Right Time, Ripe Place: The State of Farm to School in Delaware County, New York

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CADE
Center for Agricultural Development & Entrepreneurship

FARM CATSKILLS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Delaware County, New York sits along the Delaware River, about 100 miles southwest of Albany in the State's Southern Tier. The county is home to more than 700 farms and has a history and culture deeply rooted in agriculture. However, the number of farms and acres in production is decreasing, and the average age of a farmer in Delaware County is 59 (as of the 2012 Agricultural Census). Delaware County's K-12 schools provide an opportunity for farms to access new markets while providing the region's students with fresh, local food. The County's 13 school districts spend over $1 million per year on food and have the opportunity to send tens of thousands of dollars back into the local economy by dedicating even a small portion of those budgets to local food.

In order to better understand the farm to school market in Delaware County, Farm Catskills and the Center for Agricultural Development and Entrepreneurship (CADE) performed a county-wide farm to school assessment in the fall of 2017. Results of this assessment show that many Delaware County districts are engaged in farm to school activity through robust garden programs and educational initiatives. Some districts are already working with local food and the majority of districts are interested in expanding their local food programs.

These districts report a number of barriers in procuring local foods including seasonality, higher prices, accessing local food through current distribution channels, and working with staff to process and prepare raw product.

Through a county-wide survey and in-depth interviews with stakeholders from six school districts, this assessment looks more carefully at those barriers while also exploring the interest and capacity for breaking them down across the County's schools. The assessment culminates in a series of recommendations for Farm Catskills, CADE, and others in the region to support farm to school activity moving forward.

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About Farm Catskills

Farm Catskills was launched in 2004 to protect and promote agriculture and the farming way of life in the Catskills. Farm Catskills' vision includes preserving farmland for farmers and providing tangible support to the farmers of today and tomorrow. Members include farmers, landowners and community leaders, and anyone interested in our farms, the environment, and Catskill communities.

Farm Catskills has recently established farm to school programming as its top and principle priority. Recognizing the lack of coordinated and sustained farm-to-school efforts in Delaware County and how vital these efforts are to our community's long-term vibrancy, the organization is taking the lead on bringing farm-to-school programming to area schools.

About CADE

Established in 1991, CADE's mission is to increase the number and diversity of successful farm enterprises and related businesses in New York. We envision a vibrant food system, in which locally owned agricultural businesses thrive and consumers are nourished by healthy sustainably produced food. Over the last 25 years, CADE has helped numerous agricultural businesses and organizations transition ideas from concepts to commercially viable activities. In each case, CADE identified the technological and commercialization needs of regional producers, conducted outreach and education activities, organized interested businesses into cooperative groups and secured financial support to move projects into production.

INTRODUCTION

There are nearly 6,000 students enrolled in public K-12 schools across Delaware County, New York, the state's fifth largest county by land area (New York State Education Department [NYSED]; United States Census Bureau, 2010).[1] While 6,000 may seem like a relatively low student population compared to surrounding New York counties (especially considering that the county's area is 200 square miles larger than the state of Rhode Island), Delaware County's low population density makes those 6,000 students a significant portion of the overall population (about 13%) (United States Census Bureau, 2010).

Many of those 6,000 students eat at least one of their meals at school every day. Ensuring that those meals are comprised of healthy, fresh foods is in the interest of many stakeholders including food service staff, administration, parents, county and state governments, and community organizations. This responsibility is especially important in counties where student populations may be more vulnerable to food insecurity and diet-related health concerns. At 28.6 percent and 55.9 percent respectively, Delaware County ranks among the highest in the state for children living below the poverty line and students eligible for free and reduced meal prices (Council on Children and Families).[2]

Delaware County's 700 food producing farms and 146,000 acres of farmland are an integral part of its culture, economy, and history. As of the 2012 USDA Agricultural Census, the county had over 23,000 head of cattle, produced over $300,000 worth of milk annually, and had over 230 acres in vegetable production. These numbers are changing, however. Between the 2007 and 2012 census, the number of farms in Delaware County dropped by 6 percent and the acres in production dropped by 12 percent (United States Department of Agriculture, 2012).

A growing concern for the health and nutrition of students, combined with an increasing interest in supporting local agriculture and preserving farmland across the region, has pushed many to look to farm to school activity as a way of connecting students to healthy, unprocessed foods while supporting the region's producers.

Farm to School (FTS) efforts in New York State are supported by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, the New York State Department of Education, and organizations like Farm to Institution New York State (FINYS) and the Farm to School Network. Within the Southern Tier of New York, several regional organizations are also prioritizing farm to school activity, including the Food and Health Network of South Central New York, whose Farm to School Program reaches students in 20 districts across eight counties. Since 2014, the non-profit Farm Catskills has made supporting FTS programs in Delaware County their primary mission. Their work has included educational programming on the importance of local food for school-age children; a Cow to Cafeteria initiative that connects schools with local beef; and a local harvest program that aggregates and processes local ingredients for schools, food banks, and community meal services during the winter months.

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1. Note that total population was calculated by adding individual district populations on the NY State Education Department Website. This number differs from the aggregated student population for Delaware County provided by the NY State Department of Education.

2. Delaware County has the sixth highest percentage of students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch and the third highest percentage of kids living below the poverty line in the state (excluding NYC).

