Utah Farm to Fork Task Force June 2017-June 2018



In Utah, the internal network structure is organized with primary leaders and committee chairs.

Source: Utah Farm to Fork Task Force

Developing Leaders

Strong leadership within the network is key for consistent growth, organization, and communication. Leaders can come from a backbone organization or can be from multiple organizations with a large stake in the vision of the network. The leaders of your network may also be the people with the most capacity to dedicate time to the work.

In identifying and developing leadership for your network, consider the following:

Shared Leadership: When the leadership falls on one person or organization, a network may become too reliant on that person or organization's capacity to do the work of organizing and maintaining strong internal communication. Instead, aim to have more than one person in the leadership role. This may mean having network co-leads or may involve forming a leadership

team to focus on the needs of the network. For example, the Mississippi Farm to School Network Co-Directors focus on different core elements of farm to school (school gardens, local procurement, and education), and Massachusetts Farm to School Co-Directors focus on different regions of the state (east and west).

Stipends for Key Leadership Roles: Stipends for key contributors or leaders within the network demonstrate that their time is valued and allows them to increase their own capacity to do the work. In developing initial budgets and identifying funding sources for the network, build these stipends into the anticipated network expenses.

Cultivating New Leaders: As networks develop, it is important to recognize that leadership roles and responsibilities must be passed along to emerging talent and leaders. Cultivate young leaders so that they can step in when circumstances change or when there is need for additional capacity to move the network forward.

Organizing Internal Communication

Frequent, transparent, and clear communication are essential for sharing information and building trust within your network. Email, listservs, newsletters, Google documents, Facebook groups, video calls, phone calls, and in-person meetings are all frequently used platforms for network member communication. About half of all NFSN Core Partners with networks use internal listservs to communicate with stakeholders, while some others prefer to use private Facebook groups. Google documents allow for real-time updates on task management, data collection, and event planning. For internal meetings, many networks have monthly phone or video calls, with quarterly or annual in-person meetings (e.g., quarterly meetings hosted by the D.C. Farm to School Network). Because building trust is a crucial element of network development, having these meetings in person or via video calls as much as possible helps cultivate a greater sense of group cohesion. It is important to note that not all network members and leaders communicate in the same way. Having multiple forms of communication ensures that members without access to Internet or computers can stay connected, and people can digest information in formats that works best for them. See the chart earlier in the State Farm to School Network Best Practices and Analysis section for more information about how existing

state farm to school networks use various forms of communication

Open and continuous communication is a crucial part of moving a network forward. Take time to create communication channels that fit the needs of group members. For smaller groups, less complex channels that encourage responsiveness are best, whereas more complex networks may need multiple communication channels, such as a listsery, calls, emails, and surveys. Checking in with members about the level and frequency of information sent is recommended to recognize and address information overload, which can sometimes result in unresponsiveness or lack of engagement. To streamline communications, consider regularly scheduled email updates with actions items and news along with opportunities to connect outside of scheduled calls or inperson meetings.

Both formal and informal communications are required to sustain a network. Maintaining informal channels of communication to foster interpersonal relationships within a group is vital to a more productive collaboration. Network leaders may need to dedicate time to get to know each individual partner and organization within the group to ensure they are heard, valued, and are working towards the shared vision.



Solving Problems

When a new group of people come together to work collaboratively, there will inevitably be problems and issues that need to be addressed. Sustaining a cohesive state farm to school network requires systems for effective and timely problem solving. An external facilitator can be used for conflict resolution, if needed.

According to a University of Ohio Extension Group Problem Solving Process, there are five main steps for reaching a resolution:

Define the Problem: Understand the history of the issue and understand how it relates to other problems the group is currently facing or has faced in the past. Define the who, what, when, why, and how of the problem as much as possible.

Determine Causes: What roadblocks does the group need to overcome in between the current situation and the desired end goal?

Develop Alternative Approaches: Try to find as many possible solutions as possible. Do not worry in that moment which ones are the most plausible or doable. By listing numerous solutions, the group may stumble upon something different and new.

Assess the Consequences: During this process, work with the group to figure out who and what will be impacted by each decision, both positively and negatively. Are these challenges easy to overcome?

Develop Action Plans: As a group, work to determine what success looks like and what desired outcomes are. One way to develop an action plan is to work backwards from those outcomes to develop the plan. Another planning tool called the logic model is helpful in developing a plan (see Implementing the Logic Model section).

Maintaining Accountability

Accountability is a key to network success. Clear roles and responsibilities should be assigned and communicated to all participants. Having regular check-ins over the phone with a shared document can help keep everyone on track. Using shared responsibility charts can ensure accountability by clearly outlining goals, activities,

responsibilities, and progress in real-time. Instituting a decision-making structure that engages various levels of participants keeps network leaders accountable and ensures checks and balances.

Defining clear roles and responsibilities for each member of the network's leadership is essential. Examples of this include Massachusetts Farm to School Leadership Team Roles and Responsibilities, Colorado Farm to School Task Force Duties, Time Commitment, and Travel Required, and Minnesota's Farm to School Leadership Team Agreement, which was later adapted and used by Montana in the development of their state network.

Developing Memorandums of Understanding

A Memorandum of Understanding, or MOU (or similarly a Memorandum of Agreement, or MOA), is a non-legally binding contract with responsibilities, needs, and exchanges that collaborative groups can use to ensure accountability. The MOU should cover individual and group responsibilities and expectations and should be signed off by each organization to ensure capacity to carry out the listed goals and activities.

A Delaware MOA to Promote Healthy Eating and Nutrition Awareness, signed by the Departments of Agriculture, Education, and Health and Social Services in 2010, ensures interagency cooperation and clear division of responsibilities related to identifying local producers and processors to provide farm-fresh foods to the state's schools, and for developing and enhancing existing School Nutrition Programs. At the national level, NFSN and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Office of Community Food Systems developed a MOU in 2017 to clearly outline their partnership and relevant roles and responsibilities towards jointly furthering the farm to school movement nationwide.

