

Farm to School & Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE) Program Assessment Tool

This tool is designed to help a team of people from a school, school district or ECE program assess the current status of their Farm to School and Farm to Early Care and Education efforts (referred to throughout this document as “FTS”) and inform the creation of an action plan to enhance and sustain their farm to school programming.

What is “Farm to School”?

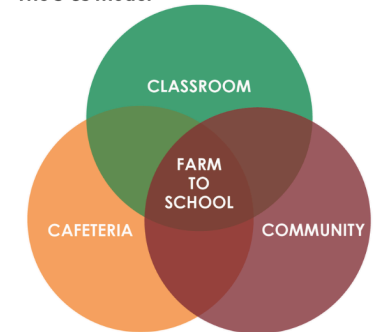
FTS connects children to local agriculture through:

- Procurement: Using locally grown foods in meals, snacks and Child Nutrition Programs like the National School Lunch Program. Our network uses the commonwealth of Pennsylvania as our definition of local.
- School Gardens: Helping educators and students grow their own food.
- Hands-On Learning: Providing experiential education through farm field trips, cooking in the classroom and more.

Creating a holistic approach:

The “3 Cs” approach, which VT FEED developed in 2000, has taken root across the country as a successful model of change that integrates efforts in the **cafeteria**, the **classroom** and the **community** to achieve robust and sustainable FTS programs. Comprehensive FTS programming includes: serving fresh and local meals in cafeterias; offering food, farm, and nutrition education in the classroom; and building school relationships with farms and community organizations. Collaboration and communication among people from a variety of constituencies within a school and ECE community make it possible to integrate FTS activities into the school culture and allow students to establish a lifelong positive relationship with food while also supporting a more just food system.

The 3 Cs model



© Vermont FEED, a partnership project of Shelburne Farms and NOFA-VT

For more information on the 3Cs, a model for whole school change, check out Vermont FEED’s [Connecting Classrooms, Cafeteria and Community: A Guide to Building Integrated FTS Programs](#), a helpful resource for FTS action planning, including a description of many terms used in this tool.

How to use this tool:

Context: Based on the proven model originally created by Vermont FEED, it's recommended that you complete this tool with input from a variety of stakeholders including: administrators, food service/school nutrition staff, teachers/educators, students, families, school board members, farmers and other community partners. A collaborative and multi-stakeholder approach will lead to a more accurate assessment of current practices and can encourage a more strategic approach to action planning and implementation for the future.

Step 1) Evaluate your current status:

- The tool is broken into four sections: Cafeteria (page 3), Classroom (page 4), Community (page 5), and Integration & Staying Power (page 6). Go through each section and each “indicator” (left hand column) and identify the description - Emerging, Developing, Deepening, or Thriving - that best matches the current state of your FTS program.
- If/when you feel that your program falls somewhere between two descriptions, choose the word that most fully represents your program. You may find it useful to circle or highlight parts of any descriptions that represent your current status.
- Use the 'Notes' column to write in any information related to your current status that may not be represented by the descriptions provided.

Step 2) “Program Assessment Results” on page 7:

- After your team has assessed your program and selected the best description for each indicator on pages 3-6, record the results in the **“Current status” column**.
- Then, discuss and identify 3-5 ‘indicators’ to prioritize for the following year and check off the ones you choose in the **“Priorities” column**. *NOTE: Deciding what to prioritize might involve a variety of factors including, but not limited to: what resources you have or will have access to in the following year (e.g., staff capacity, equipment, training), what your school/ECE currently values and supports (e.g., school wellness priorities or alignment with other current programming), or a desire to increase activities in one of the “3 Cs” areas to create a more holistic approach to FTS programming.*
- In the **“Notes for action planning” column** include any specific ideas or action items related to the 3-5 priority indicators you selected so you can document your rationale and incorporate those thoughts into your action planning.
- Continue to revisit your program assessment as you develop your action plan and share these ideas with other stakeholders from within your community for additional input. This tool can be a great resource for involving even more people and will result in more collaborative outcomes.

This tool is simply a starting point - adapt it to be useful for your needs!