INTRODUCTION

Eager to provide more targeted support, Farm Catskills received a grant from the Community Foundation of South Central New York in 2017 to perform a needs and capacity assessment in the county to better understand the current involvement, interest, and realistic capacity for K-12 schools to participate in FTS activity. The grant was matched by the Center for Agricultural Development and Entrepreneurship (CADE), a nonprofit dedicated to building a strong food system by increasing the number and diversity of successful farm and food businesses in New York through technical assistance, marketing development, and a food and farm business incubator.

The assessment involved a county-wide survey that was sent to all 13 school districts and in-depth interviews with six districts selected to represent the varied sizes, geographies, and demographics of the full population. Through the assessment, we have a better understanding of how Delaware County School districts are prioritizing FTS activity, what the challenges are for increasing efforts, and the types of resources and support Farm Catskills, CADE, and other organizations in the region might be able provide.

Methodology

In October of 2017, a 36-question survey was e-mailed to all 13 K-12 school districts in Delaware County. The survey was sent to the food service director or kitchen manager from each district, as well as the principals and superintendent. The survey included questions about food service operations, current FTS activity (including local procurement, school gardens, and nutrition/agriculture education), interest in increased activity, and capacity to do so. The survey was designed with the help of existing survey tools including the USDA Farm to School Census, a national survey administered every two years. The survey was open for seven weeks and was sent out three times. Additional outreach was performed for those who did not originally respond.

Response

Of the 13 K-12 school districts in Delaware County, 11 responded to the survey, an 84 percent response rate. This included 10 districts that completed the survey and one that partially completed it. The school districts that responded to the survey represent 90 percent of the student population in Delaware County. All of the data gleaned from the survey is self-reported.

Delaware County Schools: A Snapshot

As of the 2016-17 school year, there were 5,909 students attending Delaware County's 13 K-12 schools, approximately 13 percent of the total population (NYSED, U.S. Census Bureau). The 11 schools that responded to the survey are responsible for 5,300 of those students, or 90 percent of the student population. Respondents reported serving **3,616 lunches per day and 2,044 breakfasts per day**. This translates to 69% of students who eat school-provided lunch and 40% of students who eat school-provided breakfast on an average day across the county.

69% of DELAWARE COUNTY STUDENTS ARE SERVED LUNCH AT SCHOOL ON AN AVERAGE DAY

Free and Reduced Meals

Survey respondents reported that 57 percent of students receive free or reduced lunch across the County on average.[3] This can be compared to a national average of 51.8% and a state-wide average of 52.9% (including New York City or 40.9% excluding New York City) (Council on Children and Families).

Percentage of students who are receiving free or reduced-price meals in **responding districts**

Percentage of students who are receiving free or reduced-price meals in **New York State**

Percentage of students who are receiving free or reduced-price meals **nationally**

3. Note that this is slightly higher (about 1%) than publicly available data.

Free and Reduced Meals Cont'd

A student's eligibility for free and reduced meals is based on household income levels. For the 2016-17 school year, students were eligible for free meals if their household earned at or below 130% of the federal poverty line (at or below $31,590 annual income for a family of four). Students were eligible for reduced price meals if their household earned at or below 185% of the federal poverty line (at or below $44,955 annual income for a family of four) (United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Services, 2017a).

Out of New York State's 62 counties, Delaware County has the sixth highest percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced meals in the state (excluding New York City) (Council on Children and Families). In districts with high levels of free and reduced meal eligibility, school meals have the potential to make up a significant portion of a student's nutritional and caloric intake.

Community Eligibility Provision

The community eligibility provision or CEP is a "no price" meal option for low income school districts. CEP allows all students in qualifying districts to eat breakfast and lunch for free with no application process (United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Services, 2017b). Three districts in Delaware County reported participation in the CEP. Notably, **those districts had statistically higher participation rates.**

Food Service Basics

The size and infrastructure of each district's food service program varied across the county. Respondents reported having between 3 and 12 food service employees and an **average of 1 employee per 51 lunches served**. All respondents cited that they do both scratch cooking and "heat and serve" meals. Eight districts reported having salad bars in their schools, though only six of those districts reported that students in kindergarten through fifth grade had access to the salad bars and seven reported that students in sixth through eighth grade had access.

Food Service Budgets

Respondents reported spending an aggregate $1.2 million on food in the 2016-17 school year. The average annual food cost for responding districts was $138,000, although these amounts ranged significantly across the districts. While districts are limited in the amount of money they can spend per meal, these numers become more powerful when aggregated across the county. Allocating even a small percentage of those budgets to local food would send tens of thousands of dollars back into the local economy. The economic impact of local purchases will be explored later in the report.

RESPONDING DISTRICTS REPORTED SPENDING AN AGGREGATED $1.2 MILLION ON FOOD ANNUALLY

Farm to School

The majority of survey questions were specific to FTS activity, interest, and capacity. "Farm to school" generally includes three categories: local food procurement, school gardens, and nutrition and agriculture education. While this assessment focused on local food procurement, questions were also asked about school gardens and educational programs.

To begin, the survey asked how important FTS was in each district and whether or not that district had participated in any FTS activity. Encouragingly, **90 percent of respondents agreed that FTS activity was either very or somewhat important important in their district.** Those same schools reported that they had either participated in FTS activity in the 2016-17 school year or had started to in the 2017-18 school year.

90 PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS REPORTED THAT THEY PARTICIPATED IN FARM TO SCHOOL ACTIVITY IN THE 2016-17 SCHOOL YEAR OR HAD STARTED TO IN THE 2017-18 SCHOOL YEAR

Benefits of Farm to School

In order to better understand what motivates FTS activity, the survey asked respondents what they believed to be the primary benefits of FTS, specifically around working with local food. The most frequently mentioned benefits are shown in Figure 1.

