

Pulaski County Farm to School Implementation Plan

Farm to School Team

Background

Pulaski County Public School System is located in the rural area of Southwest Virginia. The Pulaski County Farm to School team was established in December 2014 following the USDA Planning Protocol. It originally consisted of 24 members representing stakeholder groups throughout the New River Valley community and the Pulaski County School District. Included were: school nutrition staff, agriculture teachers, school principals and administrators, community parents, members of a local food community service organization, representatives from a local university, and representatives from the local health department.

Farm to School Team Members

- Ethelene Sadler, Project Director
- Connie Wood, Assistant Project Director
- Shelly Rasnick, Project Coordinator
- Pam Ray, New River Health District, Assistant Project Coordinator
- Tracy Belcher, Grants Manager
- Chris Stafford, Director of Business and Finance
- Sophie Wenzel, VT Center for Public Health Practice and Research
- Shantal Hover, External Evaluator, VT Center for Public Health Practice and Research
- Jariah Strozier, Master of Public Health Practicum Student
- Maureen McGonagle, WIC Garden Coordinator
- Michael Perry, Principal - Dublin Elementary
- Rosita Perry, Dublin Middle School
- Judith Peele, SO Fresh
- Hannah Reed, President - FFA
- Desmond Barrett, Coordinator -Commission on Children and Families
- Alison Sutphin, PCHS Agriculture Teacher
- J.B. Snelson, PCHS Horticulture Teacher
- David Bernier, Virginia Cooperative Extension
- Jessica Alley, Parent & Owner Blue Ridge Blends
- Curtis Alley, Parent & Owner Blue Ridge Blends
- Debbie Lineweaver, SO Fresh
- Shannon Ainsley, Pulaski County Chamber of Commerce
- Rebecah Smith, Principal-Pulaski Elementary School
- Kimberly Sink, Assistant Principal - Pulaski Elementary School
- Scott Peterson, Pulaski County High School

Advisors

Outside of the regular Farm to School Team, we rely on individuals for guidance and assistance in our decision making. The following individuals have agreed to advise the team on specific matters on an as-needed basis.

- Christy Gabbard, Food System Consultant
- Thomas Brewster, Superintendent, Pulaski County Public Schools
- Amy Tanner, Pear Tree Hill Farms
- Lee Spiegel, Pulaski GROW
- Peggy White, Pulaski County Chamber of Commerce

Needed Members & Advisors

In order to further gain community support and maintain a diverse perspective on the needs of the Farm to School efforts, it would be beneficial to continue to seek out other members. Recommendations for those members include:

- Additional local farmers
- Parent representatives from Elementary, Middle and High schools
- Student representatives from Elementary, Middle and High schools
- Teacher representatives from Elementary, Middle and High schools
- School Health Officials
- Cafeteria managers from several schools
- County extension agency representatives

Farm to School Team Summary

During the Planning Phase (December 2014-March 2016) of Farm to School, the Farm to School Team has accomplished the following:

- Met established goals set in the initial USDA Farm to School planning grant:
 - Identified and recruited at least six internal and external collaborators to serve on the stakeholder team
 - Completed preliminary consultation of local resources and identified key supply chain relationships
 - Held initial planning meeting and subsequent farm to school team meetings
 - Identified best practices-nationally and locally- and compiled resources
 - Determined needed tools (such as knife sets, vegetable sprayers, etc.), trainings and assistance needed
 - Identified menu items which could be procured locally and incorporated into a new Harvest of the Month program plan
 - Implemented staff training activities
 - Secured necessary equipment for a preliminary program
 - Created both in-school and community-centered outreach and education plans
- Completed actions and objectives in addition to the original planning grant
 - Developed and began implementation of a Harvest of the Month program with input from community partners
 - Intentionally leveraged commodity dollars to purchase produce through Department of Defense (DOD) funds as to procure produce that met our definition of “local”
 - Created partnerships with local farmers to secure produce for school systems

Details & Logistics

Structure

The team is structured around the Pulaski County School District and local agencies within the New River Valley community. The goal of the team is to guide the school district in implementing and sustaining Farm to School (F2S) efforts. The team is overseen by the School Nutrition Program staff and has focused on initiatives regarding menu planning, procurement and local food education and awareness.

Name

Pulaski County Farm to School Team

Logo



To develop a Pulaski County Farm to School logo that was unique to the county, the team hosted a logo design contest with all the Pulaski County Schools. We received 7 entries and voted on the one that we felt best represented our mission. The winner was Ella Reeves, a senior at Pulaski County High School. She says, “The symbol represents farms in Pulaski County and how resources may contribute to the schools.” The logo is included on all Pulaski County Farm to School promotional and educational materials.

Responsibilities

Responsibilities include

- Attending meetings, conferences, and webinars
- Assessing school’s needs for fresh produce
- Identifying obstacles and options
- Assessing local product availability
- Assisting in the development of a F2S implementation plan

The team met monthly through August 2015. Towards the end of the planning period, the team opted to meet on an as-needed schedule. The meetings were held at various locations and were facilitated by Shelly Rasnick, the project coordinator. Meetings were open to the public. These meetings were supplemented by meetings of a larger workgroup -NRV Plus, Vibrant Community Food System Workgroup. This group consists of individuals and groups working in a variety of sectors throughout Southwest Virginia (including Bland, Giles, Floyd, Montgomery, Pulaski, and Wythe counties and the City of Radford). The group explored how to increase food access, production and profits in agriculture while ensuring everyone works together to strengthen relationships and open opportunities for more collaborations and working together better.

Meeting Schedule

December 10, 2014	F2S Team Meeting
January 8, 2015	F2S Team Meeting

January 27, 2015	Floyd F2S Meeting
January 28, 2015	F2S Team Meeting
February 11, 2015	F2S Team Meeting
February 25, 2015	F2S Team Meeting
March 11, 2015	F2S Team Meeting
April 15, 2015	F2S Team Meeting
June 11, 2015	F2S Team Meeting
July 22, 2015	F2S Team Meeting
August 19, 2015	F2S Team Meeting with USDA representative
November 17, 2015	NRV Plus Work Session
April 14, 2016	NRV Plus Workgroup Meeting
April 25, 2016	F2S Team Meeting

Resources-Farm to School Toolkits

[USDA Farm to School Planning Toolkit](#), from USDA Food and Nutrition Service- reference for starting or growing a farm to school program.

[Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition](#), Information and resources for School Food Service Professionals - includes links specific to producers and distributors

[Vermont Farm to School Network](#), Resources on variety of farm to school topics: connecting farms to schools, garden organizer toolkit, harvest of the month, curriculum units and more.