Cafeteria

INDICATOR	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	DEEPENING	THRIVING	NOTES
School Nutrition Staff Leadership	School nutrition staff are interested in the creation of a FTS program.	<p>School nutrition staff engage students and families to provide feedback on menu items and/or to support a culture of trying new foods.</p> <p>School nutrition staff play an active role in developing the FTS program.</p>	<p>School nutrition staff work with community partners, students and families to create a student-centered cafeteria experience (e.g. student voice impacts meals, cafeteria environment, communication /website)</p> <p>Menu items are culturally responsive to the needs & demographics of the students.</p>	<p>The director or manager and/or several school nutrition staff work with educators, administration, and community members to coordinate FTS efforts and programming.</p> <p>School nutrition staff gather input from students and families on a regular basis to create a culturally sustaining meal program and a welcoming dining space.</p>	
Values-Based Local Procurement	School nutrition staff identify possibilities for incorporating local food into the menu and/or resources to help source local food.	<p>Food purchasing values have collaboratively been defined for the program.</p> <p>School nutrition staff understand proper procurement practices and have identified and are purchasing local food.</p>	<p>Local food is regularly incorporated into the menu.</p> <p>School nutrition staff can adapt to fluctuating sources and seasonal availability of local food, as well as differing needs of producers/vendors.</p>	<p>Annual procurement contracts support purchasing from local farmers, BIPOC farmers, and other producers.</p> <p>Systems in place to sustain purchasing of values-based local food; new local food sources evaluated regularly.</p>	
Infrastructure & Professional Learning	School nutrition staff has begun to identify infrastructure, professional learning needs, and necessary changes to be made to incorporate values-based local food into the meal program.	<p>Infrastructure changes initiated or being planned, waste reduction strategies are explored.</p> <p>Professional learning opportunities provided for some staff.</p>	<p>Infrastructure can sustain storing, processing, cooking, and serving local foods over the long term.</p> <p>Waste reduction strategies and infrastructure are in place.</p> <p>All school nutrition and support staff who regularly support meal service have opportunities for professional learning.</p>	Plan in place for ongoing evaluations of infrastructure and professional learning needs as local food purchasing increases.	
Classroom & Community Connections	School nutrition staff interested in conducting taste tests and/or can identify possibilities for engaging colleagues and youth in nutrition education and the FTS program.	School nutrition staff works with the FTS committee to support classroom and community connections in the cafeteria (i.e. nutrition education).	School nutrition staff work with the FTS committee and students on taste tests, sustainable food practices (compost, waste reduction), and community FTS events.	Community members, students, families, and school staff see the school food program as an integral part of the school, community, and educational programming.	

Classroom

INDICATOR	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	DEEPENING	THRIVING	NOTES
Student, Educators, & Staff Leadership	Students, educators, and staff interested in creation of FTS programs.	A diverse representation of students, educators, and staff regularly attend FTS committee meetings or lead regular FTS activities.	A diverse representation of students, educators, and staff help to plan and implement FTS activities beyond their own classroom. Student leadership and decision making is developing.	A diverse representation of students, educators, and staff work with school nutrition staff, administration, and community members to coordinate FTS efforts. Students share responsibility in decision making for FTS efforts.	
Integrating FTS into Curriculum	Educators, students, and staff have identified possibilities for integration of FTS activities into standards-based core curriculum, licensing and other guidelines.	Some educators and staff teach lessons or units integrating food system themes. Some student projects integrate place-based food system topics. Educators explore emergent curriculum opportunities to include FTS activities, nutrition education and wellness themes.	Most educators and staff facilitate learning experiences integrating food systems. Learning is student-centered and projects are created based on student curiosity and place-based opportunities in the food system. FTS activities are culturally responsive, experiential, and place-based. Educators facilitate emergent curriculum which integrates nutrition, food-system and wellness concepts.	School has a coordinated approach to integrating food systems into curriculum across all grades and in multiple disciplines. Time and professional learning resources are available to support staff to integrate FTS. FTS is part of a comprehensive curriculum including student wellness (nutrition, social-emotional learning)	
Campus and Community-based Learning Opportunities	educators and students can identify possibilities for campus (gardens, greenhouse, compost, etc) and community based (community gardens, farms, producers, families etc) learning experiences.	Some educators and staff provide campus or community-based learning opportunities for students to engage in hands-on learning experiences related to food systems. Some grade levels have experiences with localized food production (field trips, guest presenters, virtual experiences, etc)	Most educators and staff provide hands-on learning experiences that are embedded within larger units of study, support established goals for learning, and students apply learning on campus and/or in the community. Student voice shapes learning opportunities, campus and community-based projects, etc	School has a coordinated approach to providing student-centered FTS learning experiences; each grade provides opportunities for scaffolded experiences that build developmentally. Students analyze, lead, and engage with community partners and campus leaders on food systems projects and learning opportunities.	
Cafeteria as a Classroom	Staff have an interest in connecting their classroom to the cafeteria (kitchen, dining spaces, communication channels, etc).	Some staff have intentionally connected classroom learning with the cafeteria (e.g. Harvest of Month, FFA programs).	Educators and staff utilize the meal program as a place for deepening student learning across multiple classrooms or grade levels. Students have learning experiences connected with school nutrition staff, resources, and apply learning in the cafeteria context.	There is a coordinated and collaborative approach to connecting cafeteria with classroom learning where students and school nutrition staff are leading and learning together.	

