



Farm to School efforts worthwhile

My children complain that they do not like the “healthy” lunches at their school this year. I’ve heard some schools are serving fresh fruits and vegetables from local farms, and I think that might help. How can I find out more?

School cafeterias have never been awarded top-rated Zagat reviews, but the changes your children are seeing in the chow line are likely the result of the “Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010,” which required the U.S. Department of Agriculture to establish nutrition standards for all foods sold in schools, even snacks and a la carte items, beyond the foods that are part of federally supported school meals programs.

Although the act doesn’t need to be fully implemented in schools yet, students in many schools are already seeing a marked difference: fewer fries and chicken nuggets, more fajita chicken and steamed broccoli. The idea is to increase the fruits, vegetables and whole grains and reduce the sodium on the school menu.

The act also promotes connections between schools and local farmers who can provide locally grown produce. Both the National Farm to School Network (<http://www.farmtoschool.org>) and Ohio State University Extension’s Ohio Farm to School program (<http://farmtoschool.osu.edu>), can help a community get started. It’s best to form a team

involving school food service staff, teachers, administrators, local farmers, students, parents and community organizations, and establish just one or two attainable goals to start with. A Farm to School effort can go beyond the cafeteria serving line to promoting experiential learning by starting a school garden and organizing visits to local farms as well as incorporating more nutrition and agriculture into the school curriculum.

The effort is likely to be worthwhile. Research shows students in schools participating in Farm to School programs tend to:

- Consume more fruits and vegetables both through Farm to School meals and at home.
- Consume fewer unhealthy foods and sodas.
- Reduce “screen time” — that is, time in front of the television, computer and/or video games.
- Increase physical activity.
- Increase knowledge and awareness of gardening, agriculture, healthy eating, local foods and seasonality.
- Demonstrate willingness to try out new foods and healthier options.
- Show overall improvement in academic achievement and life skills, self-esteem and social skills.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University’s College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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