

Growing Arkansas's Largest Industry



**ARKANSAS**  
Department of Agriculture

**2022**

**FARM TO SCHOOL  
ANNUAL REPORT**

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***Respectfully submitted to:***

*The Honorable Asa Hutchinson, Governor  
House and Senate Committees on Agriculture, Forestry, and Economic Development*

***Prepared by:***

*The Arkansas Department of Agriculture in collaboration with the Arkansas Department of Education, Arkansas Department of Health, Arkansas Department of Human Services, and the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service.*

**Written and designed by the following individuals at the Arkansas Department of Agriculture:**

- Erica Benoit, Farm to School and Early Childhood Education Program Coordinator
- Joby Miller, Graphic Artist

*A special thanks to the following individuals for their contributions to the report: Karen Reynolds, Amy Lyman, and Cynthia Edwards at the Arkansas Department of Agriculture; Sheila Chastain, Suzanne Davidson, Lisa Mundy, and K.D Wooten at the Arkansas Department of Education; Ariel Schaufler at the Arkansas Department of Health; Theresa Taylor at the Arkansas Department of Human Services; Crystal Bowne, Sarah David, Amy McClelland, Josh Phelps, Amanda Philyaw Perez, Jessica Vincent, and Rip Weaver at the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service; Ryan Patterson at Apple Seeds, Inc.; Destiny Schlinker at FoodCorps Arkansas; and Jami Kirskey at the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance.*

## BACKGROUND

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Farm to school enriches the connection communities have with fresh, healthy food and local food producers by changing food purchasing and education practices at schools, early childhood education sites, and alternative learning environments. Students gain access to healthy, local foods as well as educational opportunities such as school gardens, cooking lessons, and farm field trips.

Farm to school empowers children and their families to make informed food choices while strengthening the local economy and contributing to vibrant communities. Farm to school implementation differs by location, but always includes one or more of the following:



### SCHOOL GARDEN

Students engage in hands-on learning through gardening and farming;



### EDUCATION

Students participate in education activities related to agriculture, food, health, or nutrition; and



### LOCAL PROCUREMENT

Local foods are purchased, promoted, and served in the cafeteria, as a snack, or as a taste test.

At the national level, the birth of the phrase “farm to school” can be traced back to the 1990s when pilot projects began in California and Florida to explore the possibility of transforming children’s relationship with food by exposing them to fresh, local food.

Arkansas’s initial steps with farm to school also occurred in the 1990s. More information on the history of Arkansas Farm to School can be found at [arfarmtoschool.org/about/history](http://arfarmtoschool.org/about/history).



**ARKANSAS**  
**Farm to School**

## FARM TO SCHOOL IN ACTION IN FY2022

In fiscal year 2022 (FY2022), schools, farms, state agencies, nonprofits, and other organizations helped the Arkansas Farm to School movement grow. Below is a summary of the cumulative impact of farm to school efforts in Arkansas in FY2022.

### SCHOOL GARDENS, EDUCATION, AND LOCAL PROCUREMENT

The three pillars of farm to school are school gardens, education, and local procurement.

#### SCHOOL GARDENS

A garden is considered a school garden when it supports the learning of children aged 18 or younger. This includes gardens located at schools, early childhood education facilities, and alternative learning environments.

School gardens are fantastic educational tools and provide students with opportunities to eat healthy foods, connect to nature, and learn about nutrition. School gardens also provide an avenue for students to engage in hands-on learning through gardening and farming. Studies show that when kids are involved in growing food, they are more likely to eat more fruits and vegetables and more willing to try different kinds.

As of October 4, 2022, there are 341 school gardens across the state of Arkansas. These gardens vary in type and include greenhouses, raised beds, and/or containers inside a classroom.

Schools grow and produce all types of products, including fruits, vegetables, herbs, chickens, bees, flowers, and more in an effort to teach students about our local food system. A map of all the school gardens can be found at [arfarmtoschool.org/school-gardens/map/?category=school-gardens&sort=a-z](https://arfarmtoschool.org/school-gardens/map/?category=school-gardens&sort=a-z).

#### EDUCATION

Schools, early childhood education facilities, and alternative learning environments all play a critical role in providing students with avenues to increase their knowledge of how food is grown and produced, their understanding of the importance of healthy, nutritious food to their health and development, and their ability to make healthy food and beverage choices.



*The Delta School, Wilson*



*Hope Academy of Public Service, Hope*



*Stagecoach Elementary, Cabot*





*Washington Elementary School, Fayetteville*

In a farm to school program, students participate in educational activities related to agriculture, food, health, or nutrition, which can take on many different forms. Nutrition education can happen through hands-on lessons in a school garden or in the classroom. Schools may utilize curriculum tailored to teach healthy nutrition while providing take-home recipes for children to try with their family. Educational opportunities can also happen in the cafeteria by conducting taste tests of locally grown fruits and vegetables and providing learning materials that enhance children's understanding of the foods they are consuming.

Additionally, more advanced lessons in science and math can focus on plants, animals, the natural world, and how our overall health is connected to other processes. There is no specific mold for delivering farm to school and early care educational components, but education can easily connect to existing state academic standards.