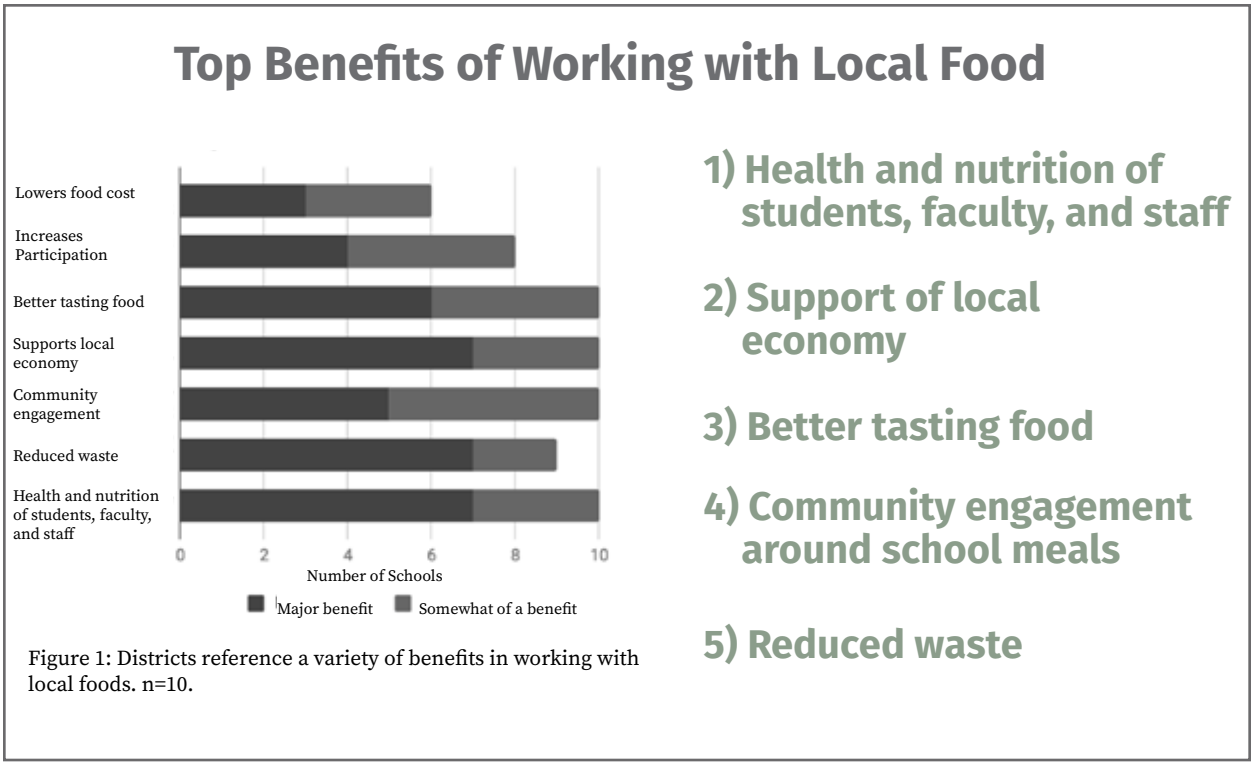

Figure 1: Districts reference a variety of benefits in working with local foods. n=10.

Local Food Procurement

Of the nine schools that reported FTS activity, six reported purchasing local foods in the 2016-17 school year, one reported starting to purchase local foods in the 2017-18 school year, one reported that they do not currently purchase local foods but plan to in the future, and one reported that they do not currently purchase local foods and have no plans to in the future.

Local Food Procurement Cont'd

Respondents reported purchasing **local vegetables, fluid milk, fruits, meat, and other dairy products**. **No district reported purchasing local poultry, fish, plant-based proteins, eggs, grain/flour, bakery items, or herbs** in the 2016-17 school year. When asked to list the top local products purchased by value, fluid milk and vegetables were the top two responses, followed by beef, apples, fruit, and yogurt.

DISTRICTS REPORTED THAT THEY ALREADY PURCHASE LOCAL VEGETABLES, FLUID MILK, FRUITS, MEAT, AND OTHER DAIRY PRODUCTS

Dollars Spent on Local Food

The survey asked those who reported purchasing local foods to provide the dollar amount they spent on local food in the 2016-17 school year. Schools were given the option to provide amounts including or excluding milk. Three districts provided total dollar amounts excluding milk; those amounts ranged from $1,500 to $7,000 and averaged 3% of their total food costs. Two schools provided total dollar amounts spent on local including milk; responses ranged from $24,000 to $67,000 and averaged 18% of their total food costs. Because of the limited sample, these results cannot be extrapolated to the full population.

One of the initial goals of this assessment was to establish a baseline of local food procurement across the county so that goals could be set and measured. The fact that only half of the schools who reported purchasing local foods provided dollar amounts suggests that those numbers are difficult to access or are not being tracked. Because broadline distributors and large food vendors do not always include a product's point of origin, tracking local food purchases often requires schools to create their own tracking mechanism or to coordinate with distributors to provide customized information. When asked about the methods they used for tracking local purchases, no respondent reported using a specific tracking tool.

Dollars Spent on Local Food Cont'd

Participants were also asked to provide their definition of local. Figure 3 shows that respondents provided a variety of definitions ranging from "food grown or produced within a 100-mile radius" to "food grown or produced within the Northeast." Three respondents reported that they did not have a definition of local. So while determining a baseline is important, there are some steps that need to be taken first to establish a shared language and understanding of what local means, and to then determine how to best track those purchases over time.