[Washington State Department of Agriculture Farm to School Toolkit](#), stories, photos, templates, documents and more to help meet farm to school goals.

Mission, Goals, and Context

Background and Current Status

Pulaski County School System was participating in regional local foods survey and promotions initiatives prior to receiving the USDA Planning Grant. Beginning in July 2012, the county successfully implemented a new meal pattern in accordance with the Healthy Hunger-free Kids Act of 2010. Given the successful transition to this new meal pattern, the school system felt it was an opportune time to complete planning for a comprehensive Farm to School program. The main goal of these efforts was to increase the amount of local foods offered as part of the school meals menu.

Since the USDA Farm to School planning grant was awarded, the following have been accomplished:

- Stakeholder team established
- Community partnerships identified and developed
- Identified sources and protocol for local food procurement
- Managers' training on using fresh herbs and spices and new recipe experimentation
- Hosted a Farm to School night at The Marketplace
- Hosted tasting events in local schools and community
- Organized local farm field trips for elementary students

Mission Statement

Our Farm to School Team worked together to create a mission statement that we felt best encompassed the overall mission of the program. "Pulaski County Farm to School works to connect with local farms in order to serve healthier food options, support community health and nutrition, and provide agriculture and nutrition education opportunities."

Long Term Vision

We defined a long term vision as 5 years and beyond. In 5 years we would like to see a comprehensive and thriving Farm to School program. This would be defined as:

- Awareness and support throughout all of Pulaski County about all Farm to School efforts
- Serve 40+% of locally-grown fruits, vegetables, milk, livestock/poultry in the Pulaski County Public School lunch and breakfast programs
- Farm to School culture that benefits the local economy and meets health objectives
- Operate a comprehensive agriculture and nutrition education program that stresses importance of local foods

Short-Term Goals and Objectives

Short-term goals are those that can be achieved in the next two school years (2016-2017, 2017-2018).

Increase awareness of the Farm to School program and the importance of supporting locally grown produce. To meet this goal, Pulaski County Farm to School focused much of the planning period efforts on marketing and public awareness. Objectives related to this goal include:

- News features of the Farm to School program ([Southwest Times](#) and [Capital Connections](#))
- Creation of a [Farm to School Facebook page](#)
- Pulaski County Farm to School [Video](#)
- Development of a Harvest of the Month Program and creation of marketing materials
- Implementation of in-school and community based taste tests
- Creation and distribution of a Farm to School newsletter

Increase the percentage of locally grown food which is served in the cafeteria. Objectives related to this goal include:

- Continuation of allocating DoD Fresh funds for local food procurement
- Regularly plan menu items which can be sourced locally
- Maintain communication with distributor, Roanoke Fruits, about preference for local food products

Identify more local farmers and producers willing and able to provide produce to Pulaski County Public Schools. Objectives for this goal include:

- Continue work with SO Fresh and NRV Plus groups to expand farmer connections
- Explore possibility of “bought-in” farmers “adopting” a school to support
- Provide interested farmers with projected types and quantities of products needed for upcoming school years

Needs Assessment Information

Background

The purpose of conducting a needs assessment was to determine the best way to get local fresh foods into Pulaski County Public Schools and to initiate the Farm to School project in the area. The needs assessment asked questions to identify prospective Farm to School partners’ needs and resources. Five different assessment surveys were created to identify the needs of different partners - school nutrition staff, farmers, distributors, students, and teachers. Key findings for the school nutrition staff, farmers, students and teachers are presented below. Distributor information was unable to be reported due to lack of response.

Method

The needs assessment surveys were created using the online survey software Qualtrics, and distributed via email to school nutrition managers, farmers, distributors, and teachers. Students were given paper copies of the student needs survey to complete. This data was entered into Qualtrics for analysis.

Key Findings

School Nutrition Manager Needs Assessment

There are a total of eight school nutrition managers in the Pulaski County School District; one manager at each school. Managers were asked questions about the following:

- Familiarity with Farm to School program
- Fruits and vegetables most frequently used in school meals
- Fruits and vegetables currently not used, but would like to incorporate
- Difficulties they anticipated when using local products
- How Farm to School team could help with these difficulties
- Estimation of food waste for school

Most of the managers (75.5%) were at least “somewhat familiar” with the Farm to School program. However, they did express that they needed more information about the program to better anticipate what difficulties they might experience in incorporating more local foods into their menus. Some managers were concerned about the timing of crops coming before the school year starts. Another manager thought that food prep time could be an issue with fruits and vegetables. Most felt that the F2S team needed to provide them with information such as “techniques that would speed up preparation time for the more difficult fruits and vegetables” in order to address possible challenges.

Most of the managers thought that having more fruits and vegetable that are fresh would help students to eat more fruits and vegetables.

The majority of managers (87.5%) said they were at least “somewhat likely” to add a new spice or alter a recipe. Only one manager said they were “unlikely” to do so. They responded that in order to increase the likelihood that they do this they would need recipes, equipment, food preparation knowledge and taste tests.

The managers identified strawberries, grapes, watermelon and cantaloupe as products they do not currently use, but would like to.

Farmer Needs Assessment

A total of 5 farmers completed a needs assessment survey. Farmers were asked questions about the following:

- Products they produce
- Familiarity with Farm to School
- Venues they supply either to or through
- Anticipated barriers to supplying to local schools
- Trainings and/or certifications held

Most farmers grew vegetables including but not limited to: asparagus, beans, beets, cabbage, carrots, cucumbers, potatoes, squash, tomatoes, and lettuce. Three farmers produced meats such as goat, beef and poultry. Only one farmer grew fruit - apples and blueberries.

All of the farmers had heard of the Farm to School program, but none of them had ever supplied to a school before. Reasons for this were: they had not been approached before or because of “limited production and low price points.”

Farmers anticipated several barriers or challenges with supplying to local schools. These included not having enough produce, not having GAP certification, and schools being unable to pay the higher costs of locally grown foods. There was also the challenge of transporting large quantities. One farmer said he “will have to wait and see how my first products do and the amount of time, energy, etc. it will take before coming up with a price list.... I would be happy to talk about putting up wall gardens out of zip towers in the cafeterias... I would need a pretty set payment plan as I am just getting started and don’t have reserve funds to float large orders.”

The majority of farmers (80%) sold through a local farmer’s market. Others also sold to local restaurants, local grocery/health food stores, international grocery stores, and directly to consumers. None of the farmers worked with a distributor.

Two of the farmers (40%) said they would be willing to adhere to a checklist of safe production, while the remaining 3 (60%) said this would depend on the guidelines. Only one of the farmers had received Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) training and none of the farmers had GAP certification. Three farmers said they would be willing to get GAP training and/or certification if it was available at a reduced cost. One farmer said this would really depend on the costs and requirements.