The following organizations have prioritized farm to school in their education work across Arkansas:

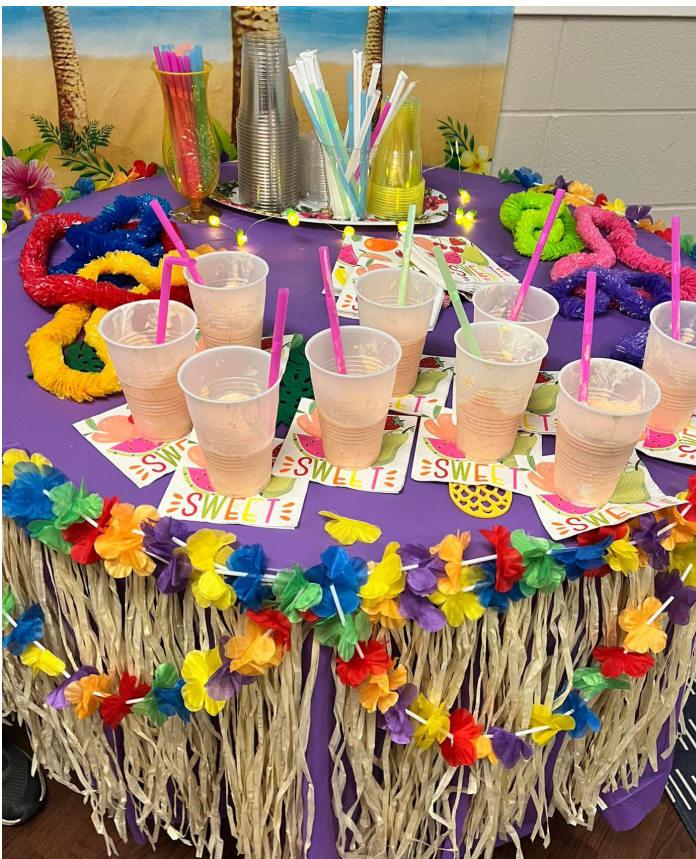
- Apple Seeds, Inc.
- Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance
- FoodCorps Arkansas
- University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service



**Apple Seeds, Inc.** is a nonprofit based in Northwest Arkansas that creates garden-based programs to educate young students about healthy food and works to increase students' access to nutrient-rich foods.

Apple Seeds operates a teaching farm and teaching kitchen in Fayetteville as a place for students to learn, cook, share healthy meals together, and be inspired to do the same in their kitchens at home. The nonprofit also provides cooking education in schools and through farm-to-table cooking classes. Accomplishments in FY2022 include:

- Field trip programs at the teaching farm reached 811 students;
- Virtual programming instruction reached 15,438 students;
- Trained 43 Growing My Plate facilitators across the



*Center for Youth and Families, Little Rock*

state on how to implement the curriculum with students;

- Taught 1,378 students through Growing My Plate program;
- Taught 66 students through the Farm to Table program; and
- Grew, harvested, and donated 4,245 pounds of fresh, farm grown produce, which accounted for 5,607 portions shared with food insecure students and families.



#### **The Arkansas Hunger Relief**

**Alliance** (The Alliance) is an association of hunger relief organizations, advocates, and state/federal programs that seek

to reduce hunger through emergency food assistance, education, empowerment programs, and advocacy. The mission of The Alliance is to collaborate as a statewide voice advancing equitable solutions to hunger.

The Alliance supports a network of partners throughout the state of Arkansas that implement Cooking Matters, an evidence-based nutrition education program that teaches low-income families how to cook and shop for healthy foods on a budget. The Alliance assists community partners through training and funding support by providing curricula and participant incentives. The Cooking Matters program provides hands-on, interactive food skills education based on the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) My Plate, and is held in convenient, community-based locations and schools. Accomplishments in FY2022 include:

- Supported our partner network to reach 577 participants with 30 classes and 25 grocery store tours;
- Attended 10 outreach events and educational opportunities to share quick nutrition tips and recipes with 411 individuals;
- Supported Apple Seeds' thriving Growing My Plate program; and
- Received a USDA Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program grant to start the Arkansas Fruit and Vegetable Prescription Program.



**FoodCorps** is part of the AmeriCorps service network that receives a portion of its funding from the federal AmeriCorps program. FoodCorps service members connect kids to healthy food in schools. Members focus on hands-on learning,

healthy school meals, and a schoolwide culture of health.

FoodCorps Arkansas places trained FoodCorps AmeriCorps service members in schools across the state for a year of service. Ten FoodCorps Arkansas service members served in the Springdale, Conway, Van Buren, and Cedarville school districts. Accomplishments in FY2022 include:

- Reached 4,696 students;
- Led 1,487 hands-on lessons;
- Led 650 taste tests in the classroom; and
- Engaged volunteers in 171 hours of volunteer work.



#### **The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture (UADA) Cooperative Extension Service's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance**

**Program - Education (SNAP-Ed)** is a federally funded, multi-level program that focuses on assisting low-income individuals and families to establish healthy eating habits and a physically active lifestyle. The program consists of direct education, indirect education, policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change components. The program is the result of a partnership between the UADA Cooperative Extension Service, the Arkansas Department of Human Services, and the United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. The goal of SNAP-Ed is to improve the likelihood that persons eligible for SNAP will make healthy food choices within a limited budget and choose physically active lifestyles consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and USDA Food Guidance System.

The program is designed to teach skills that help participants to:

- Buy and prepare healthful meals and snacks based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and USDA Food Guidance System;
- Become more physically active;
- Improve safe handling, preparation, and storage of food; and



- Develop spending and savings plans to make food dollars last throughout the month.

Some PSE change activities at schools include:

- Promoting healthy snacks, fundraisers, and concessions;
- Incorporating physical activity into classroom activities and the school day; and
- Garden-based nutrition education classes.

UADA Cooperative Extension Agents across the state bring nutrition education lessons to schools to assist in farm to school activities that grow students' knowledge of locally grown, healthy foods. Accomplishments in FY2022 include:

- Taught 4,426 lessons in early care education centers and K-12 schools;
- Reached 29,435 children participating in nutrition education (all youth participating in all locations, unduplicated);
- Impacted 9,857 children (unduplicated) with K-12 school-based PSE interventions designed to make the school environment healthier for the students and staff;
- Had 11,086 total direct education contacts with children using garden-based curricula (duplicated + unduplicated);
- Had 6,514 total direct education contacts with children using our Arkansas Foods curriculum (duplicated + unduplicated);
- 54% of individuals taught increased their knowledge of Arkansas-grown foods;
- 61% of children reported liking a locally-grown food after tasting it as part of the Arkansas Foods program; and
- 75% of children surveyed reported intending to follow MyPlate guidelines as a result of participating in the SNAP-Ed program.

