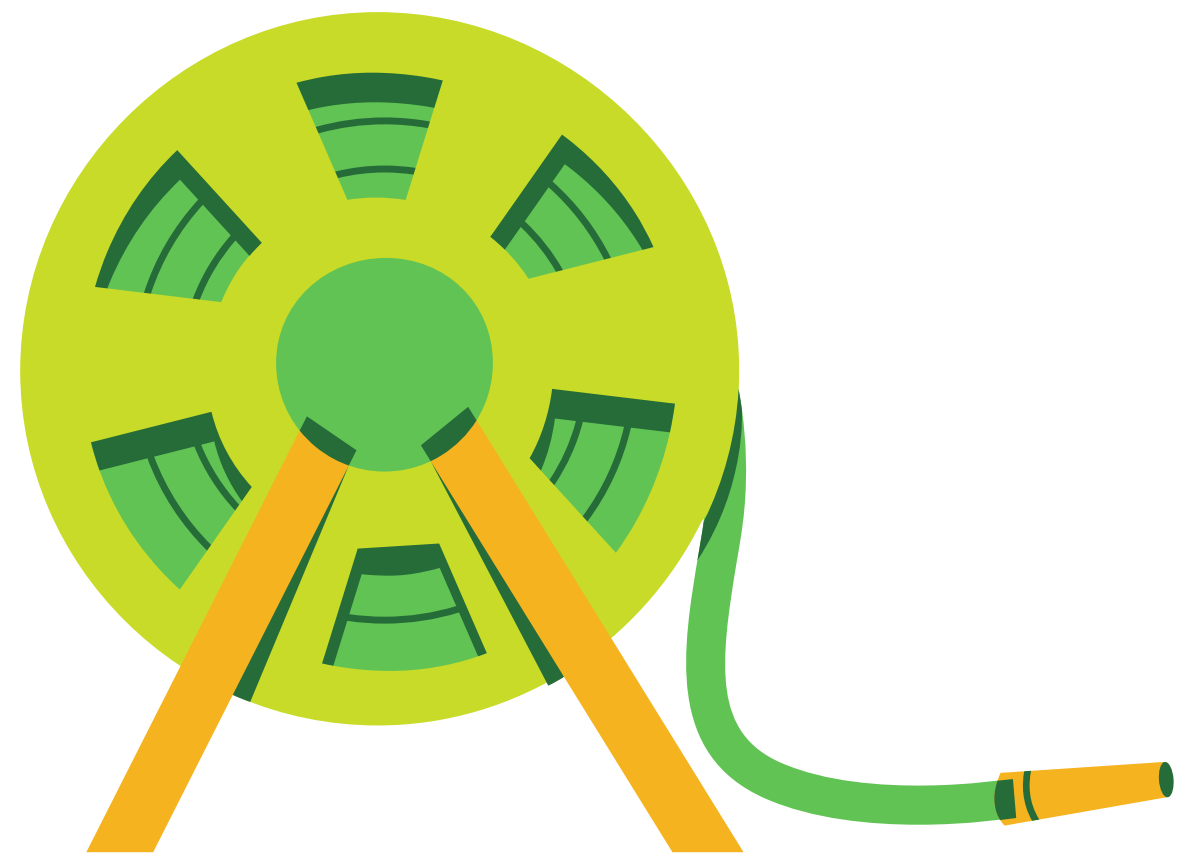




Arkansas Farm to School History

Before the concept of farm to school was formally developed, schools around Arkansas were building gardens and serving local food.

One early example was at Yellville-Summit High School in the 1940s when [Earnestine Camp](#), teacher and food service director, led the school's efforts to grow and maintain a school garden, raise chickens, and prepare scratch-made meals that included their butchered chickens and homemade bread. The school was recognized as a national pioneer for school food service because of these efforts predating the 1946 National School Lunch Act.



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.

In 1992, Dunbar Garden was established next to Gibbs Magnet Elementary School and Dunbar Middle School in Little Rock as a nonprofit to provide educational resources and interactive opportunities for youth, families, and the community through sustainable urban agriculture.

In 1995, several Arkansas producers participated with the [New North Florida Cooperative Association, Inc. \(NNFC\)](#) that worked with 60-100 Black farmers in Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Arkansas to provide fresh produce for school meals. NNFC served more than a million students in 72 school districts across the region.

From 1996 to 2004, the term **"farm to school"** gained momentum. Early farm to school leadership began by the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, Inc. (Southern SAWG). Southern SAWG was in operation from 1991-2020 with a mission of promoting sustainable agriculture in the South. In 2005, Fayetteville School District became the first school district to develop a farm to school program and it began procuring local products to serve to its students.



In 2007, Apple Seeds, Inc. was formed to inspire healthy living through garden based education. The nonprofit established and supported school gardens at Fayetteville School District initially and expanded its programming over the years to include cooking classes, garden clubs, and field trips to farms and farmers markets in Northwest Arkansas and in 2023, Central Arkansas.