All of the farmers surveyed were willing to deliver to a school or school district. One of the farmers was willing to deliver up to 50 miles, two farmers would deliver up to 30 miles, one farmer would deliver up to 15 miles, and the last farmer said delivery would depend on time and distance.

Most of the farmers (80%) said they were unable to do any grading, washing and packing, while one (20%) said, “I have never done grading, but I always wash and pack my produce.” Most of the farmers (80%) agreed to be flexible in working out a payment schedule with the schools.

Teacher Needs Assessment

The main objective of the teacher needs assessment was to see which teachers had an interest in maintaining a school garden. A total of 17 teachers replied to the survey. Teachers were asked questions about the following:

- Agricultural background/ knowledge about planting and growing produce
- Willingness to participate in a school garden
- Ability to use a school garden in curriculum

Most teachers (75%) were at least “somewhat familiar” with the Farm to School program, while four teachers (25%) were “not familiar” with the program.

Many of the teachers (56%) allotted time for agriculture or nutrition education in the classroom. Those who did so either taught it themselves or brought someone in - specifically Sarah Burkett of the Virginia Cooperative extension to teach nutrition lessons.

Nine of the teachers (53%) were interested in helping to maintain a school garden. Most teachers said they would need equipment, manpower, summer manpower, seeds, and gardening guides in order to help conduct school gardens. One teacher said, “As an art teacher, students could draw from the school gardens extra outdoor projects... garden ornaments to decorate the space. Flowers or plants that bloom would be helpful.” Another teacher was already the faculty rep of the “Plant Club” that works through the 4-H program at their school.

One teacher said, “I would be interested in beginning a garden on my school grounds, but only in cooperation with another grade or class at my school.” In terms of schools with interested teachers, two teachers were interested at Dublin Middle and Pulaski Elementary, one teacher was interested at each Critzer Elementary, Dublin Elementary, Riverlawn Elementary, Snowville Elementary, Pulaski Middle, and Pulaski County High School.

Student Needs Assessment

A total of 231 students from Dublin Elementary, Pulaski Middle, and Pulaski County High School (grades 3-12) were surveyed about their interest in the Farm to School program.

133 of the students surveyed (58%) ate school lunch “daily”, while 27 students (12%) said they “never” ate school lunch.

Most of the students (81%) had never heard of the Farm to School program. However, 81% of students said they would at least “probably” be interested in learning more about the program. 12 students (5%) said they would “definitely not” like to learn more.

Most students (65%) said they liked eating fruits and vegetables “a lot” and 29% of students said they liked them “a little.” Only 5% of students responded that they did “not very much”

like eating fruits and vegetables. The top fruits and vegetables that students enjoyed eating were: strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, pineapple, watermelon, grapes, bananas, carrots, green beans, and broccoli.

Most students (62%) said they would like having locally grown fruits and vegetables “a lot” and 34% said they would like this “a little.” Only 4% of students said they would like this either “not very much” or “not at all.”

The majority of students (84%) were interested in taking a field trip to a local farm. Most students (90%) said they would at least “probably” be interested in having a school garden, while only 10% said they would “probably not” or “definitely not” be interested in that.

Recommendations for Program Planning

Results from the needs assessment show the need for more communication about the Farm to School program, especially with the student population.

The Farm to School team should meet with the School Nutrition Staff to give them more detailed information on Farm to School efforts and help to educate them on their role in the process.

A meeting between all invested parties, specifically the school nutrition staff and local farmers, is needed before the program enters the implementation phase.

The majority of students were interested in taking a farm field trip, therefore work on identifying a suitable farm and organizing this trip should continue.

A number of students and teachers were interested in having a school garden. More work needs to be done to gather the information and resources needed to start a garden.

School Environment & Student Population

Pulaski County Public School System is comprised of eight schools (1 high school, 2 middle schools, and 5 elementary) serving approximately 4,300 students. Pulaski County is located in rural Southwest Virginia.

The Pulaski County Farm to School program serves all eight schools in the district. Below is the breakdown of free and reduced lunch eligibility in each school as of April 2016.

School	Total SNP Members	PAID Eligible	PAID %	REDUCE D Eligible	REDUCED %	FREE Eligible	FREE %	TOTAL F/R Eligible	TOTAL F/R %
Pulaski High School	1,395	812	58.21 %	61	4.37%	522	37.42 %	583	41.79%
Critzer Elementary	433	81	18.71 %	0	0.00%	352	81.29 %	352	81.29%

Pulaski Elementary	524	98	18.70 %	0	0.00%	426	81.30 %	426	81.30%
Snowville Elementary	154	90	58.44 %	8	5.19%	56	36.36 %	64	41.56%
Pulaski Middle	388	162	41.75 %	34	8.76%	192	49.48 %	226	58.25%
Riverlawn Elementary	447	201	44.97 %	32	7.16%	214	47.87 %	246	55.03%
Dublin Middle	491	281	57.23 %	36	7.33%	174	35.44 %	210	42.77%
Dublin Elementary	476	220	46.22 %	42	8.82%	214	44.96 %	256	53.78%
Totals	4,308	1,945	45.15 %	213	4.94%	2,150	49.91 %	2,363	54.85%



Pulaski County Demographics

Pulaski County, located in Southwest Virginia is home to approximately 34,872 residents according to the US Census Data of 2010. Our school district of 4,400 students is comprised of one high school, two middle schools and five elementary schools. Our rural community is a unique place, rich in natural resources that contribute to a good place to live, work and play.

Education

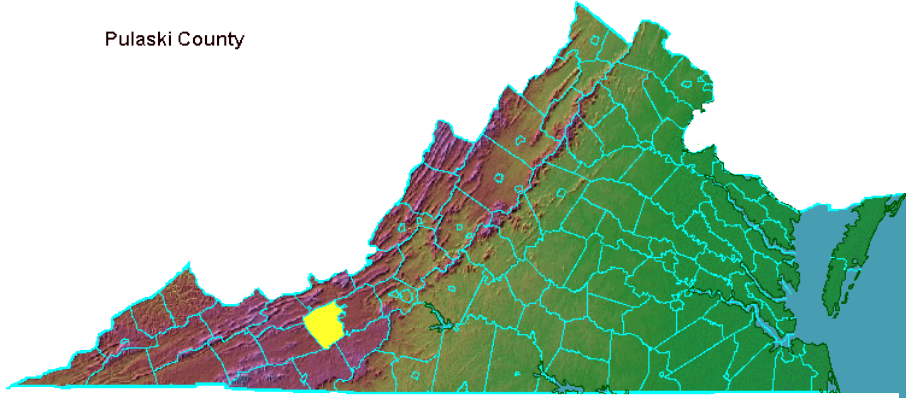
High school graduate or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2010-2014
82.7%

Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2010-2014
16.4%

Income and Poverty

Median household income (in 2014 dollars), 2010-2014 \$45,635
Per capita income in past 12 months (in 2014 dollars), 2010-2014 \$24,722
Persons in poverty, percent 14.7%

Pulaski County



The Farm to School program is an effort to use locally grown foods in school breakfast and lunch meals. Agriculture and natural resources play an important role in Pulaski County's heritage, yet numerous socioeconomic factors have led families away from healthy foods. The F2S program is designed to promote health and wellness and educate students on the long-term benefits of healthy food choices. Approximately 70 percent of students in Pulaski County receive healthy school meals on a daily basis.