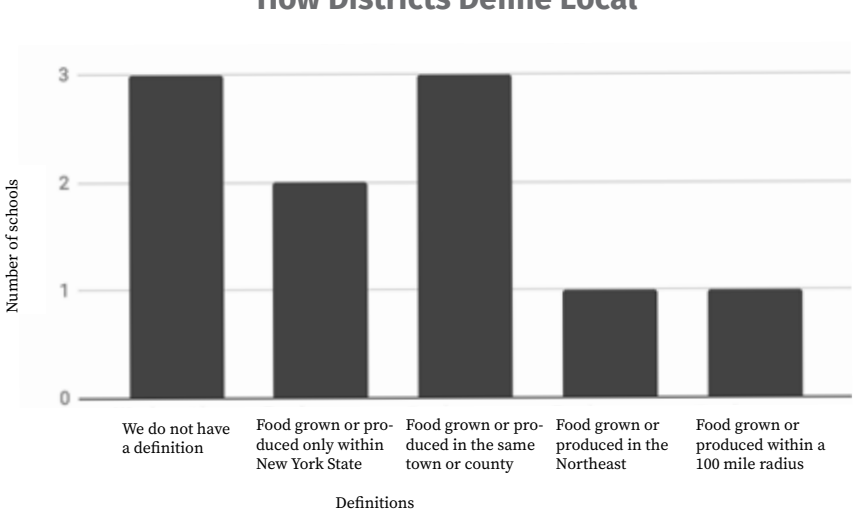

Figure 3: Districts use a variety of definitions to describe local food. n=10.

Reimbursements for Local Food

The State of New York currently provides districts with a 5.9 cent reimbursement per eligible meal. In late 2017, Governor Cuomo proposed a 5-point plan to combat hunger for New York students in kindergarten through college. Part of this plan includes a proposed increase in reimbursement for schools that purchase local foods. In an effort to increase the amount of locally grown foods served in schools, Governor Cuomo has proposed a 25 cent reimbursement for districts that purchases at least 30 percent of their ingredients from New York farms (2018 State of the State Proposals). Having a reliable system in place to measure those local purchases will be essential for schools to be able to receive this reimbursement.[4]

4. At the time this report was finalized, guidelines for this reimbursement policy were anticipated to be released to schools by August 2018.

How Far Can a Dollar Spent on Local Food Take Us?

Research shows that the economic impact of purchasing local food goes well beyond the dollar that is put directly into the hands of a local producer. When determining the economic impact of local food purchases, an economic multiplier is often used. This multiplier considers indirect and induced effects in addition to the direct effect. For a school purchasing food from a local farmer, the direct effect would be the dollar that gets invested in the local farm; the indirect effect includes the money that farmer will now spend on supplies at a local feed or hardware store; and the induced effect includes the day to day purchases made in the community by people who are employed by that farm. Multiplier effects for local food are often estimated between 1.4 and 2.6, meaning that for every dollar spent on local food, an additional $.40 to $1.60 ends up circulating through the local economy (Libman, Li, & Grace, 2017; United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Services).

Using the $1.2 million dollars spent on food by districts across the county, Figure 4 demonstrates the economic impact of purchasing local foods at a variety of percentages, with and without an economic multiplier. A multiplier of 1.45 is being used for these calculations. This multiplier was developed for a previous New York State study and was used recently by Farm to Institution New York State (FINYS) to estimate the economic impact of increasing New York-grown food purchases to 25% in state-funded agencies (Libman, Li, & Grace, 2017; Schmit, 2014).[56]

	5% local	10% local	20% local	30% local
Direct	$61,924	$123,848	$247,695	$371,543
With Economic Multiplier of 1.45	$89,790	$179,579	$359,158	$538,737

Figure 4: The potential economic impact of diverting a percentage of the county's aggregated K-12 food budget to local food.

5. Note that because our sample size was too limited to determine the current baseline of local procurement for Delaware County districts, these values do not take into consideration the dollars already being invested in the local economy by these schools.

6. This multiplier is meant to demonstrate the potential impact of local food purchasing in Delaware County schools. That being said, it was not created for this specific study and should be used cautiously.

Barriers to Procuring Local Food

While there are many benefits to working with local food, there are a number of barriers that make accessing those foods more challenging. Figure 6 shows the full list of barriers referenced by respondents.

