



ARKANSAS
Farm to School

Farm to School Committees



If you want to start a farm to school program at your school, the best way to start is by forming a committee. Farm to school programs can take a lot of planning and hard work, so it's important to enlist a team to help your program succeed. Pooling resources, ideas, and labor will help ensure that your program will continue for many years to come!

For additional help and support, contact Jessica Chapman, Farm to School and Early Childhood Education Program Coordinator, at the Arkansas Department of Agriculture, jessica.chapman@agriculture.arkansas.gov, (501) 251-3019.

Gather Interest

Start by building your network and reaching out to potential supporters for an initial brainstorming meeting. Send emails to the school community, post flyers, and talk to the school administration. School administration can help find resources and funding, coordinate with teachers, and promote the farm to school program in general.

Invite the principal, school board members, superintendent, or other administrators to participate in the committee. In addition to school administration, consider involving the following people in the committee:

- Teachers/Educators
- Maintenance staff
- Food service staff
- Family members
- Students
- Farmers/Master Gardeners
- County Extension Agents
- Community members

Hold an initial interest meeting (in-person or virtual) to present a vision for the farm to school program at your school, determine what the committee's role will be, and create a list of people interested in joining.



Develop the Committee

The recommended size of the committee is 6 to 12 people to form a diverse membership group. Diversity in stakeholders will help pull in more resources and ensure the sustainability of the farm to school program. Members should commit to participating for a specific length of time, such as one semester or school year. New members can, and should, be regularly recruited.

Committees can decide if they want to assign specific member roles or assign responsibilities on a case-by-case basis. For example, one to two people can serve as committee leaders who organize and lead meetings, delegate responsibilities, follow up to ensure that responsibilities are met, and more. Other potential roles could include treasurer, secretary, etc.

Once you've gathered and organized your team, figure out when and how often the committee will meet. It's important to set regular meetings. In addition, maintain a consistent means of communication such as email, a group message, or a Facebook group.

Set Goals



If you are in the beginning stages of starting a farm to school program, the first item on the committee agenda should be to establish goals for the program whether they are related to school gardening, local food procurement, education, or all of the above. For example, if you are starting a school garden from the ground up, the committee should plan the garden design and installation, and establish a plan for ongoing garden maintenance, including during the summer. An essential part of any farm to school program is, of course, the students. Involve students in decision-making and farm to school tasks.

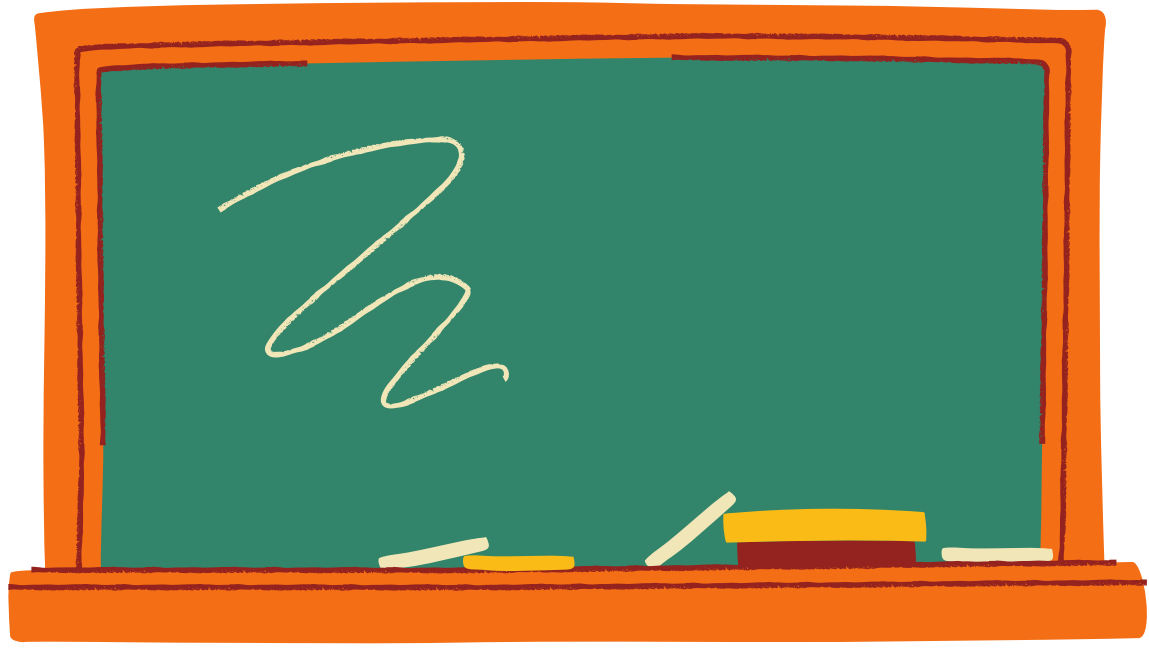
The second item on the to-do list is to address how farm to school programming will be funded. Is there funding available from the school budget? What about fundraisers? Would the committee like to write a grant? [Follow this link for a list of farm to school grants available.](#)

Launch Activities and Programming

Farm to school programs support student learning activities in the school garden, classroom, and cafeteria.

