



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 developing healthy eating habits. The Florida Farm to School program fosters opportunities for K-12 schools and local farmers to connect and increase the locally grown fruits and vegetables served in cafeterias.

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

Satsumas, the easy-to-peel citrus fruits, are popular with students and school officials alike in Leon and Calhoun counties.

Cathy Reed, nutrition services director of Leon County's central kitchen, received about 22,000 satsumas from Ryder Laramore's Bar L Ranch earlier this year as part of a Farm to School partnership.

"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."

The Farm to School program helps K-12 schools connect with area farms 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," Laramore said. "I now have a size sorter, pole barn and coolers on my property."

Laramore, who plans to double the number of schools he serves, previously could not sell his crop before it spoiled. Laramore coordinates with other local satsuma growers to meet the schools' demands.

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

Reed values the Farm to School program and sees it as a "win-win-win" for everyone involved, from students to school leaders.

"The administrators want us to buy local," Reed said. "I think they like to see us supporting the local economy."

Both Reed and Laramore recommend keeping an open line of communication between the farmers and food service directors to build rapport and nurture confidence and

trust.

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

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.

One thing that doesn't change, however, according to Reed, is the smiles on children's faces as they open the satsumas.

"The satsumas the kids ate today probably were on trees earlier this week," she 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.

**“WE’RE SUPPORTING
OUR LOCAL FARMERS.
THE LETTUCE IS
COMING STRAIGHT
FROM THE FARMER WITH
NO MIDDLE MAN.”**

— SARAH STANCEL

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PARTNERSHIP BRINGS LETTUCE, HANDS-ON LEARNING TO KIDS

For Branford High School cafeteria manager Sarah Stancel, the sought-after purple lettuce from Dasher Farms is only a phone call away.

“If I’m out and need some lettuce, I’ll have it before the day is out,” she 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.”

Randall Dasher, co-owner of 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 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.

“The lettuce we get from Dasher is really beautiful and it stays fresh, that’s what the kids like,” says Stancel. “The purple-colored lettuce with the little fringe on it gives color to the salads.”

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.”



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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 food service

staff, teachers, producers, 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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