Planning for Staff Transitions

Staff changes at partner organizations can slow down progress on network development. A best practice for alleviating implementation delays is to create staff transition plans, which ensure for smooth transitions

from one individual to another (in case of either a temporary of permanent staff change), along with a transfer of institutional knowledge. During staffing transitions, consider hiring a contractor (perhaps for a limited period of time) to assist with required tasks such as facilitation, evaluation, or handling internal or external communications.

Coordinating Multiple Statewide Networks

Some states have multiple networks based on areas of focus within farm to school. For example, Montana has a Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE) Coalition, which is led by members of the Farm to School Leadership Team, but also includes other ECE stakeholders, and Arizona has a Farm to School Coalition, a Farm to ECE Coalition, and a Garden Network.

There are advantages and drawbacks to forming highly focused, distinct networks. When it comes to the

three core elements of farm to school, for example, procurement of local broccoli will be better received if the students have grown broccoli in a garden and/or done a taste test or cooking demonstration (education core element) with broccoli, so it may be beneficial to not limit a group to focusing on just one core element. While the recipients and providers of farm to ECE are different from K-12, the core elements of farm to school and ECE are the same, and there could be areas for collaboration and learning from each other. At the same time, there may be valid reasons for developing a separate farm to ECE network such as to be more inclusive of all ECE stakeholders or to access a certain funding stream or grant opportunity. Given that the farm to school movement is still growing and gaining momentum in states, consider the pros and cons of multiple networks versus hosting one network with multiple working groups underneath it to streamline operations.



Setting a Strategic Vision and Direction

Creating a Mission and Vision

All of the work NFSN has done stems from its mission to increase access to local food and nutrition education to improve children's health, strengthen family farms, and cultivate vibrant communities. A mission statement clearly defines and communicates your network's purpose and objectives, while a vision statement describes what you would like to see the network move toward in the future.

Mission and vision statements are the building blocks of the network's road map, important for both internal clarity and for communicating the network's efforts to the public. They are also valuable for strategic planning and assessing priority and fit of goals for the network. State farm to school networks should develop a mission and vision in which all partner organizations can invest. Examples include:

National Farm to School Network

Mission: NFSN increases access to local food and nutrition education to improve children's health, strengthen family farms, and cultivate vibrant communities.

Vision: NFSN envisions a nation in which farm to school programs are an essential component of strong and just local and regional food systems, ensuring the health of all school children, farms, environment, economy, and communities.

Utah Farm to Fork Task Force

Mission: The Utah Farm to Fork Task Force works together through partnerships across the state to build farm to school and early care and education initiatives. These initiatives help kids develop healthy eating habits and educate them on the connections between agriculture and nutrition, support local Utah farmers and food producers, and strengthen community relationships.

Alabama Farm to School Program

Vision: Instill healthy eating habits in Alabama youth through the promotion of fresh, nutritious, locally grown foods, school gardens, and agriculture education.

Mission: The Alabama Farm to School Program will connect schools and local farmers to:

- Provide students with healthy meals in schools that include locally grown, raised, and produced foods;
- Support Alabama farmers by expanding local markets:
- Increase children's understanding of agriculture, health, and nutrition through experimental education;
- Utilize school gardens to teach core subjects linked to state and national standards;
- Facilitate the creation of healthy eating environments; and
- Empower children to develop lifelong, healthy eating habits.

Developing a Strategic Plan

A strategic plan gives internal partners and external stakeholders a clear understanding of organizational goals and expectations. Strategic plans usually focus on a few big buckets of change with smaller focus areas within those buckets meant to hone in on specific ways of addressing the larger issues. The strategic plan should be developed with input from diverse internal and external stakeholders to ensure that the priority areas identified align with community needs and reflect community member and member organization shared aims.

NFSN's 2017-2019 Strategic Plan guides NFSN's decision-making and priorities, including a focus on state farm to school network development. Numerous state farm to school networks have strategic plans that assist in guiding efforts and in clarifying emphasis areas such as policy advocacy, economic development, farm to ECE, event planning, food and agriculture education, fundraising and diverse revenue streams, and staff responsibilities. Your network may focus on a few of the myriad big buckets as determined by the needs and current status of farm to school in your state. Take a look at any of these state's strategic plans to generate ideas for your network: Georgia (farm to ECE specific), Montana, New Mexico (policy specific), North Carolina, and Oregon.

Implementing the Logic Model

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation Logic Model Development Guide⁹ and the Community Tool Box¹⁰ offer resources for developing logic models, which are created to combine theory and action to guide and assess programs. This model requires participants to go through a series of steps to input known information and to predict and analyze next steps.

Resources/Inputs: These include the people involved, the working hours, the monetary needs, external partners or organizations, or anything else that a group needs to make the work happen.

Program Activities: This is what you do with your resources. Whether this is hosting an event, creating an



app, or developing a curriculum, these actions will bring the group closer to achieving the goal.

Outputs: These are the direct results from your activities.

Outcomes: These are the transformations that occur to the constituency, whether a person, a group of people, a community, a school, or a system. These are tangible and sometimes measurable things that have visibly changed and are directly related to actions and outputs.

Impacts: These are changes that occur - whether positive or negative - that are a result of your activities, outputs, and outcomes. These may be long-term outcomes that the group predicted, or they may not have been anticipated.

Farm to school examples of the logic model include the Colorado Farm to School Task Force Roadmap as well as Agriculture in the Classroom's Logic Model for Agricultural Literacy Programming, used in Arizona. These illustrate the logic model's applicability for network building or for a specific program.

⁹ See W.K. Kellogg.

¹⁰ See Community Toolbox.