Students participating in garden-based nutrition education in Crawford County made the following comments about trying new foods:

- "It tastes like goodness."
- "It is fun to try new things."
- "I learned that vegetables are healthy and taste good."

## LOCAL PROCUREMENT

Schools, early childhood education facilities, and alternative learning environments have the opportunity to serve local foods to students. Local foods can be served in the classroom, cafeteria, or other locations depending on the structure of the learning environment. United States Department of Agriculture feeding programs such as the National School Lunch Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and Summer Food Service Program, as well as food service programs



*Pike View Early Childhood Center, North Little Rock*



*Fayetteville Public Schools, Fayetteville*

that do not operate under that umbrella, have the opportunity to purchase, promote, and serve locally grown foods in schools, early childhood education facilities, and alternative learning environments. In the USDA's vision, child nutrition programs championing United States agriculture and proudly promoting locally sourced foods are the norm, not the exception.

The Arkansas Legislature defines local food as food products that are grown in Arkansas and/or packaged and processed in Arkansas. This definition comes from the Local Food, Farms, and Jobs Act, found at A.C.A. 15-4-3801. In addition to the definition, the Act requires institutions that receive at least \$25,000 in state funding annually and operate a food service program to report information about their local procurement efforts to the Arkansas Department of Agriculture.

The FY2022 reporting form was completed by 251 institutions that serve children aged 18 and younger. Of those, 221 were school districts, 38 were early childhood education centers, and 3 were alternative learning environments. The 262 institutions serving children 18 and younger reported:

- Spending \$130,488,951 total on food; and
- Spending \$28,811,956 (22.1% of their food budget) on local foods, including fluid milk.

## ARKANSAS FARM TO SCHOOL MONTH

Every year in October the state celebrates Arkansas Farm to School Month. This recognition is part of nationwide efforts to connect schools, early childhood education sites, and other organizations with farms to bring local, healthy food to children.

The National Farm to School Network first started this trend in 2010 by having National Farm to School Month designated by Congress. Since then, more and more states have joined in with celebrations.

Arkansas has been formally recognizing Arkansas Farm to School Month since 2014 when then- governor Mike Beebe first proclaimed October as Arkansas Farm to School Month. Governor Asa Hutchinson has continued the tradition every year since.

In October 2021, the Arkansas Farm to School Month theme was "Connecting Schools, Farms, and the Community to Local Food." To connect students to local



*Central Elementary School, Van Buren*

food, the Department launched a new multi-platform website that features interactive maps of school gardens, local procurement activities, and farms and producers across the state. Another way the Department celebrated Arkansas Farm to School Month was by participating in a very successful Virtual Farm Tour hosted by the Arkansas Department of Agriculture and Midwest Dairy; over 5,000 people attended the event on Zoom.

More information on Arkansas Farm to School Month can be found at [arfarmtoschool.org/about/farm-to-school-month](https://arfarmtoschool.org/about/farm-to-school-month).



*Arkansas Farm to School Month 2021 Poster, designed by Joby Miller, Arkansas Department of Agriculture*



## FARM TO SCHOOL FUNDING, EVENTS, RESOURCES, AND STATE LEGISLATION

The growth of farm to school is contingent on funding for programming. In addition, events, resources, and state legislation are important to the increase of farm to school activities. Below are summaries of major funding received, events hosted, and resources created from October 2021 through September 2022.

### FUNDING

Funding for farm to school comes from federal, state, foundation, and other organizations. The largest amount of farm to school funding in Arkansas comes from federal sources. The main sources of federal funding are the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and AmeriCorps.

The following represents current farm to school funding available throughout the state:

- Arkansas Department of Agriculture's Farm to School and Early Childhood Education Program:
  - USDA Farm to School Grant Program 2021 – \$97,915
  - USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program - \$95,192 (in partnership with the Arkansas Grown and Arkansas Made Program)
  - USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program - \$75,705
- FoodCorps Arkansas
  - AmeriCorps - \$510,000
- Apple Seeds, Inc.
  - USDA Farm to School Grant Program - \$99,400
- Carroll County Resource Council
  - USDA Farm to School Grant Program - \$98,617
- Communities Unlimited, Inc.
  - USDA Farm to School Grant Program - \$498,950
- Dan-Harton Farms
  - USDA Farm to School Grant Program - \$99,626

The State of Arkansas funds the Arkansas Department of Agriculture's Program Coordinator position and partially

funds the State School Garden Manager position. The numbers below reflect salaries and fringe benefits.

- Arkansas Department of Agriculture Farm to School and Early Childhood Education Coordinator Position - \$72,741.35
- Arkansas Department of Agriculture State School Garden Manager - \$50,110.20

Finally, foundations and other sources of funding are available to increase farm to school activities.

- Arkansas Department of Agriculture:
  - Farm Credit Associations of Arkansas - \$7,000
  - Vermont FEED - \$7,500
  - National Farm to School Network, a project of Tides Center - \$2,000

### EVENTS

- Virtual Farm Field Trip hosted by Midwest Dairy and the Arkansas Department of Agriculture
- Hosting Taste Tests in School Webinar hosted by the Arkansas Department of Agriculture
- School Garden Support in the Summer Webinar hosted by the Arkansas Department of Agriculture

### RESOURCES

- 2021 Local Food, Farms, and Jobs Act Annual Report
- 2021 Arkansas Farm to School Annual Report
- Series of 44 Farm to School Handouts, including Harvest of the Season promotional posters
- Arkansas Farm to School and Arkansas Grown Multi-Site Website

## STATE LEADERSHIP

In addition to creating the Farm to School and Early Childhood Education Program, Act 506 of 2019: Farm To School And Early Childhood Education Act also required an annual farm to school report be prepared in collaboration with the following stakeholders:

- Arkansas Department of Agriculture
- Arkansas Department of Education
- Arkansas Department of Health
- Arkansas Department of Human Services
- University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service

The Act also mentioned the Child Nutrition Unit at the Department of Education, which is listed under the Arkansas Department of Education due to the Transformation and Efficiencies Act of 2019.