Community

INDICATOR	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	DEEPENING	THRIVING	NOTES
<p>Family Engagement</p>	<p>Families are invited to participate in the FTS program and/or are aware of the FTS program.</p>	<p>Families have several opportunities and a clear role in getting involved in FTS efforts (taste tests, gardening, FTS committee, etc).</p> <p>Family input and feedback is sought in a variety of ways (including informally where families gather) to ensure a diversity of voices and perspectives.</p>	<p>Families actively participate in a range of FTS efforts (school meal program, taste tests, field trips, classroom activities, fundraising, cafeteria connections, committee work, etc).</p> <p>FTS program centers food justice and equity at all levels; family members, liaisons, or organizations provide input on FTS programming.</p>	<p>A system is in place for ongoing family engagement and feedback to support FTS efforts.</p> <p>FTS program uses a food justice and equity lens informed and evaluated by families.</p>	
<p>Community Engagement (businesses, non-profits, government agencies, civic groups, organizations, etc)</p>	<p>FTS committee has identified opportunities for community members and/or groups to partner on the creation of a FTS program.</p>	<p>FTS committee supports community members' active engagement in FTS activities.</p> <p>Community members and organizations are a resource for school educational opportunities (field trips, farm visits, class speakers, etc).</p>	<p>Community members actively participate on the FTS committee.</p> <p>The FTS program is linked to or embedded in community events.</p>	<p>A diverse representation of community members have been established to provide sustained support of FTS programming.</p> <p>Engaging a diversity of community members creates a reciprocal partnership in community wellness, food systems education, and food access and justice</p> <p>The FTS program has established long-term relationships with community members and organizations to provide FTS connections throughout the year.</p>	
<p>Farmers & Producers as Partners</p>	<p>The FTS committee has identified a variety of farmers and producers to partner with on the creation of a FTS program.</p>	<p>Farmers, food producers, and local food-based businesses support the FTS program, share expertise, and are sites for learning.</p>	<p>Farmers, food producers, and local food-based businesses partner with educators and students to develop and/or implement curriculum and projects.</p> <p>Relationships with systematically marginalized farmers and food producers are nurtured.</p>	<p>Long-term relationships established between local & systematically marginalized farmers, food producers, and food-based businesses.</p>	

Integration & Staying Power

INDICATOR	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	DEEPENING	THRIVING	NOTES
Leadership Support School nutrition, director, principal, program director, school board, committee superintendent	Administration is interested in the creation of a FTS program.	Administration supports and integrates or aligns FTS with broader goals. Administration communicates regularly about FTS activities and/or with the FTS committee.	Representatives from administration support staff-wide FTS professional learning and participate in FTS activities. Administration includes FTS in communication with the broader community, board, and their networks.	Administration supports inclusion of FTS tasks into job descriptions and/or provides release time for staff to do FTS planning. Administration is a resource to other leaders on how to start and sustain a FTS program.	
Culture of FTS	FTS champions have identified connections between FTS values and activities and other school initiatives.	A FTS committee has been created and is active with diverse representation of members from across the school community. The FTS committee has developed a values statement that guides their action plan.	Staff, youth, families and community members review the goals and action plan and develop strategies for the future. All staff are provided on-going opportunities for FTS professional learning. Staff and community members feel FTS is an integral part of school identity.	FTS program values are adopted school wide. There is alignment between FTS program values and other activities and campus practices such as celebrations, events, waste reduction, schoolyard renovation, etc FTS is considered in policies and scheduling (e.g. school wellness policies) FTS helps implement other priorities such as diversity, equity, belonging, restorative justice, student wellness, etc.	
Communication	Communication about FTS takes place within peer groups (educators, administration, school food service, families, students, community members).	Communication about FTS happens across peer groups and to/with families. FTS committee ensures access to FTS information to the full diversity of the school community (This might include translating materials, elevating student perspective and voice.	Vehicles for community-wide FTS communication have been established. There is a FTS communication plan that is implemented at a variety of scales and audiences. (such as meetings, e-mail list, newsletters, website, social media platforms, etc)	A diversity of staff and community members contribute to the ongoing communications of the value of FTS to the social, physical, emotional, intellectual benefits of students and the community. A system is in place for FTS communication that prioritizes equity and access.	
Resource Allocation	Funding and resources have been identified to launch FTS program.	Resources are allocated to support on-going FTS efforts including financial, staff time, technical assistance, infrastructure, communication, PTO/PTA, school foundations, committees, or other supporting organizations help with FTS resource allocation.	Resources are allocated to successfully implement the annual FTS action plan.	A variety of resources are in place to ensure effective implementation, innovation, communication, and evaluation of the FTS program over the long-term.	

Farm to School & Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE) Program Assessment Results

Name of school/district/ECE:	Date assessment was completed:
Who was involved in completing the assessment:	

	Indicators:	Current “status” (yet to emerge, Emerging, Developing, Deepening, Thriving)	Priorities: Check off a maximum of 5 indicators to prioritize for next year	Notes for action planning: Include any specifics related to the 5 priority indicators you selected to help you get started on your action plan.
Cafeteria	School Nutrition Staff Leadership			
	Values-Based Local Procurement			
	Infrastructure & Professional Learning			
	Classroom & Community Connections			
Classroom	Student, Educators, & Staff Leadership			
	Integrating FTS into Curriculum			
	Campus and Community-based Learning Opportunities			
	Cafeteria as a Classroom			
Community	Family Engagement			
	Community Engagement			
	Farmers & Producers as Partners			
Integration & Staying Power	Leadership Support			
	Culture of FTS			
	Communication			
	Resource Allocation			