Implementing the Collective Impact Model

The collective impact model is used to address complex and deeply rooted social issues within communities. In order for this model to work, it takes cross-sectoral collaboration, from government agencies to businesses to nonprofits. The idea of the collective impact model is that no one organization can take on a single issue and solve it alone; it takes numerous approaches from different directions to solve a complex problem. As outlined by Collaboration for Impact,¹¹ there are five key elements of collective impacts:

Developing a Common Agenda: There are people who are always involved in certain types of work, but when they come together, they often have the same conversations. From the outset, bring together both obvious and unexpected stakeholders to enhance conversations. From there, define the problem being tackled and then take time to create a detailed action plan.

Developing Shared Measurement: Your network should work together to create measurable goals that will generate improved data collection, foster collaboration and coordination, and analyze outcomes in order to assess what is working and not. Data collection can also be helpful for the purposes of fundraising and policy.

Mutually Reinforcing Activities: This element of the model asks that stakeholders align existing resources and efforts to tackle the common agenda. These activities do not have to be created or planned collectively, but need to work toward the same goal. Often, groups are working on issues affecting people with multiple obstacles, with farm to school being such an example. While one organization within your network addresses access to agriculture education, another might work toward developing local food systems infrastructure. Together, these activities do not duplicate work; rather, they rely on the strengths of different organizations and tackle a problem from multiple angles.

Continuous Communication: To develop trust among stakeholders in the collective impact model, the interests and needs of each participating organization need to be valued equally. Consistent communication provides a space for that trust to form. When organizations are

unable to trust one another in an effort, they may not share all of their resources or completely invest in the work. Trust can break down walls and foster collaboration.

The Backbone Organization: In a true collective effort, the backbone organization is not meant to lead initiatives but to maintain strong systems for communication and accountability for the rest of the group. Backbone organizations are available for support and recruiting new members. It is important to note that a collective impact can start without a backbone organization. In that case, the "backbone" roles would go to founding members of the group.

Implementing the Aligned-Action Model

The aligned-action model is similar to the collective impact model in the way it takes multiple organizations and aims at solving or impacting a specific issue. It differs from the collective impact model in that it seeks to make impact on a large scale and can be spread across multiple regions.

As discussed in "How to Scale Impact Faster: Replication or Aligned-Action Network?" the aligned-action model challenges a common practice in social impact work. Often, organizations will work to create an impact by implementing the replication model, where a model of action and outcome is created and then other organizations are meant to follow that model exactly. No matter how effective a model is in one situation, it may not always work in an alternative setting. For that reason, the aligned-action model brings together organizations from different fields and with different ways of addressing one goal or preferred outcome to work together.

In order for an aligned-action model to work, organizations must:

Align: Align around a common goal or preferred outcomes with shared measurement.

Commit: Commit to the overall outcome, no matter how individual organizations get there.

Analyze: Create a space for data collection where everyone can analyze and make sense of what has happened.

¹¹ See Collaboration.

¹² See Bradach.



Credit: Emma Cassidy

The aligned-action model allows for organizations to approach an issue in their own way, which opens the doors for collaborative work leaning on each organization's strengths. Often in the replication model, one practice or initiative may not work well for that specific organization, and the replication model stipulates that organizations must adopt those ideas no matter what. With the aligned-action model, participants have more freedom to take on the task with a different lens and approach, allowing for more creative solutions to complex problems.

The aligned-action model reflects farm to school's lack of a one-size-fits-all approach. NFSN promotes the three core elements of farm to school (local procurement, school gardens, and food and agriculture education) and three state strategies (state networks, state positions, and state policy), however, specific goals and implementation towards these goals are set and carried out at the state and community levels. This model allows for organizations that have focus and expertise in one core element or one sector (e.g., education, public health, economic development, environment) to utilize approaches and strategies that work for their organization and industry and still contribute to the common goals identified by the state farm to school network.

Utilizing Working Groups and Committees

Working groups or committees are one of the most common ways that state farm to school networks divide

work and accomplish specific tasks. Examples include strategic planning, conference planning, policy advocacy, or network leadership. Sometimes working groups focus on more specific areas or projects, such as a food literacy program or school garden mapping. A total of 15 state farm to school networks use working groups as a way to share and delegate work, such as the Colorado Farm to School Task Force Working Groups, Massachusetts Farm to School Network working groups (policy, supply chain, and education) and Maine working groups (fundraising, communications, Harvest of the Month, and network development). Some working groups even have strategic plans for these groups, which allow them to have a focal point and achievable goals. Success of a working group depends on the clarity of the goals and purpose and the flexibility to convene or be dissolved based on the needs of the network.

Fundraising Collaboratively

There are many paths to becoming a funded organization, from grants that bring a group together to organizations that come together naturally over time and eventually need funding to continue collaboration. Funding for state farm to school networks may come from diverse streams, and creativity can help identify potential funders. Some states may have legislation that support networks with time committed from state employees, such as the Colorado Farm to School Healthy Kids Act. Federal grants, including the USDA Farm to School Grant Program can be

leveraged for network development activities. National, state, and local foundations can also be access points for funding. Because of the multi-sector nature of farm to school, consider diverse angles to identifying funders, such as those focused on obesity prevention, food systems, and education.

As networks endeavor on collaborative fundraising, conflicts may arise. One way for a network of organizations to address financial conflict is by being open and honest about each organization's financial situation, needs, and motivations for participation in the network. Resentment is possible when organizations are competing for the same funds. Although the competition can make dynamics uncomfortable, it is important to preemptively come up with systems on how to deal with these conflicts.¹³

A simple way to ensure that there are no or few disagreements about funds is to get group agreement on the need for funding, how funding will be used, and who will manage the funds. The following steps can help a network create a mutually agreed upon fundraising plan:

Share information on currently funded work: Being open about your organization's finances and its ability to commit to the cooperative work may seem risky, but by sharing this information, the whole group will feel more trust and freedom in developing ideas for fundraising.

Create a budget: When making the budget, think ahead to any needs that may arise related to the collaborative work, not just the activities the groups put on together. This could include things like communication platforms or meeting space expenses.

Discuss fundraising options openly: Discuss with members different options for fundraising, as well as their willingness to participate. This may be best done with a facilitator in the event that conflicts arise.