The benefits of healthy eating habits and lifestyles cannot always be measured daily, but over the course of time. The Pulaski County School Nutrition program prides itself on embracing new ideas and exploring opportunities to encourage students to participation in meal service. Furthermore, to provide opportunity for students to taste the freshness of foods that have been procured locally and served as part of a school lunch.

The Pulaski County Farm to School Program is a continuing effort that will expand and change in response to the needs of the community. While the focus of the program is currently on fruits and vegetables, there is hope to one day incorporate even more products, like local meats and dairy. Student health is a top priority and this program will continue to support that by making sure Pulaski County students have access to fresh, local and delicious school meals items.

Program Context

Pulaski County Public Schools operate the following programs.

Federal Child Nutrition Programs:

- National School Lunch Program
- School Breakfast Program
- Summer Food Service Program
- Community Eligibility Program (CEP) in Critzer and Pulaski Elementary

State and Local Initiatives

- Future Farmers of America (FFA)
- Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America (FBLA)
- "Let's Move" Salad Bars to Schools
- Received "Silver" HealthierUS School Challenge Award for all elementary schools

- 21st Century grant recipients at Pulaski Middle, Dublin Elementary, Dublin Middle and Pulaski County High School

Institutionalization

The Pulaski County Farm to School team is comprised of individuals that are already making efforts with their schools and the community. The team has a vision for long-term success with the Farm to School program. The team’s current and future plans include:

- Assign a person responsible for keeping in touch with schools, farms, answering inquiries, representing the Farm to School team at community meetings, etc.
- Keep up communication with the community, schools and potential partners
 - Keep the Facebook page updated
 - Continue producing and distributing the Farm to School newsletter
 - Put Farm to School specific information into existing promotions - such as the school calendar, monthly menus and website
 - Develop promotional materials for schools and the community
 - Expand into more classrooms in coming years
- Continue working with NEW RIVER VALLEY Plus - Vibrant Community Food System Group
 - Attend their meetings
 - Incorporate this group into the Farm to School implementation plan
 - Invite them to participate and co-host Farm to School activities
 - Utilize the group to explore farmers or other interested community members “adopting” a school that they will work with to keep Farm to School activities going
- Partner with the New River Health District on their VFHY obesity prevention grant
 - Include a Farm to School component in the VFHY grant
 - Involve local teachers in grant activities
 - Promote school gardens at each school
- Work with schools to ensure ownership of activities
 - Continue engaging teachers and building their capacity to implement Farm to School activities
 - Continue regular trainings of cafeteria managers in local food preparation to maintain their interest and encourage them to use novel food items regularly
- Contract with local suppliers and farmers
 - Continue reaching out to local farmers to include them in Farm to School activities
 - Negotiate with local farmers to purchase local produce at a reasonable price
- Think more broadly beyond direct services to policy/systems/environmental strategies to promote Farm to School
 - Work to promote ownership and self-sufficiency on the part of teachers so they do not rely on the Farm to School team as much (such as when dropping off fresh foods and promotional materials)
- Develop a Farm to School list of contacts/experts that can be shared with schools and in the community
 - Develop a comprehensive list of Farm to School-related experts that can be shared with interested teachers or community partners
- Continue to reach out to new partners
 - This work will not get accomplished alone. The Farm to School team must proactively reach out to old and new partners to ensure a sustainable and successful program implementation

Local Foods Procurement

Background & Progress to Date

Pulaski County spent \$30,000 in DOD Fresh funds and committed \$2,145 in Fresh Fruit & Vegetable funds to local purchases during the 2015-2016 school year. The school system has contracted with Roanoke Fruit & Produce Co. and Riverstone Organic Farm for the majority of this procurement. We plan to continue exploring systems for the purchasing of a greater quantity of local foods.

Definition of “local”

The Pulaski County Farm to School team has defined “Farm to School” as within a 100-mile radius. “Local” is defined as within a 250-mile radius.

The following items are grown /produced within a local radius and we are working to identify affordable and reliable sources for these possible products:

- Apples
- Asparagus
- Beans
- Beets
- Cabbage
- Carrots
- Cauliflower
- Cucumbers
- Greens (Collards, Chard, Kales, Arugula, Lettuces, Spinach)
- Herbs (Basil, Cilantro, Rosemary, Thyme)
- Onions
- Peaches
- Pears
- Potatoes
- Pumpkins
- Strawberries
- Sugar snap peas
- Sweet potatoes
- Tomatoes
- Turnips
- Winter Squash

Sourcing & Procurement

We currently work with our distributor, Roanoke Fruits, to identify products which we may already be sourcing locally and to find new local sources for other products.

We are also working with local farmers, Pear Tree Hill Farms and Riverstone Organic Farms, to set up contracts and procure foods directly from them as well.

Mechanisms for Local Sourcing

- Including local sourcing in contracts with distributor
- Working with distributor to identify local products
- Through DoD Fresh Fruits & Vegetable program

- Applying geographic preference

Delivery, Processing & Storage

Local foods are delivered directly to school kitchens. School nutrition staff work to clean and process all produce. Storage needs have not changed with using local produce as delivery and menu is coordinated so that produce can be served right away.

