



## Virginia Farm to School Week November 9 – 13, 2009

### Getting Started *Farm to School 101*

#### Start Small

Consider organizing a one-day event at as many schools within the system as possible or just start with one school.

- Feature a single local product on the menu for a day. Items available during the fall season include apples, sweet potatoes, white potatoes, broccoli, winter squash, lettuce/greens plus eggs, chicken, beef. During seasons with abundant local produce (or for subsequent events), try to add more local items on the menu.
- Appeal to student's sense of adventure. Have a tasting table to introduce students to new farm products they may not have tried before. Wear a chef's hat and apron during the tasting. Many fall items are packed with nutrition, especially kale, collards and winter squash. Sampling is a good way to introduce students to new items and get their opinion so later the items can be featured on the menu.
- Utilize the VDACS produce availability chart ([www.vdacs.virginia.gov/marketing/pdf/farmproducechart.pdf](http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/marketing/pdf/farmproducechart.pdf)) to determine what types of farm products are in season and available at the time you are planning to feature local foods on the menu.

#### Build a Network

Begin to build a network of contacts to help source local foods for purchase and assist with program development.

- Distributors: talk with your current distributor. Many are already sourcing Virginia Grown products or could assist if you provide them a farm name and contact.
- Research: locate a farm near you using [www.virginiagrown.com](http://www.virginiagrown.com) or check out the list of farms or distributors on the Virginia Farm to School Web site at [www.vdacs.virginia.gov/marketing/farm.shtml](http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/marketing/farm.shtml).
- Contact a Farmers' Market manager/contact person: <http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/vagrown/frmsmkts.shtml>
- Seek partnerships with parents and other interested community members who can provide a volunteer base to help with F2S events.
- Have a community Farm to School meeting featuring local stakeholders. From the meeting develop a working group to help with details and education. Programs can be developed to enhance the educational opportunity of Farm to School events

## Consider the Logistics

- Cost:
  - Local is not necessarily more expensive, especially when the produce item is in season.
  - Sometimes you can negotiate with farmers and receive more competitive prices for larger purchase quantities.
  - Organize several school systems into food-purchasing cooperatives to help with price negotiation.
  - Communicate to farmers an interest in purchasing less expensive in-season produce items (such as potatoes, lettuce, apples) rather than specialty varieties.
- Bidding:
  - Schools utilizing the Department of Defense Fresh Produce program are not subject to bidding regulations. (I'll confirm with Beth but think this was a recent change)
  - Produce/food item needs for a single event may not need to be put out for bid because purchase quantities are significantly less than typical food service needs.
  - Contract vendors/suppliers may already carry or may be willing to carry local food items.
  - Obtain letters of consent from relevant contract vendors/suppliers to purchase food outside of the bid for the special events.
- Distribution/Storage/Transportation:
  - Distributors may carry local produce and other food items and already have the necessary transportation systems and refrigerated vehicles in place.
  - Take advantage of parent interest and organize a corps of volunteers to assist with transportation of local food items to each school location for Farm to School events.
  - There may be cold storage facilities in each locality that would enable school systems to purchase larger quantities of fresh produce that will stay fresh past harvest when cold-stored (examples include potatoes, sweet potatoes, carrots, and apples) and serve them further into the school year.
- Food preparation:
  - Modify current recipes to include local ingredients, rather than reinventing menu items.
  - Simplify preparation methods creatively: leave skins on potatoes and sweet potatoes (which also increases the nutritional content); use a meat slicer to slice potatoes, sweet potatoes, and carrots, rather than chopping by hand; wash and serve fruit whole; do as much preparation work as possible the day before.
  - Take advantage of federal staff training assistance programs and materials, available from the United States Department of Agriculture's Team Nutrition Healthy Meals Resources System:  
[http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/nal\\_display/index.php?info\\_center=14&tax\\_level=1](http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/nal_display/index.php?info_center=14&tax_level=1)
- Consistent supply:
  - Establish clear communication with farmers regarding desired produce items and the exact quantities needed to feed each school on a daily/weekly basis.

- Also remember that weather, insects, and other elemental factors beyond the farmer's control can determine quantities available. This is not meant to discourage purchasing from local farmers but is a reminder that flexibility is important.
- Ordering/Packaging:
  - Farmers sometimes use units of measure that food distributors do not typically use, and often these units of measure do not correspond to units of measure in food service recipes. For example, a farmer might sell a "bushel" of apples, when a distributor would quantify the amount in pounds or by the case.
  - Small and mid-size farmers are not always familiar with quantities required to feed schools and institutions, and may not realize packaging needs may be different than for retail customers. For example, food service workers prefer ground beef that comes packaged in five or ten pound packs while most beef farmers typically process and sell ground beef in one pound packs.

### **Pay Attention to Marketing and Ways to Share Your Good News:**

- Feature the Virginia Grown logo on the menu and let parents know a Farm to School event is planned.
- Encourage students not purchasing lunch to bring a local farm product for their lunch.
- Schedule a "Meet the Farmer" program as part of the event so students have an opportunity to interact with and learn from the farmer(s) who provided the farm product.
- Feature a photo of the farm/farm family at the entrance to the lunch line.
- Contact VDACS for marketing and educational materials.
- Advertise Farm to School events on school Web sites and teacher blogs.
- Send out press releases and/or contact local television stations and newspapers.

### **Educate Teachers, Students and Parents:**

- Teach students about how different produce items are grown and livestock are raised using educational materials available through VDACS (<http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/teachers/index.shtml>) and USDA's Education and Outreach Department ([http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/.s.7.o.A/7.o.1OB?navid=YOUTH\\_RE\\_SOURCES&parentnav=EDUCATION\\_OUTREACH&navtype=RT](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/.s.7.o.A/7.o.1OB?navid=YOUTH_RE_SOURCES&parentnav=EDUCATION_OUTREACH&navtype=RT)).
- Explain that locally grown produce may appear different than produce items they are used to seeing. For example, local apples may be different varieties than those typically served in school cafeterias,
- Try to include recipes and preparation ideas on handouts for students to take home to share with their families.
- Schedule farmer visits to school campuses on event days to talk with students, conduct demonstrations, and answer student questions.

**Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services**

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