



MAKE STUDENTS SMILE

CONNECT WITH FARM TO SCHOOL

Linking schools and farmers not only supports local economies but also benefits children by helping them understand where their food comes from and develop healthy eating habits. The Florida Farm to School program fosters opportunities for local farmers and K-12 schools to connect and increase the locally grown fruits and vegetables served in cafeterias.

> **HUNGRY FOR MORE?** Meet growers and school food service providers who are working together to benefit Florida farmers, schools, communities and children.



Farm to School partnerships help provide school children with healthy, nutritious and fresh fruits and vegetables.

FRESH, LOCAL SATSUMAS BIG HIT WITH KIDS, SCHOOL CAFETERIAS

From the first delivery, Ryder Laramore knew participating in the Farm to School program was a good decision.

The co-owner of Bar L Ranch in Marianna, Florida, could not sell his crop before it spoiled. Now, he supplies thousands of satsumas to schools in Leon and Calhoun counties, with more on the horizon.

“Just knowing that I was serving all of these kids, it gave me a good feeling,” he said.

The Farm to School program helps local farms connect with K-12 schools to get locally grown fruits and vegetables in the cafeteria. Beyond giving students more nutritious and fresh produce, successful partnerships provide a prosperous relationship for growers.

“I have been able to really grow my business as a result of participating in the Farm to School program,” he said. “I now have a size sorter, pole barn and

coolers on my property.”

Laramore, who plans to double the number of schools he currently serves, recommends that producers who are interested in participating in Farm to School talk to those who are already involved in the program to learn about their successes and challenges. Then, keeping an open line of communication with the schools helps to build rapport and nurture confidence and trust.

The easy-to-peel citrus fruits are popular with students and school officials alike, according to Cathy Reed, Nutrition Services Director of Leon County’s central kitchen.

“The children look forward to satsuma season,” she said. “If we put them out, we know they’ll take them. We want to purchase things that we know students will eat, and they love the satsumas.”

Reed says the county has had to learn

and adjust how it works with farmers during the five years or so the county has been involved with the Farm to School program.

“I want the farmers to be successful,” she said. “The more successful they are, the more produce I will get.”

Laramore coordinates with other local satsuma growers to meet the schools’ demands. His first delivery this season totaled 275 cases, or about 22,000 satsumas.

“The satsumas the kids ate today probably were on trees earlier this week,” Reed said. “It’s just so fantastic to be able to see fruit that is so fresh. I know I can get the freshest produce if I buy it locally.

“There is a desire from all of the food service directors to have healthier, fresher, Florida produce,” she added. “Having this good experience makes me want to work with more farmers. We’re going to find more ways to do that.”



Hydroponic growing systems at the UF/IFAS Live Oak Research and Education Center.

**“GO TO YOUR SCHOOL
AND TALK TO THEM...
SEE WHAT THEY
CAN DO WITH YOUR
PRODUCT. IT’S GOOD
FOR THE KIDS AND
GOOD FOR BUSINESS.”**

— RANDALL DASHER

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT
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PARTNERSHIP BRINGS LETTUCE, HANDS-ON LEARNING TO KIDS

For Randall Dasher, co-owner of Dasher Farm, venturing into hydroponic lettuce production was an easy decision. Getting involved in Farm to School partnerships was even easier.

Now, the McAlpin, Florida, farm provides five types of lettuce to seven schools in Suwannee County.

Each week, a Dasher Farm representative calls each lunchroom to ask what they need.

“We communicate regularly with the staff and get feedback from them,” Dasher said. “We are always looking for ways to strengthen our relationship with the schools.”

Sarah Stancel, Branford High School cafeteria manager, said she values the frequent check-ins, as well as the preparation and freshness of the lettuce.

“If I’m out and need some lettuce, I’ll have it before the day is out,” Stancel said. “Dasher washes the lettuce, so we don’t have to do any preparation. It’s ready for us to start working with.”

The school expanded its involvement in the Farm to School program and now sources strawberries, blueberries and sweet potatoes from local producers, in addition to the Dasher Farm lettuce.

“We’re supporting our local farmers,” Stancel said. “The lettuce is coming straight from the farmer with no middle man.”

Sarah Carte, Dasher’s daughter and co-owner of Dasher Farm, works to grow, process and deliver the lettuce to Suwannee County schools on a weekly basis.

“For parents and students, getting to see that their lettuce was actually grown here by a local farmer in their community is a big deal,” she said. “When they see us around the school or out at the store, they ask about our lettuce and want to know more about how we grow it.”

To show students, Dasher Farm installed a hydroponic growing tower in the school cafeteria. Educating the public about from where its food comes, Dasher said, is the biggest role growers can play.

To get involved in Farm to School, both Dasher and Carte recommend that producers go straight to the schools.

“Go to your school and talk to them,” he said. “See what produce they use, when they use it and see what they can do with your product. It’s good for the community, good for the kids and good for business.”



Hydroponic growing systems at the UF/IFAS Live Oak Research and Education Center.

Researchers and collaborators include Joy Rumble, Sonia Tighe, Nicole Dodds, Laura Bernheim, Shuyang Qu, Taylor Ruth, Laura Gorham, Caroline Roper, Ricky Telg & Tracy Irani



A graduate student assistant collects video footage at Dasher Farm as a worker harvests chives.

WHAT OUR RESEARCH SHOWS UF/IFAS PIE CENTER IS HERE TO HELP

Through its research and outreach, the UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education continually looks for ways to help farmers and consumers communicate more effectively with each other.

As part of research funded by a USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant, the PIE Center talked to producers,

food service staff, teachers, Extension faculty, distributors and Farm to School program representatives.

Through these interviews, researchers identified many perceived benefits to the Farm to School program, such as an outlet for sales, a chance for positive recognition and an opportunity to promote nutritious eating habits.

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