Communicate with donors: Communicate with one another on how the group will reach out to donors to avoid suspicion of competition. Just as you might write letters or have informational meetings within your own organization, have joint letters and joint informational meetings for the network, so donors are clearly able to see the collaborative effort.

Establish fundraising leadership: In order to best coordinate funding, chose someone (or a few people) to be in charge of keeping track of everything, informing the group of updates, and staying true to the agreed upon ways for spending the money.

Manage network grants professionally and formally: The group will need to decide which organization will organize finances. If the amount of money is small, it is reasonable to have it held by a member organization. If the funding is larger and comes over a period of time, it may be helpful to identify a fiscal sponsor.

Raising money together can be a daunting task, but the Connecticut Farm to School Collaborative was able to successfully apply for a USDA Farm to School Grant. This is their story:

"Our biggest challenge was figuring out an eligible entity to apply that had the capacity to host the grant as the lead. Our state agencies do not have the capacity, institutes of higher education cannot apply, FoodCorps CT was just finishing up a USDA grant, and the other groups just did not make as much sense. Everyone was on board though and we had enough letters of support. It just took two to three people who could work through the plan, forms, and process to make it happen. It all came together quite quickly. If we get [the grant], we will be well on our way to a strategic plan!"

When talking about avoiding conflict, the partners noted:

"We spent lots of time on process and developing trust within the group before this all happened. It took us months to come up with [our] definition of farm to school, but... [it] was well worth the wait as an exercise that helped us establish relationships with one another."

Raising Awareness

Raising awareness about your network and its accomplishments is an important strategy for bringing in new stakeholders, building community support, and increasing interest in farm to school across your state. There are many approaches to spreading the word about your state farm to school network's efforts. Whether you are just getting started or are building on years of experience, there are outreach and marketing opportunities available that can fit any network's needs.







Examples of farm to school network logos.

Leveraging Logos and Branding

Developing a logo and visual brand for your network is a key strategy for raising awareness and gaining recognition. Logos can visually convey the mission of your network and create symbolic connections to efforts. Creating a logo is also a great first step in developing an overall visual brand for your network. A logo's design can help guide the colors, fonts, and visual style of additional materials your network may develop, such as a website, resource documents, or Harvest of the Month materials. NFSN Core and Supporting Partner organizations may request to use state versions of the NFSN logo, which represent affiliations with NFSN and alignment with national farm to school efforts. NFSN Partners can contact info@farmtoschool.org for information on how to access use of the NFSN State logos.

Building a Website

Websites are a standard and functional way to share the activities and impact of your network, and can often serve as a primary resource for stakeholders who are looking to learn more and dig deeper into farm to school activities happening in their state. Websites can also vastly expand the reach of your network activities and encourage engagement from diverse audiences. When developing a website for your network, it is important to consider your key audiences and stakeholders (e.g., educators, farmers, food service professionals, parents); what stakeholders

are seeking by visiting your website (e.g., educational resources, networking opportunities, training events); and, what actions you want your website visitors to take (e.g., download resources, sign up for a newsletter, get involved in an event). Explore examples of state farm to school network websites in the State Farm to School Networks across the United States map, with strong examples including the Illinois Farm to School Network and New Hampshire Farm to School.

Using Social Media

Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are simple, easy, and quick tools for engaging your stakeholders and increasing public awareness about your work. They are also great options for creating an online presence if your organization does not have a website. Post information about upcoming events, local news stories, new resources, or pictures of farm to school activities in your community. If you are crunched for time, consider using a free platform like Hootsuite to pre-draft and schedule your social media posts. While it is always best to create unique posts that best fit with each platform, Hootsuite and other social media management tools can also post a single message to all of your social media platforms at once. Check out the South Carolina Farm to School Social Media Plan for examples of how to identify social media goals, understand your audiences, and use metrics to evaluate and maximize your efforts.

Generating Buzz With A #Hashtag

Hashtags help identify and connect your social media posts to specific topics and conversations. Frequently used farm to school hashtags include #farmtoschool, #schoolgardens, #schoolfood, and #localfood. Any word or phrase can be used as a hashtag, which makes this an easy and free way to create a custom promotional campaign or crowd-sourcing method to support your work. For example, during National Farm to School Month, NFSN encourages its followers to post photos and stories about their farm to school activities with **#F2SMonth**. Not only does this make it easy to see all related posts at once, but it also creates a buzz of activity that social media followers are excited to participate in. Try creating a special hashtag to promote and generate engagement in a local food day or policy opportunity, or to boost awareness of farm to school success in your state.

Using Newsletters and Listservs

Disseminating a regularly scheduled newsletter (weekly, monthly, or quarterly) is an easy way to keep stakeholders up-to-date on your network's latest news, opportunities, and success stories. This can include an electronic newsletter (e.g., Farm Fresh RI Farm to School E-Newsletter) or a flier newsletter, saved as a PDF (e.g., Quarterly Alabama Farm to School Collaborators Newsletter). If you are sending an e-newsletter, find an email marketing platform that helps you easily create beautiful and interactive newsletters, such as MailChimp or Zoho Campaigns, both of which are free for organizations with under 2,000 subscribers. To streamline your newsletter process, create a template design and determine what kind of content you will include on a regular basis. For example, your newsletter could always include one spotlight story on a local farmer or school, a list of newly available resources, and a farm to school recipe. Creating a content template will help reduce time and take the guesswork out of creating these regular emails.

For state farm to school networks looking to foster more partnership development and resource sharing across stakeholders in their state, developing an email listserv may be a beneficial resource. A listserv is a method of communicating with a group of people via email, where any email sent is delivered to the entire group of subscribers. The benefit of a listserv is easily connecting many stakeholders for easy communication and interaction. If a listserv is publicly open to any subscriber, additional oversight and monitoring of the listserv's use may be required. Google Groups is a simple and free option for developing a listserv.

