

Healthy Kids and Healthy Economies

Results from the 2006 Farm to School Survey of Colorado Food Service Operations

Colorado Institute of Public Policy and the Rocky Mountain Farmers Union Farm to School Workgroup

More people are interested in eating locally grown foods. And local farmers are interested in finding new markets. Selling Colorado produce to Colorado schools means healthy farms and healthy children in our state.

Research shows that Colorado has tremendous promise to provide year-round produce to schools. Schools report overwhelming interest in buying local produce. The key is organizing producer resources across the state, and creating widespread awareness about how to participate in local Farm to School programs.

Data from the 90 K–12 public and private schools that responded to our survey shows that:

Schools want to buy Colorado-grown foods.

- o 84% of Colorado K–12 school Food Service directors are interested in what Colorado growers have to offer.
- o 87% of schools indicated that new district Wellness policies encourage more student consumption of fresh vegetables and fruits.
- o All types of schools—public and private, rural and urban—are interested in local produce.
- o 40% of Colorado schools have bought local foods in the past. These schools want to create future partnerships with local farms.
- o Key crops include Colorado apples, tomatoes, lettuce, watermelon, cantaloupe, potatoes, and carrots.
- o Schools with salad bars are particularly interested in buying local produce.
- o School Food Service directors reported that current vendor contracts and food policies would not prevent them from buying local produce.

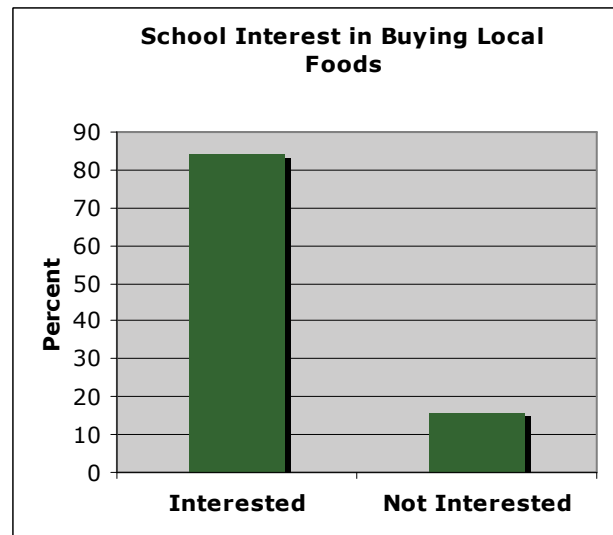
Schools don't know about Farm to School programs.

- o 53% of Colorado Food Service directors have never heard of Farm to School, although urban districts are more likely to know about Farm to School than rural districts.
- o Only 6% of Colorado schools say that they have bought local food as part of a local Farm to School program.

“The Farm to Cafeteria program is an exciting program combining education, student nutrition, and rural sustainability.”

— Senator Ken Salazar

To increase school purchases of local foods statewide, we need to coordinate and share information about current buying programs. We need to help producers and schools find local programs, and help schools that already buy local produce create sustainable local food-purchasing networks.



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Specific recommendations based on this survey include:

1. Raise awareness of Farm to School!

- o 48% of schools say they don't buy local foods because they don't know how. A statewide information campaign about local foods and regional Farm to School programs would address this.

2. Get organized.

- o Most school Food Service directors say they would be more likely to buy local foods if someone came to them with information, prices, and opportunities. Streamlining services would build long-term, sustainable relationships between schools and local producers. Many states have statewide Farm to School Coordinators to help organize programs and share resources.

3. Create comparable prices.

- o Over 95% of schools would be more likely to buy local foods if they knew the prices were about the same. Colorado could match costs, or help communities apply for grant funds, such as those available from the National Community Food Project, to offset these and other expenses. In some cases, slightly higher prices may be negligible compared to the nutritional benefits and longer shelf life of local foods.

4. Focus on what schools need most.

- o Schools say that **apples** are their number one fresh food purchase. Colorado apples are the perfect size for children, and are produced during the school year. Many schools, especially those with salad bars, also buy **lettuce** and **carrots** every week. Other Colorado-grown salad bar vegetables include **spinach**, **tomatoes**, and **onions**.

5. Make resources available to schools, parents, and farmers.

- o A Colorado Farm to School website could disseminate lists of interested schools, interested growers, crop calendars, contacts, and other practical information.

Information and Resources

Survey information:

Lyn Kathlene, Director, CIPP
Lyn.Kathlene@research.colostate.edu

Producer information:

Dan Hobbs, Rocky Mountain Farmers Union
bobosos@aol.com

Related websites:

Rocky Mountain Farmers Union:

<http://www.rmfu.org>

National Farm to School Program:

<http://www.farmtoschool.org>

Handbook for schools, farms, and community organizers: <http://agr.wa.gov/Marketing/SmallFarm/farmtocafeteria.htm>

Massachusetts state Farm to School website:

http://www.mass.gov/agr/markets/Farm_to_school/index.htm