Menu Planning

Background & Progress to Date

The Farm to School Team along with the NRV Plus Community workgroup began researching the potential for implementing a Harvest of the Month program to promote Farm to School beginning in May 2016. The hope is that the program will become established throughout the Pulaski County School District and then will be implemented throughout the county and expand into other areas of the region. Working with our distributor, Roanoke Fruits, and local farmers, Pear Tree Hill Farms and Riverstone Organic Farms, we were able to identify produce purchases that could be procured locally and regularly for the cafeteria menu. These items were:

- Mixed greens (Pear Tree Hill, Riverstone, Pulaski Grow)
- Cauliflower (Riverstone)
- Lettuce & tomato (Pear Tree Hill, Riverstone, Pulaski Grow)
- Cherry tomatoes (Pear Tree Hill, Riverstone, Pulaski Grow)
- Steamed carrots (Pear Tree Hill, Riverstone)
- Cucumbers (Pear Tree Hill, Riverstone, Pulaski Grow)
- Potato varieties (Pear Tree Hill, Riverstone)
- Vegetable medley (Pear Tree Hill, Riverstone, Pulaski Grow)
- Green beans (Pulaski Grow)
- Steamed broccoli (Pear Tree Hill, Riverstone, Pulaski Grow)
- Pinto beans (Pear Tree Hill)

Additionally, the team developed a list of seasonal items to launch our first Harvest of the Month initiative for the 2016-2017 school year. The following items were identified as being seasonally available in southwest Virginia and able to be reasonably sourced through DoD fresh, local distributors, the New River Valley Glean Team or local farmer partners. The team choose to include summer options given the success of the county summer feeding program. Some items have multiple months in which they may be highlighted - the team will decide each year based on local product availability that season. The following items will appear as Harvest of the Month selections and/or as cafeteria menu options:

- Apples (September, October, January)
- Bell Peppers (July, August)
- Carrots (December, January, February)
- Cucumbers (June)
- Mixed Greens (December, March)
- Onions (April)

- Peaches (August)
- Pumpkins (October)
- Strawberries (May)
- Sweet corn (July, August)
- Sweet potatoes (November)
- Tomatoes (July, August)
- Winter squash (December, February)

By using the DoD Fresh sources, our local distributor, and local farmer partnerships, we will work to source local first and supplement with other producers if the demand exceeds the local supply. Our farmer partner, Pear Tree Hill Farms, has pre-contracted with the schools to plant and supply sweet corn for the schools in August.

Example of promotional material:

Apples



Harvest of the Month

Fun Apple Facts

- Apple trees take four to five years to produce their first fruit.
- Pilgrims planted the first U.S. apple trees in the Massachusetts Bay Colony.
- In Southwest Virginia, local apples can be available July through April.

Nutrition Facts

- A medium apple provides 5 grams of fiber—this helps with healthy digestion.
- Apples also contain Vitamin A, Vitamin C, calcium, and potassium.
- Much of the fiber and nutrients in apples are contained in the peel.
- Apples are thirst quenching because they contain about 85% water.

The Pulaski County Farm to School Program works to connect schools with local farms in order to serve healthier food options, support community health and nutrition, and provide agriculture and nutrition education opportunities.



Service & Promotion

Farm to School Harvest of the Month will be promoted in several ways including printed bookmarks, Harvest of the Month posters to be displayed in all cafeterias, information of the school calendar and lunch menus and the district web page.

Food Safety

Background and Progress to Date

All school nutrition staff are ServSafe certified. Regular trainings are scheduled to keep staff up to date in their knowledge of food service safety standards. Each school also has a food safety plan that includes all programs that operate under the School Nutrition Program.

State and Local Health Requirements

We are in compliance of all local and federal laws. When buying from local farms, we only buy from those who have received good agricultural practices (GAP) training. Farms are also asked to complete a [checklist for retain purchasing of local produce](#).

Food Safety in the Kitchen

We do not anticipate changing food preparation at this time. Due to limited freezer and storage space, most local items will need to be fresh and prepared close to time of delivery.

Training Needs

School nutrition staff is kept informed of the techniques required to successfully implement our Farm to School program. They are asked of any training needs and then accommodations are made to ensure they have what they need. We plan to train and refresh staff knowledge on a continual basis.

Food Safety in School Gardens

We do not plan to use school garden items in the school lunch menu at this time.

Resources

[USDA Fruits & Vegetables Galore: Helping Kids Eat More](#), from USDA's Food and Nutrition Service- This tool for school foodservice professionals is packed with tips on planning, purchasing, protecting, preparing, presenting and promoting fruits and vegetables.

[Farm to School Food Safety FAQs](#), from the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service- Answers to frequently asked questions about food safety rules, working with local farms, and handling fresh produce.

[Produce Safety Resources](#), from the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service- Information about produce safety for child nutrition professionals.

[Institute of Child Nutrition Produce Safety](#), Series of resources on produce safety that describe best practices for receiving, storing, handling, and purchasing fresh and fresh-cut produce through videos, fact sheets, and PowerPoint presentations.

Promotion & Outreach

Background and Progress to Date

The official kick-off for our Farm to School program took place in March 2015 in coordination with School Breakfast Week at Dublin Elementary School. Students were introduced to Farm to School with a breakfast display of “Where Your Food Comes From” and worksheets and coloring activities. Kindergartens students were engaged with agricultural story time and a lesson about where food comes from.

Our outreach program included special events, marketing material development, field trips, social media presence, and high visibility community events.

Marketing & Outreach Goals:

- Educate students, families, school staff and community about the farm to school program and importance of locally grown foods
- Increase consumption of fruits and vegetables among Pulaski County students and families
- Create awareness and excitement about eating locally-grown foods
- Incorporate agricultural and nutrition education into classroom curriculums

Reaching Students, Parents, Teachers, Administrators, Food Producers, and Community Students

A primary goal of the Farm to School program is to expose students to new fruits and vegetables and to encourage an appreciation of local foods. Several events took place throughout the school year to educate, engage and excite students about the new program. These events included:

- Farm to School logo design contest
- School Breakfast Week promotion in cafeteria
- “Where does your food come from?” classroom lessons
- Local farm field trips
- Harvest of the Month promotions
- Cafeteria taste tests
- Partnership with summer program and local grower for hands-on herb growing
- Partnership with Growing Minds and Family and Consumer Science classes

Parents

It was a goal of the program to keep parents informed and excited about our efforts. Major parent marketing included:

- Kickoff article in the local newspaper
- Website presence of the program happenings on the Pulaski County Public Schools site
- Creation of a Farm to School Facebook page where upcoming events and progress were shared
- Creation and distribution of a Farm to School newsletter
- Development and sharing of a Farm to School video
- Farm to School table and activities at the Pulaski County Food Show

- Fresh produce samples and information at all Back to School nights
- Parent letters to accompany children home after participating in Farm to School activities

Teachers and Administrators

The farm to school team recognized the importance of complete involvement and support of school teachers and administrators. Efforts were made to inform and involve them in the process:

- Kickoff article in the local newspaper
- Website presence of the program happenings on the Pulaski County Public Schools site
- Development and sharing of a Farm to School video
- Creation of a Farm to School Facebook page where upcoming events and progress were shared
- Meetings with each school administrator to discuss school specific needs
- Outreach and meetings with any interested teachers

Food Producers

Our Farm to School plan included purchasing foods directly from local farmers when possible. In order to inform and build relationships, we engaged in the following:

- Attended meetings in Floyd of local farmer groups
- Worked closely with SO Fresh - a local farmer network
- Invited and involved farmers in meetings and activities
- Scheduled meetings and farm visits to discuss the program
- Development and sharing of a Farm to School video

Community

- Kickoff article in the local newspaper
- Website presence of the program happenings on the Pulaski County Public Schools site
- Creation of a Farm to School Facebook page where upcoming events and progress were shared
- Information table and activities at The Marketplace (Pulaski County Farmer's Market)
- Development and sharing of a Farm to School video

Resources

Examples of Farm to School Promotional Materials:

-See newsletter insert below



Students start their own seeds at the Pulaski Food Show

Pulaski Food Show

Farm to School was at the first Pulaski Food Show this year. This event allowed students and their families to try products and give input on what they would like to see on their school menu.