Connecting with Media

Targeted media engagement can be one of the most impactful methods of growing awareness about your efforts and reaching new and diverse stakeholders. Being featured by a state or local newspaper, television station, or radio show will often reach a much wider audience than will your network's communications platforms alone. Work on developing a core list of local journalists and reporters who you know focus on topics related to your work, and be in touch with them regularly about potential story ideas and opportunities for them to learn more about your efforts. See NFSN's Tips for Building Media Relationships and Placing a Great Story for ideas.

Developing Key Messaging

Every stakeholder in your network has the opportunity to represent your activities and articulate a common vision for farm to school. Developing a document with key messages and talking points can be a helpful resource for ensuring members feel equipped to articulate your collaborative efforts and mission in a clear, compelling, and consistent way. Consider creating a communications guide that includes suggested language for describing your network (e.g., your mission and vision, who is involved, activities) and a list of standard messages and talking points about your network that can be used in any outreach opportunity, whether online, in print, or in person. Make sure every member of your leadership team is familiar with this document. See Vermont FEED's Communications & Outreach Planning worksheet to start developing your messaging.



Credit: Massachusetts Farm to School

Using Printed Materials

Printed materials and resources are the most effective resources when meeting people face-to-face, and should not be overlooked in your strategy to raise awareness about your work. For example, the Massachusetts Farm to School Network flyers are hung across the state to create awareness, and their postcards ask people to write down why farm to school is important to them. The Vermont Farm to School Awareness Day flier promotes the event at the state house.

Exploring Additional Outreach Resources

Developing visually engaging materials and diving into outreach and communications activities may seem intimidating if you lack a communications expert on your team, but it does not have to be. There are many free and easy-to-use resources available online that can make outreach activities doable at any skill level. Canva can help you easily create beautifully designed posters, handouts, presentation, social media graphics, and more. Piktochart is great for developing simple infographic and reports that feature metrics from your work. Wordpress and Google Sites are easy places to start if you are new at developing

a website. It is also always beneficial to consider contracting with a consultant who does have marketing, media relations, or design skills, as these are important investments in strengthening your brand and growing awareness about your efforts across the state.

Engaging Supporters

While marketing is crucial to growing your state farm to school network and the national movement, so is engaging supporters in your work and initiatives. Give people outside of your network the opportunity to engage and take action, whether through signing up for a free newsletter, attending an event such as Vermont Farm to School Network regional gatherings, volunteering, or engaging online through social media. Consider hosting a "How to Start a Community Garden" event or a day at the capitol to engage parents and the general public in legislative action. The more you are able to engage diverse stakeholders, the more they will feel connected to the farm to school movement and will commit to spreading the word about it

Advocating to Advance and Institutionalize the Movement

Engaging in Advocacy

Policy (including legislative and administrative actions) is integral to the success of state farm to school networks. Policy advocacy is a core function of NFSN, and policy change is often a primary goal for state farm to school networks. In fact, certain policies can support development and sustainability of networks themselves.

State policies that support farm to school can raise awareness about farm to school (e.g., designating a farm to school week or month), contribute financially to farm to school activities (e.g., funding a grant program), institutionalize farm to school via state employee positions (e.g., establishing a state agency position devoted to farm to school), and establish farm to school networks (e.g., a farm to school task force or council).

All network stakeholders can advocate on behalf of the network based on their roles, in varying capacities from providing general education about farm to school to lobbying for a specific bill. Networks can also reach out to legislators who are parents or former farmers or educators and work to get them involved in farm to school initiatives, thus encouraging them to support policy efforts. Consider holding events for potential farm to school champions such as Legislators in the Lunchroom, a practice originating in Oregon. NFSN farm to school site visits for policymakers invite staff to tour a school garden, eat

school lunch, and hear from farm to school practitioners in D.C., which then allows NFSN's Policy Director to set up meetings with those who attended to work more closely on farm to school legislation.

New Mexico's farm to school policy efforts to fund the NM Grown in the Schools Program brought together a collaboration of network stakeholders including Farm to Table, NM Food and Agriculture Policy Council, NM School Nutrition Association, farmers, and other organization and agencies, demonstrating the collaborative nature of farm to school advocacy. Similarly, Oregon's 2009 legislation to create farm to school positions in the Department of Education, in addition to the already existing position in the Department of Agriculture, and 2017 bill to increase spending for the state's farm to school program, have been the result of a number of organizations working together.

For a state farm to school network that is new to advocacy, try something on a smaller scale. For example, the Illinois Farm to School Network partnered with the Illinois Stewardship Alliance and successfully advocated to have "Apple Crunch Day" officially recognized by the state in 2017. Small wins like these can lead to bigger wins as farm to school gains more momentum across the state. See NFSN's State Farm to School Legislative Survey for examples from across the network.

Credit: Center for Rural Affairs



Developing Shared Metrics and Evaluating Impact

Measuring Success

Metrics are a vital tool for tracking progress toward network goals, identifying needs and planning initiatives, and assessing impact. Looking at metrics can help state farm to school networks adjust approaches, secure new funding opportunities, and improve outcomes; hence measuring success is critical to prioritize. Consider partnering with a data-driven, research-oriented agency or university for designing your evaluation plan, which for a network with multiple partners and members needs to tie in with the shared goals and priorities. This is what the state network in Minnesota did. The Minnesota Farm to School Leadership Team partnered with the Applied Research and Evaluation Department within the Extension Center for Family Development to produce "Cross-Sector Collaboration: A Report from the Minnesota Farm to School Leadership Team." This report documents an evaluation of the processes and outcomes of the leadership team's collective efforts. It provides a glimpse of farm to school initiatives in Minnesota, including the benefits of the leadership team as described by 22 current and former members. An integrative leadership framework was selected to guide the evaluation because it is designed to increase understanding of how cross-sector collaborations are brought together to effectively address large scale, public problems.