In 2008, Glyen Holmes with NNFC met with Stephen Walker of the Tri-County Community Coalition (TCC), a nonprofit incorporated in 2006, to talk about piloting a farm to school project in Arkansas that would provide more local food options for school districts.

In January 2009, two meetings were scheduled by the Arkansas Department of Education Child Nutrition Unit to look at the expansion of farm to school in the state. The first was a meeting to gather initial interest in farm to school and to talk about working with farmers in the southern region of the nation.

Regional and national events were held, including the **Farm to Cafeteria Conferences** in 2001 (Washington), 2005 (Ohio), and 2007 (Maryland) that paved the way for national farm to school leadership to emerge. This culminated with the creation of the National Farm to School Network (NFSN) in 2007.



The second meeting was in collaboration with NNFC, Florida A&M University, and TCC. Child nutrition directors from around the state attended the meeting to hear about the successes of NNFC and to establish a farm to school pilot program in the state.

Following the meeting, TCC began using the farm to school model developed by NNFC with its group of farmers in south-central Arkansas. TCC used NNFC's processing facility to process sweet potatoes, green beans, and collard greens into fresh, packaged, easy-to-serve products. 24 districts participated in the pilot program which connected them to local farms and aided in the purchasing of local food.

Federal Farm to School Legislation

2004 Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act

Established a federal farm to school program, but the program was not funded at that time. The bill also required all school districts participating in the National School Lunch Program or other federally funded school meal programs to have a school wellness policy by the 2006-2007 school year.

2008 Food, Conservation, and Energy Act

Established a geographic preference option to improve opportunities for local procurement in school meal programs. This bill directed the USDA Secretary of Agriculture to encourage schools to purchase locally grown and locally raised products "to the maximum extent practicable and appropriate."

2010, Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act

Provided \$5 million per year in mandatory funding for the USDA Farm to School Grant Program.

2014 Farm Bill - Agricultural Act

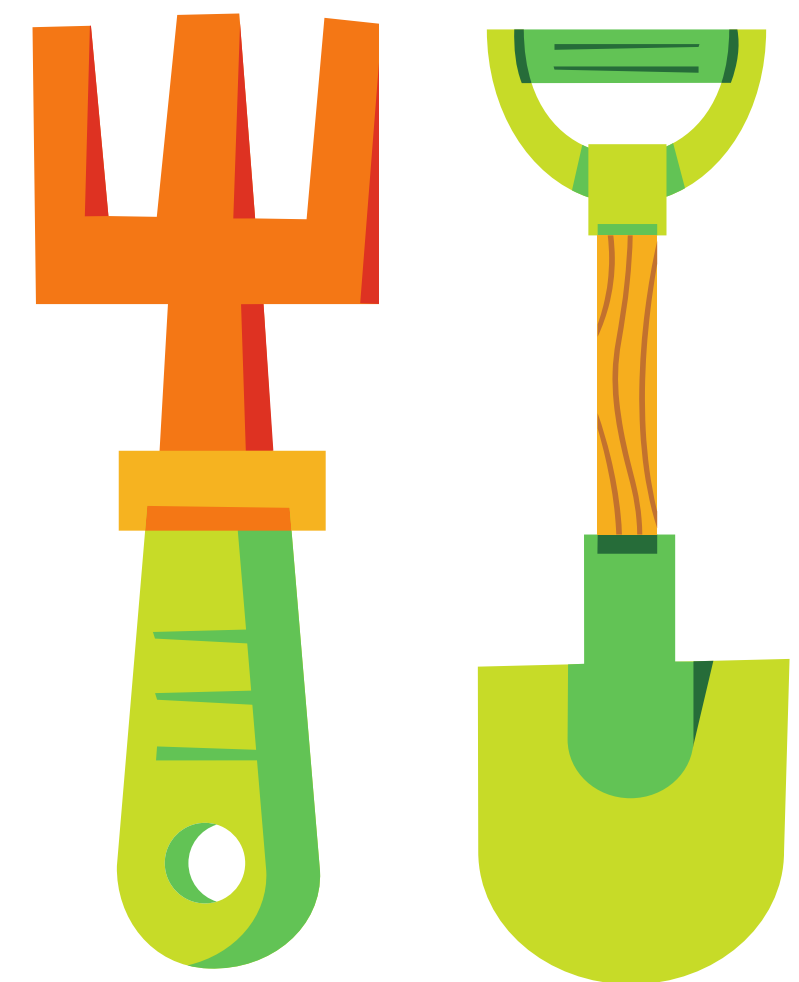
Established a new pilot program for up to eight states to explore procurement alternatives – including local procurement – for unprocessed fruits and vegetables.