Farm to School served up some fresh asparagus samples provided by Pear Tree Hill Farms. Students were also able to decorate cups for starting their own seeds. They loved the opportunity to plant an herb or vegetable of their choice (such as basil, rosemary, zucchini, tomatoes, and more).

Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)

Pro-

CEP will be implemented at Critzer Elementary and Pulaski Elementary for the 2015-2016 school year. All students will be offered breakfast and lunch at **no cost**. Students that attend Critzer or Pulaski Elementary will no longer need a meal application.

Please contact Ethelene W. Sadler at (540) 994-2523 for questions related to this important change.

What is Community Eligibility Provision?

CEP is an option created by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 that allows high poverty schools to offer breakfast and lunch to all students at no charge. Benefits of the program include:

- Parents are assured that students are getting two healthy, nutrient-dense meals a day at school.
- Families' financial burden is eased when students eat school meals at no cost.
- Students that have access to better nutrition tend to perform better academically.
- Meal lines move more quickly.
- Stigma attached to free school meals is eliminated, encouraging more students to participate in breakfast and lunch.
- Counting and claiming is simplified because staff no longer has to categorize each meal served as paid, reduced-price, or free.
- No uncollected meal charges when students can't afford to pay for meals.

*School lunch menus
are available
monthly at
[www.pcva.us/
foodservices/menus/
menus.htm](http://www.pcva.us/foodservices/menus/menus.htm)
Nutritional
information also
available.*

School Lunch Payment

We are now receiving online payments! Visit www.myschoolbucks.com to utilize this very easy and convenient method. This will allow you to:

- View account history, check account balances 24/7, and view purchases
- Make payments using debit or credit (Visa, MasterCard, or Discover) with a monthly automatic transaction option
- Receive deposit confirmations and low-balance reports via email
- Beginning this year, Smart Mail message alerts on low balances will be available, check with your school's SNP manager

Pulaski County School Nutrition has a written policy concerning charging school meals to a child's meal account. This policy can be found at:

<http://www.pcva.us/foodservices/chargedmeals.htm>



Enjoying some corn on the cob

Farm to School Taste Tests

One of the F2S activities is to host local product taste tests in the schools! Students are introduced to fresh produce incorporated into several different recipes. They then are able to vote on their favorite recipe, which can then be offered as part of their regular school lunch menu.

The F2S team held one of the first taste tests in April at Snowville Elementary School. Overwintered carrots from Pear Tree Hill Farms—located just a couple miles from the school—were served as raw carrots, carrot fries, and apple carrot salad. The majority of students loved the freshness of these carrots, which were harvested the night before they were served. The top two favorites were raw carrots and the apple carrot salad. Students got to enjoy the apple carrot salad as part of their May menu.

More taste tests will be scheduled for this fall. If you are interested in helping out with these at your child's school, please contact the Farm to School Coordinator, Shelly Rasnick at rasnicks@vt.edu or (423) 202-0212 to be added to the volunteer contact list.

Education & Curriculum Integration

Background and Progress to Date

USDA Farm to School Grant Activities

The USDA Farm to School Planning Grant has allowed the Farm to School Team to plan and implement several educational activities.

Most of the educational activities during the planning period involved student engagement and activities during the summer and fall months.

The following education activities were completed during the planning period:

- School Breakfast Education and Story Time
- Healthy Snacking Session with Summer Camp
- Afterschool Cougar Enrichment (ACE) Summer Program
- Food Show Planting Activity

Farm to School Education Activities

Field Trips

Sinkland Farms Field Trip, October 2015

All 3rd grade classes from Snowville Elementary and all 5th grade classes from Critzer Elementary visited Sinkland Farms in Christiansburg, Virginia on October 8th and 9th. The goal of the trip was to have students experience a local farm and receive education on how foods grow and how animals are raised. Prior to the trip students were asked questions about their background knowledge of where foods come from and their expectations of the farm. While at the farm, staff provided education on the growth cycle of pumpkins and corn. Several students were given cameras and allowed to visually document their learning process on the farm. Each student was able to pick out and take home a small pumpkin. To tie in the farm to school message, students were also given a fresh pumpkin muffin (prepared by the school cafeteria) so that they could appreciate pumpkins as a food source.

Our plan is to continue to offer a similar field trip experience to any interested elementary school class. In the future, we hope that some classroom lessons can be incorporated to make the experience well received by the students.

Summer Activities

During summer 2015, Pulaski County Farm to School partnered with ACE and Pulaski GROW to offer nutrition and agriculture education to Pulaski County High School students participating in the ACE summer program. Participating students engaged in six interactive and hands-on lessons with the Farm to School Coordinator:

- Introduction to the Farm to School program
- Construction of wooden herb planter
- Herb planting, soil science research and experimentation
- Food safety discussion, handwashing exercise
- History of herbs and spices, brainstorming for class recipe cards
- Tour of school kitchen and greenhouse, discussion of kitchen safety, finalizing vegetable recipes

- Student chef day in the kitchen, preparation and tasting of recipes

Resources

[Growing Minds-Farm to School](#), from Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP)- Provides various farm to school teaching resources including lesson plans, children's literature and recipes.

[Agriculture in the Classroom](#), Farm to School education quizzes and lesson resources with state-specific program information.

[Enjoying our Healthy Harvest Curriculum](#), from Oregon State University Extension Service- Curriculum and support materials.

[Edible Schoolyard Project](#), Educational resources for a K-12 edible education curriculum- can sort by program type, resource type, subject, grade and season.

[The Great Garden Detective Adventure](#), from USDA Food and Nutrition Service- a standards-based gardening nutrition curriculum for 3rd and 4th grade.

