

Tools for Promoting Local Purchasing & Farm to School Activities: Sample Wellness Policy Language for Schools

Farm to School: A Tool for Achieving School Health & Nutrition Goals

Nationwide, schools are turning to farm to school programs to improve the quality of school meals and the effectiveness of nutrition education. Farm to school programs include four key elements:

1. Purchase farm products from local farmers for inclusion in school meal programs and other school food sales.
2. Agriculture and nutrition education to existing standards-based curricula.
3. School gardens, where children can learn to eat what they grow, and link their experience to tangible lessons in science, math and other disciplines.
4. Hands on experiential education programs that teach children about agriculture & nutrition – such as farm and farmers' markets visits, where children can plant, weed, harvest, and taste local farm products.

These programs offer more than great tasting farm-fresh products; they provide hands-on educational experiences to connect children with the source of their food. Because farm to school programs are multi-faceted, linking nutrition education with the classroom, the lunchroom, the school garden and local farmers, they benefit not only the students, but provide a win-win-win for schools, farmers and the community:

- **Schools:** Allows schools to serve more and tastier fresh fruits and vegetables in school meals, and can increase participation rates in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), thereby increasing school revenues.
- **Students:** Offers kids ripe, seasonal fruits and vegetables that are bursting with flavor so they learn to like fresh foods at a time in their lives when they are developing life-long eating habits. Experiential learning activities reinforce healthy options offered in the cafeteria.
- **Communities:** Patronizing local farms helps keep community dollars in the local economy. Engaging the community with their local food sources helps strengthen regional relationships and community health. Healthy farms provide jobs, pay taxes, and keep working agricultural land open. Undeveloped farmland can also benefit the region by maintaining open space and diversified wildlife habitat.
- **Farmers:** Selling to schools provides farmers with a steady, predictable market for much of the year. This allows farmers to establish better controls on planting, harvesting and marketing.

78% of children in the United States do not consume the recommended 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day. Of the 23% that do, many are meeting the federal requirements in the form of potatoes, mostly french fries.

Farm to School: Linking to Policy

The Reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act in 2004 included a provision that requires each educational agency participating in a federal school meal program to establish a local school wellness policy, which must be in place for the 2006-2007 school year (Public Law 108-265 Section 204). The law requires that these policies must, at a minimum:

- II. Set goals for nutrition education, physical activity, and other school-based activities that promote student wellness.
- III. Establish nutrition guidelines for all foods available on campus during the school day.
- IV. Assure that guidelines for school meals are not less restrictive than those set at the federal level by the Secretary of Agriculture.
- V. Establish a plan for measuring the impact and implementation of the local wellness policy.
- VI. Involve parents, students, representatives of the school authority, the school board, school administrators, and the public in development of the local wellness policy.

Studies of Farm to School programs have shown that more students participate in the school meal program when farm fresh products are on the menu, instead of pre-packaged, canned and processed fruits and vegetables.

Organizing in Your School District – Using this Policy

This resource was developed to help you promote policies that support local purchasing and other farm to school activities as part of your school districts' wellness policy. We encourage you to pick and choose the recommendations here that make the most sense for your district. You can use any of these policy statements individually or as whole sections, depending on where your district is and what changes you want to make. Pursuing farm to school strategies is only one step toward creating a healthy school environment and the language in this tool is intended to be only a part of a comprehensive policy that addresses a school's many needs. Please refer to the resources section for information on additional tools to help your school develop a comprehensive policy.

STEP 1: Inquire if the district has made any progress in developing a school wellness policy. One place to start is the district superintendent's office. In the process of this fact-finding you'll meet school personnel and others that will most likely be involved in drafting a wellness policy.

STEP 2: Play an active role in the development of the wellness policies. If the process is already underway, become part of the planning group. If they have not yet started, help bring together the important players from the school and the community – including school administrators, food service staff, teachers, parents, students, and community representatives. Use the policy ideas mentioned here to help start the conversation.

Studies have shown that organic produce has more vitamins and minerals, and improved protein quality than crops grown using pesticides. In one study organic oranges had 30% more vitamin C non-organic oranges.

STEP 4: Draft a policy that fits the needs of your school district. The federal and state standards will be your starting point. Use this tool and other model policies listed in the resources section to determine what other issues you want your district's policy to address. Present this to your school board for adoption.

STEP 5: The true test of an effective policy is how well it's implemented. Develop an evaluation plan so you can ensure that the policy is being implemented the way it was intended.

Need Help Getting Started? Contact Heather Fenney at CFJC at 310-822-5410

Children with families below 130% of the federal poverty threshold are twice as likely to be overweight than those above the threshold. These are many of the same families that rely on the school meal program to provide their children with a healthy and nutritious lunch.

Sample Language for School Wellness Policy

Use any of these sample policy statements individually or as whole sections, depending on the interest of your district.

Wellness Policy Requirement I: *Set goals for nutrition education, physical activity, and other school-based activities that promote student wellness.*

Nutrition Education

- Each school shall establish a school garden to be used as an outdoor classroom for nutrition, science, and other lessons.
- Nutrition education messages from the classroom will be modeled in the cafeteria and across campus by offering locally grown food whenever possible in the following ways:
 - Within the reimbursable meal program.
 - Through in-cafeteria marketing and nutrition education, such as taste tests and activities that explain where the food comes from.
 - In vending machine sales
- Staff shall integrate experiential activities – such as gardening, cooking demonstrations, farm and farmers' market tours, and classroom visits from farmers and farm workers - into existing curricula at all levels.
- School food service, in partnership with other departments and community organizations will work to creatively market and promote locally produced food to students, through activities such as:
 - Featuring food grown in the school garden in the cafeteria through sampling and inclusion in school meals based upon availability and acceptability.
 - Developing cafeteria themes relating to local farmers and products grown in the region.
 - Hosting farmers' markets or farm stands on school grounds during lunch or after school for students, staff and the community.
 - Developing creative campus fundraisers based on healthy food items - such as produce and seedling sales.