Updates on FY2022 farm to school leadership from the noted stakeholders are included on the following pages of the report.



### ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

The Arkansas Department of Agriculture (Department) is dedicated to the development and implementation

of policies and programs for Arkansas agriculture and forestry to keep its farmers and ranchers competitive in national and international markets while ensuring safe food, fiber, and forest products for the citizens of the state and nation.

The Department is recognized as a partner by the National Farm to School Network and joins the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Southwest Region in regional farm to school development and growth.

The Department's Farm to School and Early Childhood Education Program leads farm to school efforts. The Department's Arkansas Grown, Arkansas Made, and Homegrown By Heroes branding programs support farm to school efforts in the state.

## FARM TO SCHOOL AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Farm to School and Early Childhood Education Program (Program) connects schools, local growers, and the community to food and farm education experiences paired with healthy, locally grown food. The Program provides equitable and just programming, resources, funding, and technical assistance to schools, farmers, and partners in the local food system. The Program is the current facilitator of the Arkansas Farm to School Collaborative.

**Websites:** [agriculture.arkansas.gov/arkansas-department-of-agriculture-programs/farm-to-school](https://agriculture.arkansas.gov/arkansas-department-of-agriculture-programs/farm-to-school) and [arfarmtoschool.org](https://arfarmtoschool.org)

**Team:** Erica Benoit, Farm to School and Early Childhood Education Program Coordinator; Shannon Newerth-Henson, State Local Procurement Manager; and Cecilia Trotter, State School Garden Manager

**Programs:** Arkansas School Garden Grant Program, Arkansas Grown School Garden of the Year Contest, Arkansas Taste Test Grant Program, and Harvest of the Season

### Accomplishments:

- Provided technical assistance to 218 schools, farmers, agencies, and nonprofits;
- Participated in 43 regional and national farm to school meetings;
- Hosted and spoke at 18 farm to school educational trainings, webinars, and events with 5,299 attendees;
- Visited 20 schools, farms, and organizations to outreach about farm to school;
- Facilitated 6 Arkansas Farm to School Collaborative bi-monthly meetings that engaged 19 state agencies and non-profit partners;
- Coordinated 1 Governor's proclamation and responded to 8 interview requests on farm to school;
- Released 17 newsletters, 7 press releases, and 5 blogs on farm to school;
- Wrote 3 reports, 1 article, and 5 letters of support on farm to school;
- Created 44 handouts and infographics and 3 toolkits on farm to school;



- Produced 2 videos and 2 webinars on farm to school;
- Launched a new multi-platform website that partners Arkansas Farm to School with Arkansas Grown and features interactive maps of school gardens, local procurement activities, and farms and producers across the state;
- Managed and awarded \$7,000 total to 10 winning schools and early childhood education facilities of the 2021 Arkansas Grown School Garden of the Year Contest;
- Managed and awarded \$31,000 total to 62 schools, early childhood education facilities, and alternative learning environments as part of the Arkansas School Garden Grant Program;
- Managed and awarded \$6,500 total to 26 schools, early childhood education facilities, and alternative learning environments as part of the Arkansas Taste Test Grant Program; and
- Launched the Harvest of the Season promotional program, which makes available seasonal food posters highlighting local Arkansas products.

## **THE ARKANSAS GROWN, ARKANSAS MADE, AND HOMEGROWN BY HEROES BRANDING PROGRAMS**

The Arkansas Grown, Arkansas Made, and Homegrown by Heroes Branding Programs (Branding Programs) were established to equip farmers and producers with marketing tools to identify their goods as products grown and produced in Arkansas. The programs focus on generating exposure and creating new opportunities for local farmers and producers to increase sales and transactions. The Arkansas Grown branding program promotes the many agricultural products that are grown in the state and supports the farmers, ranchers, and producers who grow them. The Arkansas Made branding program promotes goods and products made in our state by local producers, craftsmen, and artisans. In 2015, the Department adopted the national Homegrown by Heroes branding program that enables farmer veterans to market their local agricultural products by labeling them as veteran-produced. Homegrown By Heroes is administered by the Farmer Veteran Coalition and is offered as a free program to farmers who have veteran, active duty, National Guard, or Reserve member of the United States Armed Forces status. These three programs help make the critical connection between producers and buyers.

**Website:** [arkansasgrown.org](http://arkansasgrown.org)

**Team:** Karen Reynolds, Grants Program Manager

**Programs:** Arkansas Grown, Arkansas Made, and Homegrown By Heroes

### **Accomplishments:**

- Increased membership in Arkansas Grown, Homegrown By Heroes, and Arkansas Made programs by 110 new members;
- Received \$71,757 from the USDA Specialty Crop Block 2021 Grant program to develop a statewide Local Food System Supply Chain Infrastructure;
- Received \$500,000 from the Walton Personal Philanthropy Group to develop and manage the Arkansas Grown Grant for Northwest Arkansas Farmers Pilot Program, awarding grants of up to \$15,000 to farmers in Northwest Arkansas to increase their capacity to sell wholesale;
- Assisted in connecting Arkansas Grown farmers with the Arkansas Department of Human Services for the \$3.7 million Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative grant program funded to the state through USDA;
- Promoted Arkansas Grown and Arkansas Made products with a staffed display at the National Restaurant Association Show in Chicago, Illinois;
- Participated in designing an Arkansas Food Systems Fellowship hosted by the Wallace Center at Winrock International;
- Hosted two virtual Local Conversations events and two in-person regional meetings;
- Coordinated and promoted two Arkansas Farmers Market Week Proclamation Presentations with 84 total attendees;
- Delivered presentations at three annual conferences and events;
- Presented staffed displays at six statewide and three regional conferences and events;
- Attended 12 virtual trainings;
- Responded to seven media interview requests;
- Cross-promoted farm to school information in 23 Facebook posts;