Evaluation

Background and Progress to Date

The Pulaski County School Nutrition Program was awarded a USDA Farm to School planning grant for one year. The grant period began on November 1st 2014 and was slated to conclude on October 31st 2015. The Farm to School Program was awarded an extension until March 31st 2016. This planning grant is for schools or school districts that are just beginning to work on Farm to School initiatives and is intended to assist the school district in organizing and structuring efforts to increase Farm to School activities and impact in the community. This opportunity allowed the Pulaski County Public Schools to assess local resources, gain community support, determine program feasibility and implement best practices to begin a farm to school initiative.

Pulaski County aimed to complete a variety of activities during this grant period. The Farm to School Program team collaborated with schools, farms, parents, students, the community and other stakeholders. The team developed and distributed nutritional information and local farm educational materials in the schools and in the community. The team worked to increase the percentage of local foods served in the school cafeterias. Various tasting events were held during the grant period to allow children to try new menu items.

Elementary school children went on field trips to a local farm to learn about where their produce comes from. The team provided community-centered outreach and education at events such as Farm to School Night at the Marketplace and Back to School nights. The team worked to train and encourage cafeteria managers and staff by implementing chef visits and trainings on the use of new spices. The team created partnerships with farmers and producers throughout the region in order to prepare for implementation of more Farm to School activities. Finally, the planning grant facilitated the purchase of new equipment for school cafeterias.

Participation in the Farm to School Program included students (K-12), teachers, school food service representatives, families, farmers, school administrators, school board members, and a variety of partners throughout Pulaski County.

The mission of the Pulaski County Farm to School Program was developed by the team:

“Pulaski County Farm to School works to connect schools with local farms in order to serve healthier food options, support community health and nutrition, and provide agriculture and nutrition education opportunities.”

This evaluation report describes how the Pulaski County Farm to School Program was formed, completed grant-related tasks, and worked towards their mission. The report describes activities and presents results of short term outcomes and recommendations for the future.

Evaluation Overview

The Virginia Tech Center for Public Health Practice and Research served as the external evaluator throughout the planning grant time period.

Evaluation efforts throughout this grant period have consisted of both process and outcome evaluation. Process evaluation indicators were monitored to meet project deliverables and accurately describe the implementation of the project over the course of its term. The process evaluation captures the number of schools participating, children participating, local farmers working with the program, trainings and educational sessions with staff, a taste test and field trips throughout the county, and more. The outcome evaluation captures impact of program implementation efforts. This was primarily conducted through the use of questionnaires for students, parents, and community members. The goal of the outcome evaluation was to measure change in knowledge, attitudes and intended behaviors regarding local food, food choices, produce consumption, agriculture and general nutrition. As applicable to the particular Farm to School activity, student impacts, teacher impacts, policy impacts, food service impacts, farmer impacts, parent impacts and/or community impacts were assessed. Tools and data collection methods used to measure impact were often adapted from existing Farm to School toolkits. This was used to ensure rigor of the method as these tools have been validated.

Process Evaluation Results

1) In accordance with the grant, the Farm to School Program in Pulaski County was required to form a team and construct a work plan. The tasks and documentation of completion is as follows:

- The task to recruit at least six internal and external collaborators to serve on the stakeholder team was completed. Collaborators on this team include Pulaski County Public Schools, SO Fresh, Pulaski Chamber of Commerce, Pulaski Marketplace, Virginia Cooperative Extension, New River Health District, Beans & Rice Inc., New River Valley Community Services, Commission on Children and Families, Pulaski Grow, and Virginia Tech Center for Public Health Practice and Research.

- This stakeholder team met twice a month during the first three months of the grant and once a month thereafter until June 2015. After June, meetings occurred on a “as needed” basis.

-A Project Coordinator was recruited for the Farm to School Program. Shelly Rasnick served as the Project Coordinator for the first 10 months of the grant period, and shared the Project Coordinator roll with Pamela Ray for the remaining months in the grant period.

- A work plan based on grant objectives was created and followed (Appendix A).

2) The Farm to School team conducted an infrastructure and needs assessment. The tasks and documentation of completion is as follows:

- The team consulted with USDA Farm to School leadership for instruction on developing the implementation plan.

- A needs assessment was completed with farmers, students, teachers, and school nutrition managers in Pulaski County. The needs assessment aimed to understand how the Farm to School team could accommodate the needs of a particular population in order to determine the best way to get local foods into Pulaski County Public Schools. The needs assessment also served as a tool to gather information on the various groups the team aimed to work with.

- Five farmers, 231 students, 8 school nutrition managers, and 17 teachers were surveyed.
- All of the farmers had heard of the Farm to School program, but none of them had ever supplied to a school before. Reasons for this were: they had not been approached before or because of “limited production and low price points.”
- A total of 133 of the students surveyed (58%) ate school lunch “daily”, while 27 students (12%) said they “never” ate school lunch. Most students (62%) said they would like having locally grown fruits and vegetables “a lot”, while 34% said they would like this “a little.”
- Most of the managers (75.5%) were at least “somewhat familiar” with the Farm to School program. However, they did express that they needed more information about the program to better anticipate what difficulties they might experience in incorporating more local foods into their menus. A follow up qualitative survey with school nutrition managers at the end of the grant cycle was attempted but they were unfortunately not available.
- Many of the teachers (56%) allotted time for agriculture or nutrition education in the classroom.
- Results from the needs assessment show the need for more communication and outreach about the Farm to School program, especially with the student population.
- The Farm to School team met with the School Nutrition Staff to give them more detailed information on Farm to School efforts and help to educate them on their role in the process. A meeting between all invested parties, specifically the school nutrition staff and local farmers, is needed before the program enters the implementation phase.
- The needs assessment report was developed and presented to the Stakeholder committee and the USDA technical team.

- Best practices were researched by a Virginia Tech practicum student, reviewed by the Center for Public Health Practice and Research and shared with the stakeholder team. A best practices toolkit was created for the Farm to School team to reference as development of projects progressed.

- The team assessed local and regional product availability and identified and established key supply chain relationships in the region. Riverstone Organic Farm in Floyd, VA and Pear Tree Hill Farms in Snowville, VA have the capacity to provide produce on a regular basis to the schools. Pulaski GROW in Draper, VA and Highland Farm in Dublin, VA can provide produce to

schools periodically. A local and regional product availability list had been established and is available for use.

-Menu audits have been completed for the previous year's menus to identify products that could be replaced with local produce. The team has developed a list of locally sourced foods that can be substituted when appropriate.

- Throughout the grant period, the capacity of several distributors to collaborate on Farm to school efforts was assessed. During the grant cycle, the School Nutrition program switched distributors from Woods Produce to Roanoke Fruit & Produce Company. Roanoke Fruit has greater capacity and willingness to provide local produce and to label where these comes from. The team has found that there are very limited distributor options for this area.