Physical Activity

Studies of farm to school programs have found that by combining the introduction of fresh farm products in the cafeteria with nutrition education in the classroom, student are able to chose healthy meals 75% of the time, compared to 46% before the educational component was introduced.

- The district encourages and approves the use of a school garden as a venue for physical activity during the school day.
- The district recognizes that farm visits and school gardens can offer physical activity opportunities, as well as agricultural education, by engaging students in activities such as planting, harvesting, weeding, and composting. Teachers and students are encouraged to take advantage of these physical activity opportunities during the school day as well as through field trips and after school activities.

Wellness Policy Requirement II: *Establish nutrition guideline for all foods available on campus during school day.*

- The Child Nutrition Services Director shall develop and implement a plan to integrate organic foods or foods produced with minimal pesticide use into the meals served to students.
- The Child Nutrition Services Director shall develop and implement a plan to eliminate potential harmful food additives and processes, such as bovine growth hormones, irradiation, trans fats, and known genetically modified foods.
- Schools are encouraged to offer fresh, seasonal locally grown produce at every location on the school site where food is sold and at all school sponsored events and activities.
- Meals served within the federally reimbursable meal program must be designed to feature fresh and minimally processed fruits and vegetables, from local sources to the greatest extent possible.

Wellness Policy Requirement III: *Assure that guidelines for school meals are not less restrictive than those set at the federal level by the Secretary of Agriculture.*

- The Child Nutrition Services Director will review the school wellness policy and ensure that it is not less restrictive than those set by the Secretary of Agriculture or state law.

Childhood obesity rates have doubled in the last thirty years, with more than 25% of American children now overweight or obese and vulnerable to heart disease and diet-related illness.

Wellness Policy Requirement IV: *Establish a plan for measuring the impact and implementation of the local wellness policy.*

Evaluation of farm to school programs shows that including locally sourced farm products within the school lunch program and offering interactive nutrition education in the classroom and cafeteria helps to meet both nutrition and financial goals of schools' meal programs. Offering students local produce has been shown to increase participation in the school lunch program, which increases students' consumption of fruits and vegetables, and also generates increased revenue for school food service. When evaluating the effectiveness of these elements of your school wellness policy you should be sure to reflect on these factors.

- An annual review will be conducted to measure the impact and implementation of the wellness policy. The review will look at:
 - What percentage of food was purchased from local sources.
 - What was the budgetary impact of increasing local purchasing.
 - Where do opportunities exist to increase purchases of local and seasonal items.
 - What impact has local purchasing had on participation in the school meal programs and fruit and vegetable consumption of students.
 - Frequency and effectiveness of nutrition education activities involving the school garden, farm visits and other agricultural based activities.

Wellness Policy Requirement V: *Involve parents, students, representatives of the school authority, the school board, school administrators, and the public in development of the local wellness policy.*

In addition to diverse district and community representatives, there are significant benefits to involving members of the farming community when developing school wellness policies around farm to school. Farmers, representatives from organizations that represent farmers, agricultural industry representatives, master gardeners – they can all help you to know what is in season when, what you can grow in your garden and how you can use in your cafeteria or on campus, how to implement a composting program and how to work with farmers in a mutually beneficial way.

- The wellness policy committee must include representatives from the local agricultural community, such as farmers, representatives from organizations that represent farmers, farmers' market representatives and agriculture industry representatives. The team should also include food and nutrition professionals such as representatives from community organizations that work to promote local foods, local public health professionals, chefs and master gardeners.
- A team of district and community representatives will be established to support the food service director and teachers in implementing local purchasing and other farm to school activities on an on-going basis.

Farm to School Resources

Information on Starting a Farm to School Program

- ◆ **National Farm to School Program:** www.farmentoschool.org
- ◆ **Community Food Security Coalition** Farm to school program: www.foodsecurity.org/farm_to_school.html
- ◆ **Linking Farms with Schools: A Guide to Understanding Farm to School Programs for Schools, Farmers, and Organizers:** www.foodsecurity.org/pubs.html
- ◆ **Healthy Farms, Healthy Kids: Evaluating the Barriers and Opportunities for Farm to School:** www.foodsecurity.org/pubs.html
- ◆ **Rethinking School Lunch:** www.ecoliteracy.org/rethinking/rs1.html

Model School Wellness Policies

This resource only includes model language to support farm to school and is intended to be used together with more comprehensive policy models. Below are comprehensive wellness policy resources that we recommend.

- ◆ **National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity:** www.schoolwellnesspolicies.org
- ◆ **Public Citizen** Irradiated food model wellness policy: www.safelunch.org
- ◆ **Center for Food & Justice** *Healthy School Food Policy Check List:* departments.oxy.edu/uepi/schoolfoodschecklist.htm
- ◆ **USDA Local Wellness Policy Resources:** www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/wellnesspolicy.html
- ◆ **Action for Healthy Kids:** www.actionforhealthykids.org/resources.php

**Contact the California Food and Justice Coalition for
more information on impacting your local school wellness policy or
starting a farm to school program in your area**

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