- Launched a new multi-platform website that partners Arkansas Farm to School with Arkansas Grown and features interactive maps of school gardens, local procurement activities, and farms and producers across the state;
- Attended the North American Agriculture Marketing Officers Annual Conference in Starkville, Mississippi;
- Launched a cost-share program of up to \$1,000 to Arkansas farmers for Good Agriculture Practices certification funded by the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program;
- Managed USDA National Organic Cost Certification Reimbursement Program, providing a total of \$2,208 to seven organic farms around the state;
- Managed the Farmers Market Promotion Program providing 32,000 bags to 29 farmers markets and \$9,000 in promotional funds to 22 farmers markets around the state; and
- Hosted Homegrown By Heroes event honoring scholarship awardees in conjunction with a Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences event at the Department.



## ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The mission of the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) is to provide leadership, support, and

service to schools, districts, and communities so every student graduates prepared for college, career, and community engagement.

ADE is a member of the Arkansas Farm to School Collaborative. The Child Nutrition Unit and School Health Services support farm to school efforts in the state.

### CHILD NUTRITION UNIT

The Child Nutrition Unit (CNU) provides technical assistance, training, monitoring, and processes claims for reimbursement of federal funds used in the operation of local school nutrition programs in accordance with United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulations.

**Website:** [dese.ade.arkansas.gov/Offices/child-nutrition-unit](https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/Offices/child-nutrition-unit)

**Team:** Suzanne Davidson, Director; Sheila Chastain, Associate Director; Krista Jackson, Associate Director; Courtney Erick, Fiscal Support Manager; and Area Specialists

**Programs:** National School Lunch, School Breakfast, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable, After-School Snack, Seamless Summer, and Farm to School Program

### Accomplishments:

- Managed \$316.2 million federal and \$1.65 million state funding dollars for child nutrition programs that resulted in 33.8 million breakfasts, 51.5 million lunches and over 1.8 million snacks;
- Managed \$3.3 million in federal funding for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program in 181 schools, and awarded \$3.4 million to 172 schools for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program for FY23;
- Hosted three Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Online Trainings/ Modules, and one included farm to school information;
- Collaborated with the Arkansas Department of Human Services, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Division to provide Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) benefits to families last school year to replace meals lost by their children as schools closed or restricted their in-person schedules due to a COVID-19 isolation/quarantine;
- For school year 2022-23, 70 school districts (250 schools) qualified for the Community Eligibility Provision and 27 school districts (102 schools) qualified for Provision 2; and
- Supported the Arkansas Department of Agriculture's Local Food, Farms, and Jobs Act Survey by completing reporting for the Arkansas Department of Education and following up with school districts to encourage their completion.

### SCHOOL HEALTH SERVICES

The Arkansas School Health Services Initiative is an interagency collaboration between the Arkansas Department of Education Division of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE) and the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH). This state-level infrastructure provides support to Arkansas schools in the implementation of health and wellness activities that create a safe and healthy school environment that supports learning.

Due to the collaboration between the Arkansas Department of Education and Arkansas Department of Health, the information on School Health Services can be found under the Arkansas Department of Health.





## ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

The mission of the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) is to protect and improve the health and well-being of all Arkansans.

ADH is a member of the Arkansas Farm to School Collaborative. The School Health Services office supports farm to school efforts in the state.

### SCHOOL HEALTH SERVICES

The Arkansas School Health Services Initiative is an interagency collaboration between the Division of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE) and the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH). This state-level infrastructure provides support to Arkansas schools in the implementation of health and wellness activities that create a safe and healthy school environment that supports learning.

**Websites:** [dese.ade.arkansas.gov/divisions/learning-services/school-health-services](https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/divisions/learning-services/school-health-services) and [healthy.arkansas.gov/programs-services/topics/school-health](https://healthy.arkansas.gov/programs-services/topics/school-health)

**Team:** Arkansas Department of Education: Lisa Mundy, Coordinated School Health Director; Brittany Rogers, Grants Manager; Shy Whitley-Smith, Act 1220 Coordinator; and Cheria McDonald, State School Nurse Consultant. Arkansas Department of Health: Ariel Schaufler Rogers, Coordinated School Health Director; Crystal Brown, School Based Health Center Advisor; Ashley Williams, Director of School Health Services Unit; and Shannon Borchert, Act 1220 Coordinator

**Programs:** Coordinated School Health, School-Based Health Centers, Act 1220 (BMI), Joint-Use Agreements, Medicaid in the Schools, and Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment

#### Accomplishments:

- Facilitated the completion of the annual Indistar report which resulted in a completion rate of 98% school districts and 93% of schools;
- Hosted four summer professional development trainings for health and physical education teachers;
- Hosted four coordinated school health professional development opportunities for school wellness coordinators;
- Hosted Coordinated School Health teacher professional development summer opportunities;

- Funded and supported six priority school districts: Blytheville, El Dorado, Magazine, Malvern, Marvell-Elaine, and Springdale Public Schools;
- Increased attendance of school personnel and districts represented at the quarterly meetings;
- Updated the Arkansas Health Standards Crosswalk that details health and nutrition standards related to farm to school; and
- Cross-promoted farm to school information in one e-newsletter.



## ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

The mission of the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS) is to serve, protect, empower, educate, and encourage children, at-risk youth, families, adults, aging adults and seniors, and people with disabilities as they move towards a better future. DHS is a member of the Arkansas Farm to School Collaborative through the Division of Childcare and Early Childhood Division. The Health and Nutrition Program supports farm to school efforts in the state.

### HEALTH AND NUTRITION PROGRAM

The Health and Nutrition Programs (HNP) is federally funded by the United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service to provide reimbursement for well-balanced, nutritious meals served to individuals enrolled in Child and Adult Care Food Programs (CACFP), At-Risk, National School Lunch Program (NSLP), and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). In Arkansas, these programs are administered by the Arkansas Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education, and Special Nutrition Programs. The HNP falls under the umbrella of Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education (DCCECE) which ensures that Arkansas children and families have access to a safe, high-quality, developmentally appropriate early-learning environment. The Division accomplishes this by educating and assisting parents, licensing, regulating, and supporting childcare providers, and working with communities to prepare children for future success. HNP provides reimbursement for well-balanced, nutritious meals served to individuals.

**Website:** [humanservices.arkansas.gov/divisions-shared-services/child-care-early-childhood-education/health-nutrition-programs/special-nutrition-programs](https://humanservices.arkansas.gov/divisions-shared-services/child-care-early-childhood-education/health-nutrition-programs/special-nutrition-programs)

**Team:** Pamela Burton, Assistant Director; Sharon Hagen, Program Administrator; Nora Fawcett, Program Administrator; James Ponzini, Program Administrator; Perry Hunter, Program Manager; Wayne Thornberry, Program Manager; Leslee Jones, Quality Assurance-Trainer; Stephanie Clowers, Program Manager-Trainer; Sharon Parker, Quality Assurance; Rayvnn Smith, Program Manager; Louise Scott, Program Manager; Maurice Anderson, Program Manager; and Theresa Taylor, Quality Assurance Coordinator

**Programs:** Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), National School Lunch Program (NSLP), Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), USDA Processing, and Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (DoD FFVP)

#### **Accomplishments:**

- Hosted 143 CACFP trainings that included information on farm to early care and education;
- Hosted 47 NSLP trainings that included information on farm to school;
- Hosted 137 SFSP trainings that included information on farm to school;
- All CACFP, At Risk, NSLP, and SFSP Online Refresher trainings are available on demand for providers to access. All trainings include farm to school information;
- Provided a Health and Nutrition Unit Quarterly Newsletter to sponsors, independent centers, family home daycares, adult daycare centers, potential institutions, and partners;
- Managed \$70,808,617.79 in CACFP funding. The program included 398 contracts (311 centers, 78 at-risk, 9 homes) serving a total of 40,462,449 meals (25,696,102 free, 4,507,232 reduced, 10,259,364 paid);
- Managed \$1,372,529.45 in NSLP funding, which included 23 contracts and 29 facilities and sites serving a total of 585,469 meals (447,620 free, 20,627 reduced, 117,222 paid);
- Managed \$2,970,433.78 in SFSP funding, which included 74 contracts and 243 facilities/sites serving a total of 790,301 free meals;
- Managed \$3,205,625.00 as part of the USDA Processing Program;
- Managed \$6,120,694.00 allocated for schools in the DoD FFVP; and

- Acquired grants amounting to:
  - \$3.7 million for the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA);
  - \$2.2 million for the Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program (LFS);
  - \$1.1 million for FY21 Technology Innovation Project; and
  - \$592,370 for The Emergency Food Assistance Program Reach and Resiliency Grant.



### **THE UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS SYSTEM DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE**

The mission of the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service (UADA) is to strengthen agriculture, communities, and families by connecting trusted research to the adoption of best practices.

The UADA is a member of the Arkansas Farm to School Collaborative. The Family and Consumer Science Programmatic Area and the Local, Regional & Safe Foods Team support farm to school efforts in the state.

#### **FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCE PROGRAMMATIC AREA**

Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) was founded as Home Economics. FCS affords Arkansans immediate and timely access to cutting-edge, reliable, unbiased information to develop critical life skills in health, nutrition, family life, and personal finance, empowering individuals and families to thrive. FCS promotes 21 youth curricula and five are garden focused: Grow It, Try It, Like It; Great Garden Detective; School Gardening Lessons; Eating from the Garden; and Dig In.

**Website:** [uaex.edu/life-skills-wellness/default.aspx](http://uaex.edu/life-skills-wellness/default.aspx)

**Team:** Bryan Mader, Assistant Professor of Health; Josh Phelps, Associate Professor of Nutrition; Sarah David, SNAP-Ed Finance Manager; Amy McClelland, SNAP-Ed Program Manager; Katie Holland, SNAP-Ed Curriculum and Evaluation; Crystal Bowne, SNAP-Ed PSE Coordinator; Jessica Vincent, Instructor of Health, High Obesity Prevention (HOP) Program Manager; Tyler Brown, HOP



County Operations Coordinator; Caitlin Palenske, HOP Communications Coordinator; Darby Treat, HOP Program Associate; and County Extension Staff

**Programs:** Arkansas SNAP-Ed (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Education), Expanded Food and Nutrition Education, and High Obesity Prevention (HOP) Program

**Accomplishments:**

- Managed \$2,144,681 in SNAP-Ed funds in FY22 to deliver statewide nutrition education program, with a large emphasis on school-based programming;
- Continued work to expand the Arkansas Foods program, including inclusion of additional foods, development of new resources, translation of existing resources, and creation of the annual AR Foods recipe calendar to use with nutrition programs (SNAP-Ed);
- Provided three trainings to internal staff on policy, systems, and environmental change to make healthier choices more accessible to Arkansans (SNAP-Ed);
- Presented a poster at the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior national conference on the school garden/nutrition education program in Crawford County (SNAP-Ed); and
- Agents have begun implementing a new school garden/nutrition education curriculum to our approved resource list, added in FY21 (SNAP-Ed).