Developing Shareable Qualitative Data

Qualitative data collection in the form of interviews, stories of success, and testimonials can demonstrate individual impact as well as the collective power of state farm to school networks. Anecdotes and stories can give a human face to your efforts and can be a valuable tool in engaging new stakeholders, reaching diverse communities, and demonstrating the value of farm to school to policy makers, funders, and other supporters. Consider having a section on your website devoted to examples in action like California's farm to school stories and Vermont's farm to school videos

Gathering qualitative data in the form of interviews with state farm to school network members can also help assess the functionality of a network and the satisfaction of its members. Periodic internal process evaluation as well as informal feedback from membership and partners will ensure longevity and sustainability of the network.

Developing Shareable Quantitative Data

Tracking concrete outcomes before, during, and after an activity or project is important to prove validity of efforts as well as assess continuation or change of course. While collecting your own datasets for farm to school progress in the state, also look at the USDA Farm to School Census for your state's statistics on farm to school involvement and outcomes.

Modes of data collection can be diverse, depending on your network's reach and partnerships. Some states, such as Michigan and Texas respectively, have successfully integrated farm to school data collection into child nutrition reporting or state agency procurement tracking systems. Other states use an awards program to incentivize self-reporting, such as Georgia's Golden Radish Award. An annual impact study is a strategy used to measure success, review progress, and make adjustments and can generate investments from policymakers and funders alike. Review California's Farm to School Matters one-pager, Oregon's Farm to School Counts, and impact reports from Illinois and Vermont.

Mapping School Gardens

Many state farm to school networks have created maps of school gardens to demonstrate to school administrators and the public the scope of school gardens and the potential for the future. See states school garden maps from Alabama, Delaware, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, Oregon, Washington, Washington, D.C., and Wisconsin.



Vermont

Farm to School Network



History

In 2005, Vermont passed the first legislation in the nation to created a farm to school grant program and farm to school position in a state Department of Agriculture (the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets). By 2008, there was discussion of whether to develop a formal Farm to School Council in the state or to develop a more grassroots Network and Steering Committee. A network was chosen for its ability to take action and to bring diverse stakeholders together. The steering committee was organized by Vermont FEED (a partnership of two nonprofits) and the Agency of Agriculture and included other state departments, statewide and regional nonprofits, and higher education.

The Steering Committee had a vision for farm to school in every community, hosted numerous events and gatherings, and coordinated farm to school activity across the state. In 2014, the Steering Committee launched a strategic mapping process to identify key levers of change in the farm to school system and reorganized the network to better take action on those levers.

Structure

Vermont's Farm to School Network has more than 30 organizations engaged through six Action Teams - including educational value, economic value, demand, policy, evaluation, ease of use, and supply innovation - that have biannual gatherings to share learning and progress. As of March 2018, a new Action Team focused on farm to ECE is in development. One member of each Action Team, selected by their team, serves as the team lead, and on the Network's Steering Committee, along with standing positions for the network backbone organization, Vermont FEED, the state farm to school coordinator housed at the Department of Agriculture, and the broader Vermont Farm to Plate Network. The Network Steering Committee

distributes funding to Action Team projects based on need and availability of funding. To reach additional stakeholders, the network uses their listsery of over 500 people.

Implementing Best Practices

Vermont's Farm to School Network used a number of strategies as they developed their network. First, they started with a grassroots approach of strengthening their collective impact by reaching out to local organizations to be a part of the network. They built a strong alliance with food system nonprofits, farmer associations, antihunger organizations, School Nutrition Association-VT, the Vermont Community Garden Network, the Department of Health, Department of Child Nutrition, Agency of Agriculture, and the University of Vermont. The Vermont Farm to School Network built trust by focusing on alignment of the partners around a shared goal, developed through a series of individual interviews, focus groups, and feedback at larger gatherings. They built a sense of urgency and boldness by assessing the gap between where they were and where they needed to be. An outside facilitator was hired to use a more rigorous systems mapping approach to identify where the network could have the greatest leverage. Cross-team communications are essential, so every six months, all the Teams gather to share their learnings.

The network is tracking progress towards goals through collection of existing evaluation data and a survey of schools. Each Action Team develops short-term projects based on strategies to reach their goal. Seed funding to each Team was instrumental in building momentum quickly and building collaboration among partners. Their mantra has been "align, act, adjust" as they assess progress towards their goals. One of the resources they used during their formation was a book titled *Reinventing Organizations* by Frederic Laloux, which focused on a



Credit: Vermont Farm to School Network

model for tackling complex issues of change. The network collaboratively identifies gaps in desired data for making the case for farm to school. Action Teams have completed reports on the economic contribution of farm to school, videos on the educational value of farm to school, and a series of case studies of best practices to share with the network broadly.

Since 2007, the state-funded Vermont Farm to School grant program has supported 157 schools and 22 early care programs, with almost \$1.2 million in state funds. The grant program has always had a strong technical assistance component tied to the grants and based on evidence-based best practices. Schools are provided coaching and technical assistance for their efforts in the classroom, cafeteria, and community. The Agency of Agriculture contracts with Vermont FEED and other nonprofits to provide this support, helping schools to develop sustained programs after the grant period. The network has achieved a great deal and has tracked progress in their Impact Report.

Strategic Visioning and Future Plans

Vermont's Farm to School Network faces many of the same challenges that other networks face, from finding a consistent source of funding to capacity constraints, particularly around communications, both internal and external. In order to maintain engagement with current funders, Vermont's network involves them in their strategic planning process so that they are more invested in the long-term outcomes. In looking for new funders, they seek organizations that can contribute to long-term investment. such as foundations. Part of the network's success is rooted in multi-year grants from foundations that allowed the network to build momentum and experiment with their new structure. To address and move legislation, Vermont has launched a grassroots legislative campaign with the objective of increasing farm to school funding for their grant program. Lastly, as they confront the need for more consistent and clear communication, they make sure that multiple individuals within the network are checking in with others working on specific projects or tasks, so they can maintain momentum.