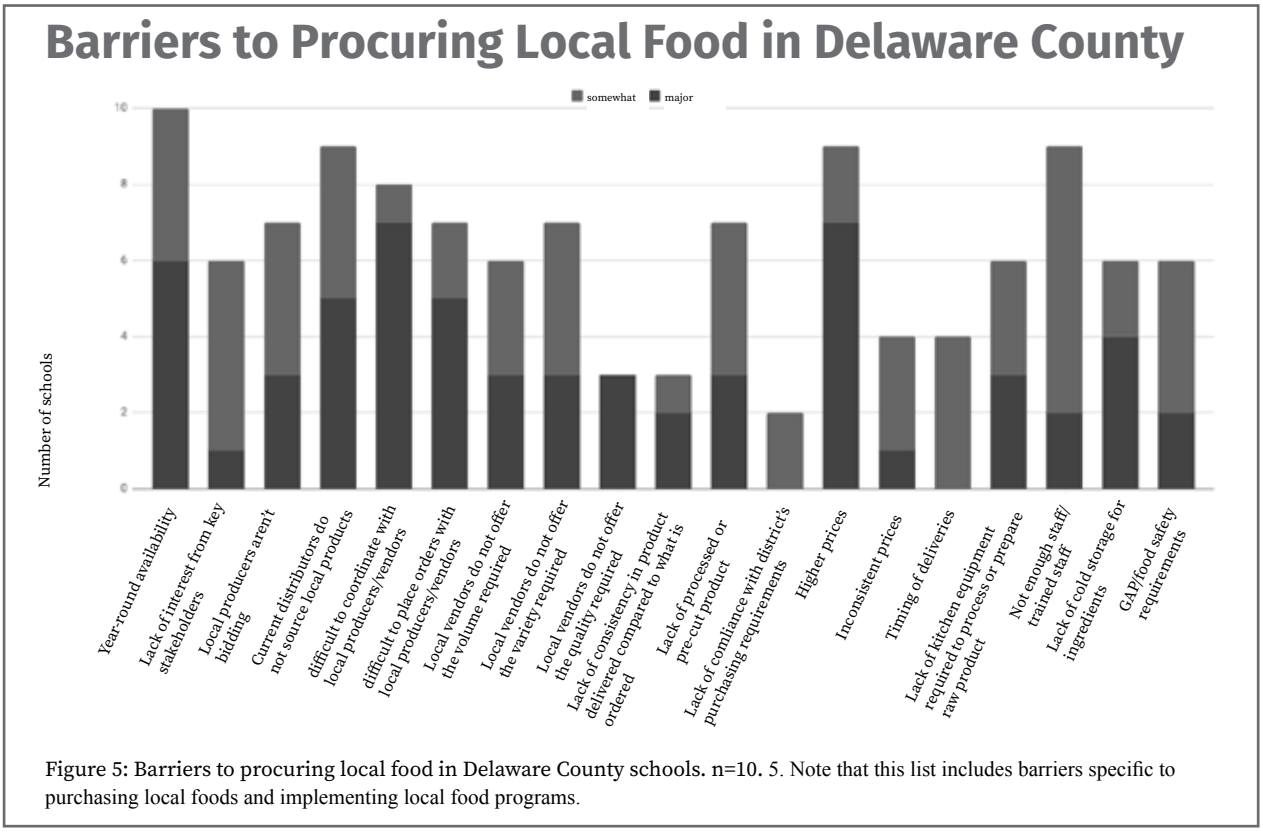

Figure 5: Barriers to procuring local food in Delaware County schools. n=10. 5. Note that this list includes barriers specific to purchasing local foods and implementing local food programs.

Top Barriers

1) Year-round availability

2) Higher prices

3) Current distributors do not source local product

4) Not enough staff/trained staff to process raw materials

5) Difficult to coordinate with local producers and vendors/unsure of how to communicate with producers/vendors

Barriers to Procuring Local Foods, Cont'd

In addition to the most frequently mentioned barriers, several respondents cited multiple coordination and distribution-related challenges. These challenges relate specifically to the act of finding, ordering, and moving local product. Seven out of ten respondents mentioned all four of these as barriers and one respondent mentioned three out of four:

-Local producers aren't bidding
-Current distributors do not source local products
-Difficult to coordinate with local producers/vendors
-Difficult to place orders with local producers/vendors.

For districts that are used to buying food from a few large vendors, working with multiple small vendors can require a significant amount of added coordination. In rural regions where the schools are spread out and do not require huge quantities, it can be especially challenging for farms working independently to make deliveries to multiple schools.

School Gardens and Education

While this assessment focused primarily on local food procurement, we also recognize that giving students access to local food is only one piece of the puzzle. Allowing students the opportunity to feel responsible for the food they eat and to understand where it comes from is a critical component of FTS. In order to better understand how districts are incorporating FTS concepts into the classroom and day-to-day activities, the survey asked questions about school gardens and nutrition and agricultural education initiatives.

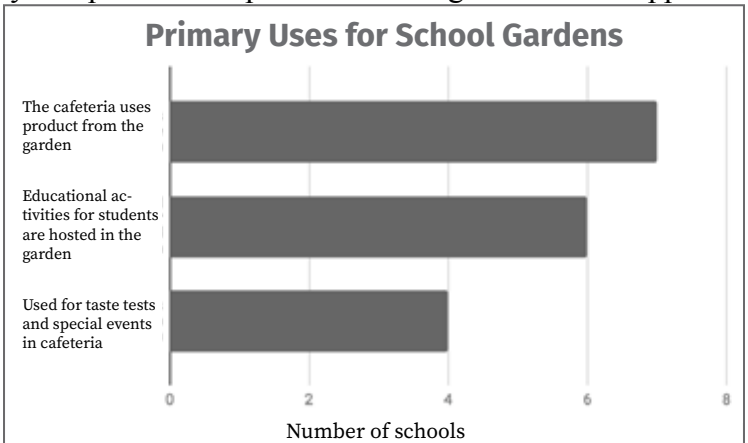

Figure 6: Schools are using their gardens in a variety of ways. n=7

Seven schools reported having school gardens. Figure 6 shows that those gardens are used in a variety of ways like providing product to the cafeteria, hosting educational activities for students, and for taste tests or special events.

School Gardens and Education, Cont'd

Eight districts reported that they offered some kind of nutrition or agricultural education. Figure 7 shows that the most frequently mentioned activities included performing taste tests, encouraging healthy eating through cafeteria activity, and promoting local food through promotional materials like posters and newsletters. Notably, none of the schools reported that they host farmer visits in the cafeteria, classroom, or garden.