## LOCAL, REGIONAL & SAFE FOODS TEAM



The Local, Regional & Safe Foods (LRSF) program team supports specialty crop growers with understanding and implementing food and produce safety regulations and associated

practices and fosters the development of local and regional food systems. Food and produce safety cover outreach, education, and technical assistance regarding state and federal regulatory programs such as the Food Safety Modernization Act that protect the public's health and farms' viability. Local and regional food systems development covers the food supply chain from farm to table and provides technical assistance from evidence-based research to support production, market access, community & economic development, food safety, value-added food product development, and access to healthy food.

**Website:** [uaex.uada.edu/localfoods](http://uaex.uada.edu/localfoods)

**Team:** Dr. Amanda Philyaw Perez, Food Systems & Food Safety Specialist, Assistant Professor; Dr. Renee Threlfall, Research Scientist; John Swenson, Food Innovation Associate; Rip Weaver, Program Technician; Gaby Sanders, Program Associate; David Hill, Program Associate

**Programs:** Arkansas Produce Safety, Share Grounds, and Local Food System Development

**Accomplishments:**

- Collaborated on potential procurement of blackberry surplus from one Arkansas farm to schools within the state over 7 meetings with the Arkansas State Local Procurement Manager, Ritter Farms, University of Arkansas Food Science Department, and the North Little Rock School District;
- Attended 5 bi-monthly Arkansas Farm to School Collaborative meetings to share programming updates, resources, network, and collaborate on farm to school programs;
- Maintained the two Share Grounds food manufacturing kitchens in McCrory and Rison;
- Conducted 446 direct and in-person outreach and education methods including demonstrations, classes, online courses, farm visits, meetings, one-on-one consultations, conferences, workshops, and county meetings across the LRSF statewide programs;
- Made 2,209 direct education contacts for all programs through direct and in-person methods including demonstrations, classes, online courses, farm visits, meetings, one-on-one consultations, conferences, workshops, and county meetings;
- Attracted 11,255 visitors to the UA Extension Local Foods webpage;
- Hosted 35 educational sessions with 1,151 views on YouTube;
- Published 10 papers, posters, conference proceedings, factsheets, technical reports, and information sheets;
- Distributed 15 newsletters reaching 23,135 contacts;
- Posted 123 social media posts with 36,889 views; and
- Featured in 33 news or magazine articles and media outlets.

## COVID-19



The following provides an overview of ways in which partners adapted to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

**Apple Seeds** adapted their in-person programs to reach students virtually wherever they were learning. Virtual education videos were supported with teaching guides, student workbooks, and learning assessments, and all were free of charge. In addition to new methods of education and outreach, Apple Seeds expanded the fresh food donation program initiated at the beginning of the COVID pandemic.

Nutrient-rich foods from the farm were shared with children who need it most through area partners. Each portion of farm fresh produce was paired with a kid-pleasing recipe and links to educational videos.

**The Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance** pivoted their nutrition education to be hosted entirely online during the COVID pandemic, which allowed them to reach more families from across the state. The Alliance is now looking forward to reconnecting with more pre-pandemic partners to support traditional, in-person classes and host grocery store event days in all six food bank regions of the state. The Alliance plans to retain and build on flexibilities improved during the pandemic and facilitate virtual Cooking Matters at Home lessons. The Alliance is also expanding programming opportunities and partnerships around the “Food as Medicine” concept, to include food insecurity screenings at clinics with referrals to virtual nutrition education, the Arkansas Fruits and Vegetable Prescription Program, and the Nutrition Pantry Program.

**FoodCorps Arkansas** service members adapted their service to be responsive to the needs of their school and community. The main focuses were meal distribution and garden produce distribution. Members worked with their district food service departments to prepare and distribute meals to their community. They connected with local churches and food banks to offer support and continued to grow food in the school garden. Service members also sent gardening kits, seeds, recipes, SNAP applications, and other resources to students’ homes through meal service and digital platforms. As schools reopened, they maintained their focus on increased food access and connecting aligned community partners and organizations to their districts to expand student opportunities. They also returned to indoor and garden classrooms to continue connecting students to healthy

food through hands-on learning. It was a big year for garden renovations and digging back in.

**The Arkansas Department of Agriculture** continued to host events, webinars, and training virtually. The Farm to School and Early Childhood Education Program also submitted a grant proposal with the goal of providing grants to school nutrition departments to purchase necessary processing and storage equipment to serve more scratch-made meals in schools in response to supply chain challenges.

**The Arkansas Grown, Arkansas Made, and Homegrown By Heroes Programs** continue to manage their multi-platform website, in partnership with Arkansas Farm to School, which enables members to create an individual listing and connect farms with schools conveniently.

**The Arkansas Department of Education’s Child Nutrition Unit** supported schools in completing the 2021 - 2022 school year with 96% of the enrolled students attending school in-person. Local Child Nutrition Programs continue to provide healthy meals to students. The Child Nutrition Unit applied for USDA Nationwide waivers to support the changing needs of the child nutrition programs, if the need arises for closures due to COVID-19 isolations/quarantines.

**The Arkansas Department of Education and Arkansas Department of Health Coordinated School Health program** received a grant for \$433,000 to provide school districts with training and resources to limit spread of the virus in the school setting. This collaboration led to the creation of 6 videos aimed at teens using popular social media platforms to increase COVID-19 vaccine confidence in the 13 through 18-year-old demographic. Six school districts were awarded \$35,000 each to align work between academic, behavior, and mental health supports at school, focusing on the needs of the whole child.