Mississippi

Farm to School Network



History

The development of the Mississippi Farm to School Network was purposeful and carefully planned. While farm to school activity has taken place in the state since the 1990s, formation of a formal network began when the Mississippi Food Policy Council started a statewide conference and split the state into different regions to offer support to stakeholders within those regions. As leadership emerged, the Mississippi Farm to School Network received a W.K. Kellogg Foundation grant in 2015, and a group of stakeholders were pulled together to become an advisory board to the newly re-formed

network. It was important that numerous industries were involved, including grassroots nonprofits, relevant industries, state agencies (including the Departments of Education and Agriculture), educators, school food service, and early care and education stakeholders.

Structure

With any state, recognizing the needs of the community is important in creating a cohesive and functioning group. The Mississippi Farm to School Network was able to rely on their knowledge of the state's culture of community and the value found in connection. Once leaders were

Credit: Mississippi Farm to School Network



able to collect a diverse group of stakeholders to be a part of the network, they set out to create an intentional community that could be trusting and productive together. They brought in an external facilitator to get the member organizations on the same page and to build trust. This initial step would allow the leadership group to work more effectively in the long run. The network is based around having an advisory board with stakeholders from numerous industries. A complete list of the network's Board seats are listed in the section on Representing Multiple Sectors earlier in this toolkit.

Implementing Best Practices

The Mississippi Farm to School Network brought in an external evaluation team to assess its work and impact for alignment. This helped the network stay focused on their goals while taking the time needed to continue to build their community. The Board for the network meets in person twice a year and the network hosts monthly phone calls, maintains an active listsery, and meets at the annual Mississippi Farm to Cafeteria Conference. Working groups allow for members to connect on specific projects outside of their general networking tasks. The network's strong focus on community and connection has allowed it to spread farm to school across the state through programming such as the statewide Mississippi Farm to School Week celebration, school garden support grants, and curriculum teacher trainings.

The Mississippi Farm to School Network has seen a 12 percent increase in school districts practicing farm to school since 2015. The network membership is comprised of over 600 individuals across the state. The network collaborated in 2017 to issue a Mississippi Farm to School Week Challenge that reached 38,000 students who participated in school garden activities, cooking classes, and consumption of local foods on the lunch tray, many for the first time. The network holds an annual statewide conference that attracts keynote speakers from across the country and state.



Credit: Mississippi Farm to School Network

Strategic Visioning and Future Plans

Mississippi has faced challenges including staying connected and communicating well when working on collaborative projects and staying focused during both inperson and phone meetings. They hope to mitigate these issues by focusing on big picture items while they have their in-person meetings and focusing on more specific action items while they speak on the phone, since those meetings are more regular. They also plan to work toward having greater representation within their network by constantly asking the question "Who is missing from this discussion?" and then working to increase their reach and inclusion with their answer.

California

Farm to School Network



History

California's Farm to School Network is currently housed in the state's Office of Farm to Fork. The development of this office was an objective of the Health in All Policies (HiAP) Task Force's Farm to Fork Implementation Plan beginning in January 2012. To achieve this objective, the task force brought together the Departments of Education, Food and Agriculture, and Public Health to form the collaborative Office of Farm to Fork within the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA). On September 26, 2014 the Office of Farm to Fork was formally and permanently established within CDFA when Governor Brown signed Assembly Bill (AB) 2413. Authored by Assembly Speaker John Pérez, AB 2413 charged the officially created office

with increasing access to healthy foods for underserved communities and schools in the state. Already comprised of diverse stakeholder groups, the Office of Farm to Fork was a natural fit to take over leadership of the state farm to school network, which it did in 2016.

Structure

Through the collaborative efforts of the Office of Farm to Fork, the California Farm to School Network developed with eleven regional lead organizations, each connecting with other relevant organizations in their respective areas and also connecting with the main partners at the Office of Farm to Fork. The regional leads were chosen from a

Credit: California Farm to School Network



group of diverse stakeholders, from food service directors to state agency representatives and nonprofits. California's structural model is based off of the previous partner model of NFSN (NFSN had Regional Lead Agencies from 2007-2016). Their reach is increased by their regional structure, allowing connection across a large, densely populated state.

Implementing Best Practices

California employed numerous strategies while creating and moving their state farm to school network forward. In order to maintain contact and to implement various projects within the network, they hold quarterly calls and host a yearly in-person meeting. Because California's network established leaders across regions and backgrounds, they were also able to increase visibility throughout the state. This visibility contributed to recognition from elected officials, which would eventually lead to the official declaration of October as Farm to School Month in 2017.

The California Farm to School Network hosted a Farm to School and Garden Conference in 2015 and 2017 to

expand the farm to school movement. The network also created numerous resources to support both their regional leads and individuals interested in farm to school. From a guide on how to start a farm to school program to farm to school curriculum to farm to school policy, the California Farm to School Network has increased their visibility and catered to the needs of the people of California. The network also devotes a section of their website to farm to school grants to help their partners and others searching for farm to school funding.

Strategic Visioning and Future Plans

As the California Farm to School Network moves forward, it faces the challenge of attaining consistent funding. To combat this challenge, they are working to engage more school boards and local government officials in farm to school and farm to fork initiatives in hopes of building a more grassroots movement to secure funding from state government allocations. In addition, they plan to engage more parents in farm to school so that schools and other local entities-such as local governments-identify farm to school as a priority for constituents.







Challenges for State Farm to School Networks

Finding consistent and appropriate funding is a frequently cited challenge for farm to school stakeholders across the country. Securing grants from government agencies and foundations alike is a difficult and demanding process. Sometimes funders prefer to fund newer, innovative projects rather than providing support for sustaining the core functions of a statewide network. In fact, some nonprofit-led state farm to school networks have closed their doors in the last decade due to lack of sustained funding sources. Legislation has provided some opportunities to sustain statewide networks through farm to school positions (learn about these in NFSN's State Farm to School Positions resource). Many state farm to school networks seek to diversify funding through exploration of paid membership and fee for service, among other ideas. Even as state farm to school networks achieve important landmarks and goals, planning for fiscal sustainability must always be a priority.