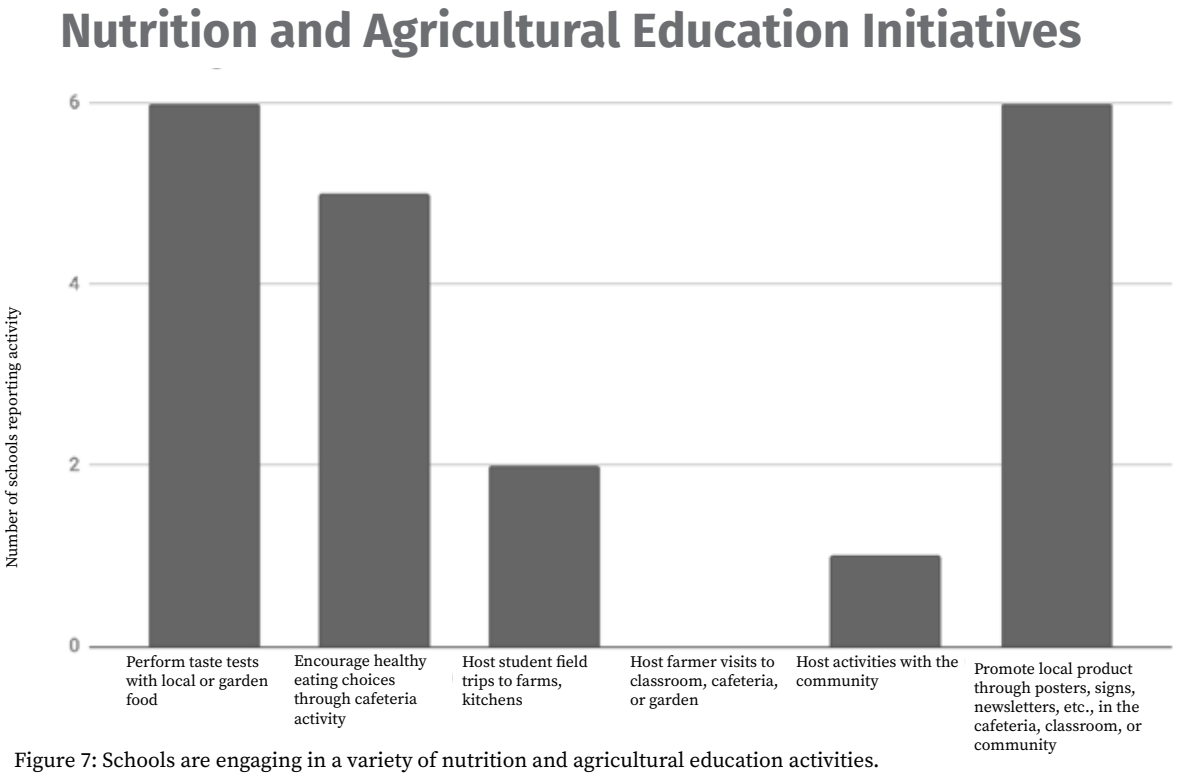

Figure 7: Schools are engaging in a variety of nutrition and agricultural education activities. Note that no school reported hosting farmer visits. n=8.

Moving Forward

When asked about the future of farm to school activity in their district, **80 percent of respondents reported that they believe farm to school activity will increase in their district.** When asked what kind of resources they thought would be beneficial, a number of suggestions were cited (Figure 8).

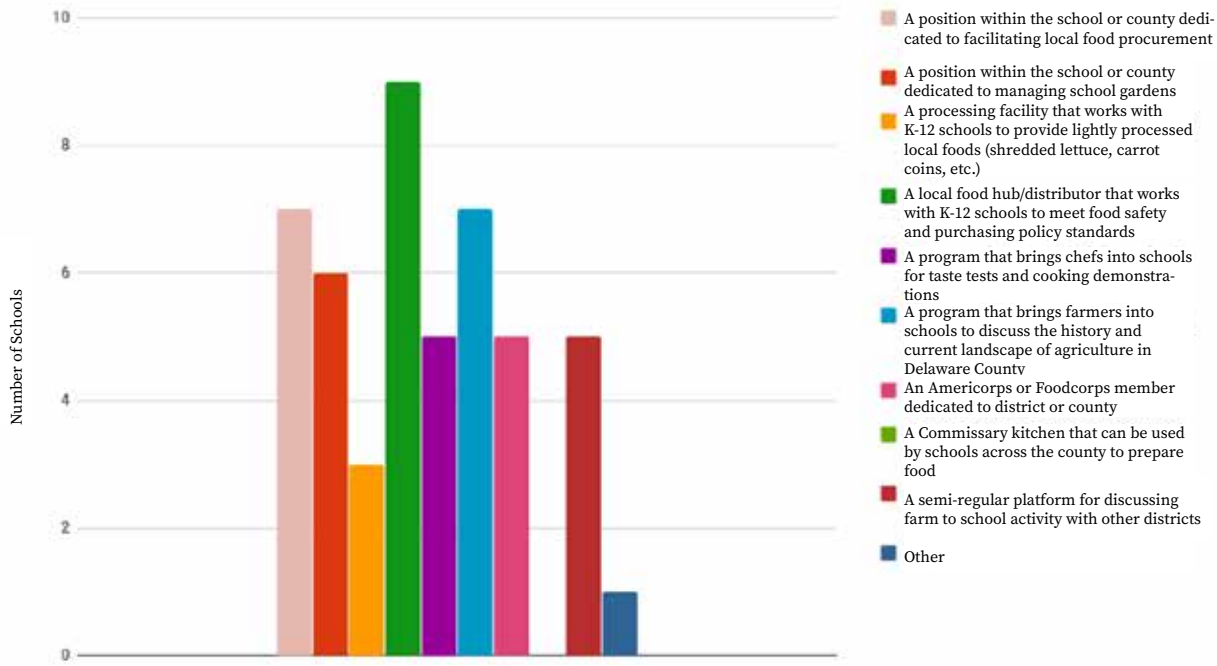

Figure 8: respondents reported that they would benefit from a variety of resources and programs. n=10.