**The Arkansas Department of Human Services Health and Nutrition Program** opted in on waiver requests to USDA for the purpose of allowing flexibility when needed related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The waiver requests cover the National School Lunch Program, Summer Food Service Program, and Child and Adult Care Food Program.

**The Arkansas Department of Education, Arkansas Department of Health, and Arkansas Department of Human Services** established a school and childcare hotline in 2020. The hotline is still available 7 days per week to answer questions about quarantine and isolation guidelines, verify positive COVID-19 cases, fast-track contact investigation for positive cases and contact

tracing for their probable close contacts, provide guidance on pivoting from face-to-face learning to virtual learning due to shortage of staff or prevalence of positive cases and probable close contacts, and provide guidance on COVID testing in schools.

**The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture (UADA) Cooperative Extension Service Local Regional and Safe Foods Team** created resources and offered virtual options for workshops and trainings in order to provide outreach and education to farmers, clients, and stakeholders. The team published an information sheet on Fall Farm Activities and COVID-19 which gives up-to-date guidance to farmers in Arkansas on how to safely operate these cherished seasonal, family-oriented activities during the pandemic. This resource won a 2021 Outstanding Leaflet award from the American Society of Horticultural Science. Additionally, the team continues to maintain 8 webpages on COVID-19 for Arkansas farmers, small food businesses, agritourism, and other food system stakeholders. Additionally, the SNAP-Ed program has continued to provide nutrition education to schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. UADA Cooperative Extension Agents worked with schools to identify program delivery methods that fit within the safety guidelines specific to that school, based on local conditions. Agents have continued to provide gardening education outdoors as well.



*Apple Seeds, Inc., Fayetteville*

## MOVING FORWARD TO FY2023

Using the fiscal year 2022 information, the Arkansas Department of Agriculture, Arkansas Department of Education, Arkansas Department of Health, Arkansas Department of Human Services, and the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Services will continue to work together to build a comprehensive farm to school program in Arkansas.

As members of the Arkansas Farm to School Collaborative, the stakeholders in Act 506 will continue to 1) collaborate and work together; 2) foster student understanding of where their food comes from; 3) cultivate children's leadership and self-efficacy; 4) create equitable access to local food; and 5) support farmers. Additionally, each stakeholder has set goals for the upcoming 2023 fiscal year.

**The Arkansas Department of Agriculture** will continue to offer farm to school leadership and support in the state. The Farm to School and Early Childhood Education Program will develop a program to offer kitchen equipment assistance grants to schools. Additionally, it will host the first-ever Arkansas Farm to School Institute. The Program will also continue to offer the Arkansas School Garden Grant Program, Arkansas Taste Test Grant Program, and Arkansas School Garden of the Year Contest.

**The Arkansas Grown, Arkansas Made, and Homegrown By Heroes Branding Programs** within the Department will partner with Arkansas agriculture associations and organizations to host the first Arkansas Grown Conference & Expo. The Arkansas Grown Conference & Expo will be open to all parties interested in the Arkansas agriculture industry, the state's largest industry, and focuses on the farmers and producers who grow for our local food system. In addition, the Branding Programs will launch a robust advertising campaign to promote the purchase of Arkansas Grown products to consumers throughout the state.

**The Arkansas Department of Education** will support public and charter schools in Arkansas in the upcoming 2022-2023 school year. The Child Nutrition Unit will continue to provide support to schools to ensure healthy and safe meals are available during the pandemic on regular school days. All National School Lunch Program public and charter schools in Arkansas,



administered by the Child Nutrition Unit, are currently operating under National School Lunch Regulations, which requires districts to establish free/reduced eligibility for students and claim meals served in the correct category.

**School Health Services** will offer trainings and resources to schools that increase the knowledge and skill level among students, staff, and the community about nutrition, physical activity, farm to school, and the management of chronic conditions. Additionally, due to funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), School Health Services will offer training on COVID-19 vaccine confidence and will address mental health in schools.

**The Arkansas Department of Human Services Health and Nutrition Program** will remain focused on feeding healthy and nutritious meals to children. It has increased outreach in rural areas and aims to increase engagement with current sponsors and the community using informational flyers and brochures. It will continue to provide exceptional support to the feeding program sponsors and looks to streamline the onboarding process. Lastly, it will continue to collaborate with partners by cross promoting information to the staff via e-newsletters and other social media outlets and will continue to identify farm to school partners within the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education. It has distributed over \$5 million dollars of reimbursement to SFAs and CACFP operators due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



*Hugh Goodwin Elementary, El Dorado*

**The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service (UADA) SNAP-Ed team** plans to continue to incorporate new curriculum, materials, and PSE resources to improve school programming and increase access to Arkansas-grown foods.

Also, UADA will offer mini grant opportunities to County Cooperative Extension Service offices statewide to implement farm to school projects locally. Up to \$5,000 per year until 2023 can be requested due to the indirect funding accumulated from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention grant. Evaluation and implementation measures have been established, and technical assistance will be provided to assist County Cooperative Extension Service Agents in carrying out their farm to school projects.

Additionally, the Local, Regional & Safe Foods team will continue to provide support to farms as they implement regulatory requirements of the Food Safety Modernization Act's Produce Safety Rule. There will be an opportunity to develop microgreens produce safety trainings within the next year. For the Share Grounds program, the team will build upon successes at the McCrory and Rison sites and will increase client volume in value-added products.

The Arkansas Department of Agriculture is honored to support the goals of Act 506 of 2019 and is pleased to submit the 2022 Arkansas Farm to School Annual Report. For more information about the report, please contact Erica Benoit at the Arkansas Department of Agriculture.

**Erica Benoit**

Farm to School and Early Childhood Education  
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# **SUPPORTING, PROTECTING, AND GROWING ARKANSAS AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY**



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