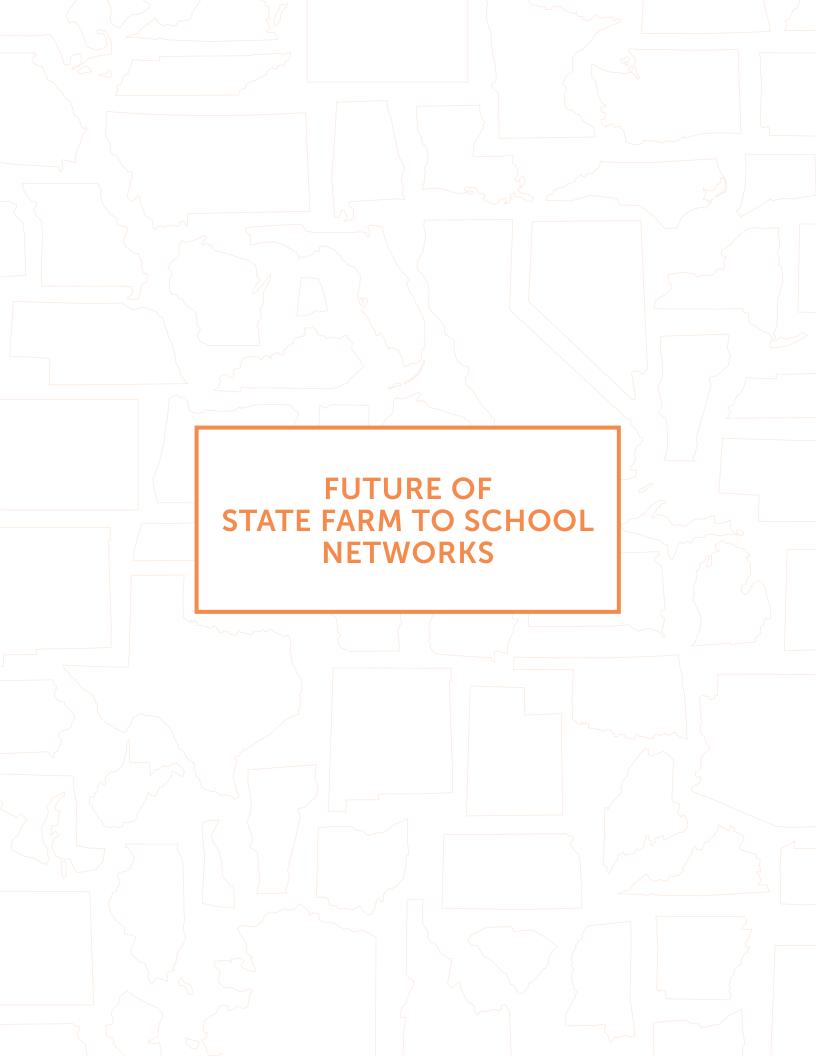
Constant and clear communication is a challenge for both emerging and seasoned networks. Remaining open and transparent can be difficult when organizations are competing for limited resources and funding. To set the stage for transparency, communication, and shared ideals, organizations should first identify the nature of the "network." Some state farm to school networks call themselves a "project" or "program" (e.g., farm to school is a project or program within an organization or agency) when their work is indicative of a network, and some

groups call themselves "networks" when their work is more indicative of a project or program. Communicate clearly and consistently to both members and the public the "what" and "why" of the state farm to school network and continually work to support collaboration and cohesion. The capacity to achieve network goals and identify consistent funding streams increases greatly when networks are working well together and have clear, outlined goals and expectations.

Maintaining a sustainable network is a struggle identified by many farm to school network stakeholders. Sometimes networks are strong and have a lot of momentum, but then one person leaves and the structure seems to fall apart. In Oregon, there used to be a strong and robust farm to ECE network, but when one of the organization entities shifted focus, the network was meshed with another entity and somewhat dissolved. There is also the problem of being a "victim of success," where networks are highly successful but find it difficult to continue to engage stakeholders and funders in growth once the goal - whether that means forming a network or gaining a state farm to school position - is reached. Thoughtful planning and consideration of the seeds of success identified in this resource can help build sustainability into the fabric of the network. However, as need and interest in a state changes, a network must also have flexibility to modify member composition, structure, and approach as needed.

Credit: Emma Cassidy





Future of State Farm to School Networks

Farm to school has made significant strides since the 1990s and since NFSN's inception in 2007. Interest in and demand for high quality farm to school resources and support is not waning and state farm to school networks are key to meeting this demand and developing infrastructure to sustain initiatives. Developing state farm to school networks will further this growth and will sustain engagement of communities given the farm to school movement continues to offer abundant opportunity for meaningful impact at multiple levels. State networks present an opportunity to coordinate and collaborate on a level aligned with other programs, policy, and partnerships.

While the development of a sustainable and effective state farm to school network may be challenging, the successes achieved by networks across the country speaks to the powerful impact that these coordinated efforts can have. The three case studies highlighted in this toolkit and the many states contributing to this resource offer just some examples of the policy and programmatic growth opportunities that farm to school networks can champion. At this stage in the farm to school movement, many state farm to school networks are well developed enough to share their learnings and established best practices. States in the beginning stages of network development

or just considering establishing a network have abundant resources and examples from which to learn.

The seeds of state farm to school network success outlined here offer a strong foundation for state networks:

- Identifying and Engaging Stakeholders
- Establishing a Robust Network Structure
- Setting a Strategic Vision and Direction
- Raising Awareness
- Advocating to Advance and Institutionalize the Movement
- Developing Shared Metrics and Evaluating Impact

Stakeholders can return to these seeds regardless of the network stage of development to both avoid common pitfalls and address challenges as they arise. Though state political and social environments may shift and levels of support and engagement change, the strategies in this toolkit have potential to sustain efforts and increase impact and activity of state farm to school networks nationwide to ensure that more children, farmers, and communities reap the benefits of farm to school.

Credit: Jason Van Haverbeke



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