Top Resources

1) A local food hub/distributor that works with K-12 schools to meet food safety and purchasing policy standards

2) A position within the school or county dedicated to facilitating local food procurement

3) A program that brings farmers into schools to discuss the history and current landscape of agriculture in Delaware County

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Introduction

In addition to the countywide survey, six districts were selected to participate in an in-depth interview phase. The districts were chosen to reflect a range in size, demographic, and geography. Interviews were performed with food service directors, garden coordinators, wellness committee chairs, administration, community members, and students when available. The interviews were meant to give us a better understanding of the procurement process; to follow up on survey responses regarding barriers, opportunities, and resources; to hear the perspective of stakeholders outside the cafeteria; and to aggregate data around beef and produce usage.

Key Findings

- **Education, Education, Education**

Stakeholders across the county and from all corners of the school system emphasized the importance of education. FTS cannot exist in the cafeteria alone; putting local food on the menu is simply not enough. Students need to better understand where their food comes from, why supporting local producers is important, and how agriculture fits into their shared history and culture. Several interviewees from districts with robust FTS programs referenced "food for thought" days or school-wide film screenings as the impetus for school gardens or the development of science electives dedicated to sustainable agriculture.

- **School gardens are game changers (even if they don't make a large impact on overall food purchasing)**

School gardens offer students an opportunity to learn science, math, business planning, nutrition, culinary skills, and systems thinking. Some schools have incorporated the school garden into science electives, while others have established garden clubs where students spend time outside of the school day. Product is sold at on-site markets, donated to vulnerable community members, and used in the cafeteria (one science class even spends time processing and preparing ingredients when the weather is not suitable to be outside). For the most part, food service staff say that receiving product from the garden is a positive thing. However, they also largely agree that school gardens can realistically only provide them with a small portion of the food they need and are not a primary source of product.

Key Findings Cont'd

- **FTS stakeholders want to communicate with each other**

Several interviewees emphasized the importance of gathering with other FTS stakeholders in the county to share best practices and experiences. "We all have specialties," said one garden coordinator, " A dedicated day when we're all talking about what we're doing in our classrooms, what we're doing in our gardens, what projects we have going on, I would definitely be interested in that."

While there are several robust regional and national conferences dedicated to FTS, interviewees have an interest in engaging with those that are working specifically in this unique region. One administrator added that he would like to see (and would be willing to host) a roundtable discussion that also involved local farmers; this would allow food service directors to better understand what is available and who can supply it.

- **The more champions you have the better, and a supportive administration will get you far**

FTS efforts are often initiated by one person who recognizes a need and then recruits others. In some cases, this person works in the cafeteria; in others that champion is part of the faculty, staff, or administration; and in some districts, the voice comes from a parent or community member. Most interviewees emphasized that these programs have to start somewhere and that usually involves one person with a simple idea. Districts with FTS champions across the school system (who are communicating and collaborating with one another), are more likely to build momentum, especially if the administration is on board. Principals and administrators are engaged in the farm to school conversation in a variety of ways; involvement ranges from providing an open dialogue and offering to work with the cafeteria's efforts, to actually managing and facilitating a growing space for students.

- **Coordinating with local producers and physically moving product is a challenge**

Several food service directors and kitchen managers referenced the already complicated process of purchasing school food. Adding more vendors, more orders, and more deliveries, is not feasible for many of these employees who are already juggling food safety regulations and purchasing policies. Having a local food aggregator or food hub that would communicate with local farmers, aggregate products, and work with schools to meet all of their regulations was referenced by numerous interviewees.

Key Findings Cont'd

- **Schools know what they need and they are willing to share that information**

In order to better understand the need on the demand side, we asked interviewees about the top produce items, by value, that they purchase. From those responses, we considered the local produce items that survey respondents mentioned and created a list of five essential products that schools use. Interviewees were asked to share the quantities they use of each product in a given year. **These numbers give us a sense of how much product would be needed to supply six of Delaware County's school districts for a year.**

Product	Quantity Needed to Supply six Schools for one Year
Lettuce/Romaine	7820 lbs
Carrots	6,511 lbs
Tomatoes	6,749 lbs
Onions	2,215 lbs
Apples	9,280 pc/month or 73,600 pc/year

Figure 9: The total amount of product needed for six Delaware County schools for one year. Note that these quantities are self-reported and some calculations had to be made due to inconsistent units used across districts. For example, some schools are invoiced for apples by the piece, while others are invoiced by the pound.

We also asked interviewees about their beef usage. Most dsistricts use their government entitlement dollars to procure USDA commodity beef. These entitlement dollars are given to districts based on their size and free and reduced meal eligibility. For the six interviewed districts, these funds are most frequently used on commodity products like beef, chicken, cheese, peanut butter, and frozen or canned fruits and vegetables.