A **school garden**, whether potted plants in a windowsill or in-ground beds outside of the school, provides students with opportunities for hands-on learning. Gardens can enhance lessons, connect to the state standards, and teach students life-long skills about food, agriculture, and nutrition. Work with school administration and curriculum specialists to link the school garden to Arkansas state standards.



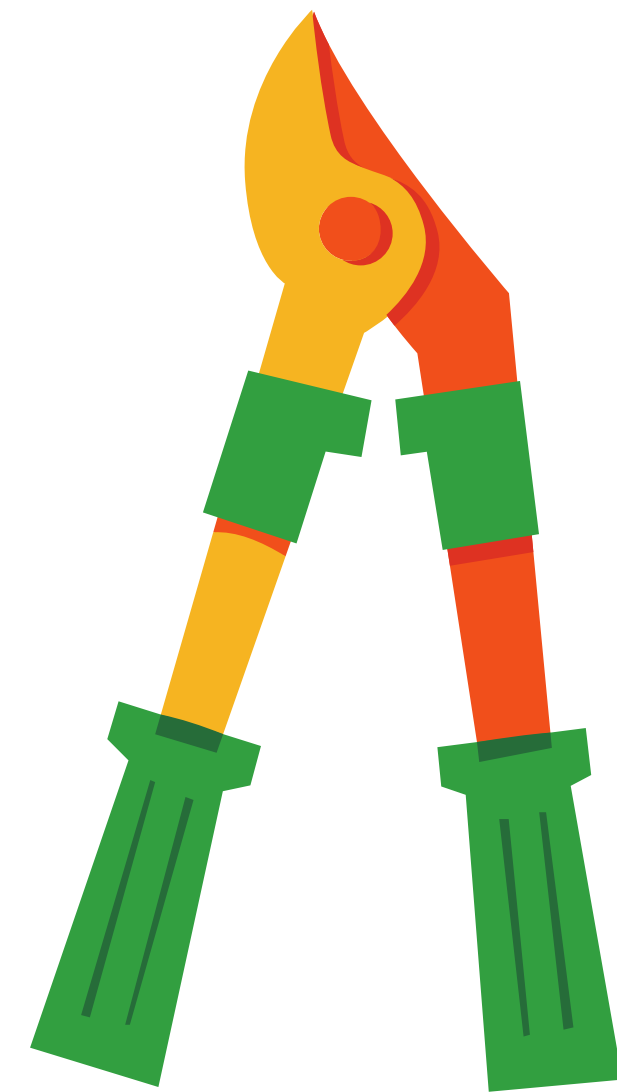


Farm to school in the **classroom** provides a real-life context for learning across Arkansas state standards, such as science, math, language arts, social studies, art, music, and more. Engaging students in hands-on opportunities, such as planting seeds, cooking food from scratch, and visiting local farms, establishes meaningful connections to the curriculum and deepens student understanding. Consider brainstorming speakers who could present on special farm to school topics.

The **cafeteria** can incorporate local, seasonal foods into school meals, build school nutrition staff expertise through professional development, reduce waste, and make nutritious food accessible to all students. Fruits and vegetables grown in the garden can be served in school meals or as snacks! Students are more likely to eat food they were involved in growing, which can increase school meal participation and students' consumption of nutritional foods. Taste tests are also an innovative way for school nutrition staff to try out a new recipe to gauge students' interest before adding it permanently to the school menu.

Sustain the Program

Successful farm to school programs are supported by the school community and beyond. Host a ribbon cutting ceremony, open house, or party in the school garden to generate interest in farm to school with students, staff, administrators, and community members. Communicate farm to school activities through social media, school newsletters, and other avenues to maintain interest and engagement. Recruit members inside and outside of the school community to volunteer in the school garden, host a test test, or help with other farm to school activities. Communicate your need for support from district level administrators and advocate for policies that advance farm to school initiatives. Seek out grants and other funding sources to support your farm to school program. Provide regular professional development opportunities for a wide range of members of the school community.



3, 2, 1, GO!

Farm to school presents fantastic opportunities for students to discover where food comes from and engage in hands-on learning across a variety of disciplines. Building a diverse, dedicated team to collaborate in goal-setting, coordinate your program, and share the work is an essential part of starting and sustaining a farm to school program. Once you've assembled your school garden committee, you have taken the first step toward ensuring your farm to school program will benefit students long into the future.

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