Towards the end of 2009, Heifer International hosted an Arkansas Farm to School Conference in Little Rock. This event brought together more than 200 stakeholders from around the state and nation, and it marks the first time the term **“Arkansas Farm to School”** was used. An Arkansas Farm to School Steering Committee was convened following the 2009 conference based on interest in building farm to school momentum in the state. The group met regularly to discuss statewide goals and in 2010, the committee moved under the leadership of the Arkansas Food Policy Council.



In 2012, a Community Advisory Board for the Arkansas Grow Healthy Study that was led by Arkansas Children's Research Institute (ACRI) was formed to advise on pilot farm to school projects around the state. In 2013, ACRI was chosen as the state's Core Partner by the National Farm to School Network (NFSN) and assumed a state leadership role.

In 2013, Fayetteville School District became the first school district in Arkansas to receive a Farm to School grant from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Since 2013, a total of \$617,430 has been provided to nine Arkansas entities through the program. The other awardees include Lawrence County School District, Mansfield School District, ACRI, Conway School District, the Wallace Center at Winrock International, the Arkansas Department of Agriculture, Carroll County Resource Council, and Springdale School District.



In 2014, then-Governor Mike Beebe proclaimed October as Arkansas Farm to School Month. Governor Asa Hutchinson continued the practice in 2015 and each year since. Also in 2015, a USDA Farm to School Census was completed using information from the 2013-2014 school year. The USDA found 47 school districts, 195 schools, and 95,605 students in Arkansas participated in farm to school; \$1,255,960 was invested in local food; and 36 school gardens existed.

Finally, the 2015 governor-endorsed Healthy Active Arkansas Initiative launched with the single, overarching goal is to increase the percentage of adults, adolescents and children who are at healthy weight. Farm to school goals were included in the 10-year strategic plan.

In 2017, a group of state agencies and statewide nonprofits formed the Arkansas Farm to School Collaborative (Collaborative). The Collaborative has expanded to include representatives from 12 state agencies and nonprofits. In addition, NFSN recognized the following as farm to school Supporting Partners: Arkansas Department of Agriculture, Arkansas Department of Education, Arkansas Department of Human Services, and the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service (UADA).

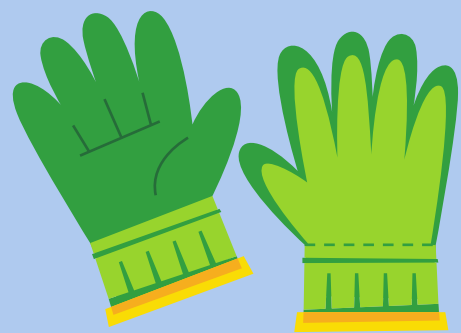


Legislation enacted by the Arkansas General Assembly in 2017 and 2019 solidified the momentum of farm to school in Arkansas. The passage of the Local Food, Farms, and Jobs Act (Local Food Act) in 2017 created a local food preference by requiring state agencies that received at least \$25,000 in state funding for the purchase of food products to set a goal to ensure that 10 percent of the food budget was spent on local farm and food products in the first year. The goal increased to 20 percent in subsequent years. Amendments to the Local Food Act in 2019 increased the goal to at least 20 percent and expanded the number of agencies required to report local food purchases.



Through the passage of Act 506 in 2019, the Arkansas legislature established a Farm to School and Early Childhood Education Program and a position for a full-time Program Coordinator within the Arkansas Department of Agriculture to: address the issues of supply, demand, procurement, and consumption of local farm or food products in schools and early childhood programs; take reasonable steps to incorporate more agriculture and nutrition education into schools and early childhood programs; create a statewide program in collaboration with stakeholders; and prepare an annual report.

In 2019, the USDA completed another **Farm to School Census** based on the 2018-2019 school year. The next Farm to School Census will take place in 2023.



Additionally in 2019, farm to school leaders from Arkansas travelled to Washington D.C. to speak with U.S. Senator John Boozman and U.S. Senator Tom Cotton. Ally Mrachek with Fayetteville School District and Maegan Brown with Conway Public Schools visited Senator Cotton to share about their child nutrition farm to school efforts. Second, Destiny Schlinker with FoodCorps met with Senator Boozman to talk about the Kids Eat Local Act.

In 2020, the Arkansas Department of Agriculture moved into the role of Core Partner for NFSN and ACRI shifted from Core Partner to Supporting Partner. The other Supporting Partners remained the same and UADA hired a Local Food Specialist who spends half their time focused on farm to school efforts in three regions of the state.

In 2023, the Arkansas Farm to School Pilot Program was launched. This year-long professional development program offers training, resources, and technical assistance to school educators, administrators, school nutrition directors, cafeteria staff, local farmers, and community partners. Selected schools are invited to a summer retreat to create a collaborative Farm to School Action Plan. With the support of a coach, teams spend the school year putting their plans into action and strengthening their capacity to impact classrooms, cafeterias, and communities, with change that lasts.

For more information and to sign up for the newsletter, visit arfarmtoschool.org.