Farm Catskill's Cow to Cafeteria program has made it possible for some districts in Delaware County to access local beef through community grants and fundraisers. The most recent Cow to Cafeteria event, a pig roast hosted by a local cider taproom, raised enough money to purchase a whole cow for one of the districts (for this particular district, one cow will provide enough beef for more than a year). Recognizing that Delaware County schools are relatively small, we asked interviewees to tell us how much beef they use in an average year.

Key Findings Cont'd

In order to provide six schools with the quantities of beef they require for a year, approximately 12,050 lbs of beef would be needed, roughly 20 cows. These quantities suggest that in this particular region, community-based programs like Cow to Cafeteria have the opportunity to make a significant impact on the beef being served in the county's schools. There are, of course, other considerations that need to be made if a program like this were to be scaled such as storage, freezer space, food safety requirements, and delivery methods.

IN ORDER TO PROVIDE SIX SCHOOLS WITH THE QUANTITIES OF BEEF THEY REQUIRE FOR A FULL YEAR, APPROXIMATELY 12,050 LBS OF BEEF WOULD BE NEEDED, ROUGHLY 20 COWS.

- **Engaging in farm to school activity is extra work, plain and simple**

Schools that have garden programs or are working to purchase local foods have faculty and staff that are dedicating additional time, resources, and energy to those activities. Local food means less processed food. Breaking down raw products and doing scratch cooking requires additional labor. Ordering from multiple sources, managing deliveries, and balancing the price of local products with commodity products requires additional coordination. In an environment where people are already working extremely hard with limited resources, asking them to allocate even more time is a tall ask. Securing funding and additional support positions to bolster these activities will be an important part of moving forward.

Recommendations

Based on survey results and in-depth interviews, there are three primary areas where Farm Catskills, CADE, and other regional organizations could potentially provide support to Delaware County schools: education, coordination, and distribution. The following recommendations are offered with those three cateogories in mind.

1. Develop a scalable "Food for Thought" curriculum and plan for implementation

There is a clear need and interest in increased educational programming across the county. While some districts are already incorporating sustainable agriculture, horticulture, and nutrition into their curriculums, there is an opportunity for increased involvement from farmers, educators, and others working within the food system. One administrator suggested that he would like to see an educational video produced about the importance of supporting local agriculture that he could share with parents and other stakeholders. Others said that having an organization like Farm Catskills come in and host "food for thought" days was critical for their FTS success. Survey results show that a program that brings farmers into schools is one of the top three resources schools would most like to see. Farm Catskills has already created a guide to organizing and hosting a Day of Food For Thought. Building this guide into a scalable curriculum that is introduced to different age groups across the county would provide a valuable supplement to local procurement efforts.

2. Support a Farm to School Coordinator Position

Survey results showed that the top barriers for procuring local food include "higher prices," "not enough staff/trained staff," and "difficult to coordinate with local producers and vendors/unsure of how to communicate with them." This suggests that there is a need for additional coordination support. This notion is furthered by the fact that the second most mentioned resource or program that survey respondents expressed interested in was "a position within the school or county dedicated to facilitating local food procurement." Interviewees that are currently responsible for purchasing food confirm that adding local food to their program requires a significant amount of additional time and coordination that they often don't have the capacity for.

Farm to school coordinators exist in a variety of models and are funded through a number of channels. Typically, this person is responsible for tasks like: communicating with local farmers and food producers, coordinating the delivery of local products, recipe and menu development around local items, taste tests, setting up tracking tools, setting and measuring goals for local procurement, and working with food service staff to ensure that local items meet all regulations and purchasing policies. Often these positions are grant-funded or housed within an outside organization. For example, the Food and Health Network of South Central New York (FaHN) has a farm to school coordinator who oversees 20 districts in eight counties. As FaHN expands their work into Delaware county, there may be opportunities for Farm Catskills and CADE to explore partnerships.

Recommendations, Cont'd

3. Support an aggregation and distribution cite that connects local farmers with Delaware County schools

Distribution and coordination challenges are often intertwined. Interviewees pointed out that because their schools have relatively small student populations and are spread out over a large geographic region, it is challenging for farmers to rationalize making those deliveries. Interviewees are also hesitant to receive multiple deliveries on multiple days.

Supporting a hub or aggregation cite where local product can be dropped off, sorted, and transported in a single delivery would allow farmers to limit their travel while still accessing multiple schools. It would give schools the opportunity to use a streamlined ordering process and still receive product from multiple farms.

4. Expand Farm Catskill's Cow to Cafeteria program

The six districts who provded in-depth interviews reported that they use an aggregated 12,050 lbs of beef annually, approximately 20 cows. Farm Catskills' 2017 Cow to Cafeteria program raised enough money to purchase one district enough beef for their entire school year. While this district is one of the smallest in the county, the quantities needed across the interviewed districts suggest that community-supported programs like Cow to Cafeteria have the potential to make a real difference for a number of schools. A pilot program that introduces Cow to Cafeteria to 2-3 new schools per year, would support community businesses and farmers while connecting thousands of students with sustainably grown, local beef.

5. Establish a Delaware County FTS Task Force

Interviewees frequently mentioned their interest in a platform for sharing ideas and experiences. Establishing a Delaware County FTS community of practice or task force, where players along the FTS supply chain (including school faculty, staff, and administration; parents; community members, farmers; and distributors) could come together and discuss FTS challenges, ideas, and programs, would be a valuable first step.

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