- The team worked closely with the Floyd Farm to School Program to see where they can partner with distribution needs. Floyd currently has one truck they are willing to use to help the Pulaski team with distribution needs, although it is limited. SO Fresh is regularly looking for grant opportunities to assist with local distribution, which could be a collaboration possibility in the future.

3) The Farm to School Program team implemented several trainings and new cafeteria equipment was purchased. The tasks and documentation of completion is as follows:

- A Managers' Training was conducted at Critzer Elementary School on incorporating fresh herbs and spices to fresh produce. A total of thirteen participants observed and tasted various foods that included herbs and spices in the recipe.

- A survey was conducted at the end in which twelve managers were surveyed. The results include: all 12 managers found the training useful and would like to see trainings like this one in the future, 10 (83%) are likely to use techniques learned in future meal preparation, 4 (33%) are very likely and 5 (42%) are likely to use the recipes in future meal preparation, and 8 (67%) are likely to use fresh herbs in future meal preparation.

- New kitchen equipment has been purchased for each school. The list of equipment for each school includes eight knife sets, eight lakeside utility cards, and eight cutting boards and stands.

4) Community and in-school outreach was conducted by the Farm to School Program team. The tasks and documentation of completion is as follows:

-A Farm to School Education plan was completed and the following activities were completed in the school:

- During School Breakfast Week, students learned about healthy breakfast and where their food comes from. Students were introduced to the Farm to School Program with a healthy breakfast display and coloring activities on produce. Stories on agriculture were read to Kindergarteners and a "Where your breakfast comes from" lesson was taught. This was promoted at the school as well as community-wide through a newspaper article. This article was shared throughout the school system. In-school outreach was expanded by having the Farm to School Coordinator visit all schools to meet school nutrition staff and administration.
- Another outreach at Dublin Middle School included learning about seeds. Students learned about tomato plants and transplanted seedlings to bigger pots as part of the "Growing Kids" project.
- Students in Ms. Perry's Family and Consumer Science class at Dublin Middle School regularly engage in Farm to School education. This includes planting and raising different produce. The

previous year they learned about growing tomato seedlings to then use in recipes. They are currently growing fresh herbs to be used in the school cafeterias. They have also used donated local pumpkins, apples and beet to make fresh recipes.

- The following activities were completed in the community:

- The Farm to School team set up a table at the Pulaski County Food Show in which fresh asparagus samples were served and children were lead in planting activities that could then be continued at home.
- Farm to School led activities at the ACE (Afterschool Cougar Enrichment) summer program with high school students in which they built planters, learned about herb planting, and experimented with spices and herbs in recipes.
- A Farm to School Night was held at the Pulaski Marketplace. The team was able to connect with parents, students and community members and partnered with other community organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, Commission on Children & Families, and SO Fresh to help gain awareness and establish support for the Farm to School Program. Farm to School night provided an opportunity to showcase the partnership between the school nutrition program and local farmers for the shared goal of serving more local food options as part of school lunches. Students, parents, teachers and other community members were able to stop by the Farm to School table to receive information and resources on the Farm to School Program and also had the opportunity to discuss school lunch questions and concerns with the School Nutrition Director. The team provided two cooking demonstrations and taste tests of different school menu items.
- Farm to School held a community outreach event at Back to School Nights in which nutrition staff members prepared recipes using local foods. Newsletters were distributed to parents and local foods were promoted through menus, recipes, and taste tests. A survey was conducted and the results show that overall, according to parents, the Farm to School Program would be beneficial to the Pulaski County School District. The sample size was 43 participants consisting of parents and a small number of teachers. The majority of parents and teachers (63%) said they had not heard about the Farm to School Program before that night. Only 16 people (37%) said they had heard about the Program before that night. Forty percent of parents reported that their child ate the school lunch “always”. When asked why in the follow up question, some parents commented on the ease and convenience for their child and family. The second answer that parents put most often was “most of the time” (26%). The majority of parents (60%) agreed that using local produce would encourage their child to eat the school lunch more often. When asked if the parent had any suggestions or comments for the Farm to School team, comments were made in favor of the program.

- A schedule of planned and completed community activities for the grant period and beyond was completed and presented. Continuing activities during the grant period include Pulaski County Food Show, Farm to School Night at the Marketplace, Back to School nights and the Harvest of the Month program. The team has also been collaborating with the SO Fresh campaign to expand agriculture in classrooms. The team will continue to provide for this program by securing seeds and soil for the students to plant and grow their own herbs for use in the cafeteria.

- A logo contest was held with students at Pulaski County High School, Dublin Middle School, and Pulaski Middle School. There were a total of 7 entries, and one winner was chosen by the Farm to School team. A high school senior’s entry was chosen and she received a \$25 gift card and was recognized for her design. The logo is the official logo of the Pulaski Farm to School program and is featured on all promotional materials, such as flyers, banners, and business cards.

- Two Field trips were planned and held at Sinkland Farms in Christiansburg. Third graders from Snowville Elementary School (2 classes, 30 children) and Fifth Graders from Critzer Elementary school (4 classes, 60 children) attended the trips.

- A teacher’s survey was held online after the trip in which four teachers out of six responded. The results included: all four teachers thought the students enjoyed the field trip, thought the trip was engaging, and thought it was educational; three (75%) were able to connect the trip with their current curriculum; and two completed follow-up activities.

- A taste test was held in Snowville elementary during the lunch period in which students tasted 3 different carrot recipes.

- A survey was conducted of the entire school. The results include: 83 (36%) students thought the raw carrots “Tasted Great”, 80 (34%) students thought the carrot salad “Tasted Great”, 37 (16%) students thought the carrot fries “Tasted Great”, 94 (41%) students voted for the raw carrots to be in their school meals, and 80 (35%) students would like the carrot salad in their school meals.

- Newsletters about Farm to School activities were created and distributed quarterly (Appendix F).

5) An implementation plan has been designed by the Farm to School team. The tasks and documentation of completion are as follows:

- As of June 2016, the plan was completed

- The Farm to School implementation plan will be presented to Stakeholders and other necessary groups for final review in June 2016.

Outcome Evaluation Results

	Event	Tools Used	Outcomes
Managers’ Training	Managers’ training on fresh herbs and spices	Survey	<p>12 Food Managers were interviewed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All 12 managers found the training useful and would like to see trainings like this one in the future • 10 (83%) are likely to use techniques learned in future meal preparation • 4 (33%) are very likely and 5 (42%) are likely to use the recipes in future meal preparation. • 8 (67%) are likely to use fresh herbs in future meal preparation

Community-centered outreach and education	Farm to School Night at the Marketplace	Parent and Teacher Survey	<p>Awareness of Farm to School Program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 37% had heard about it • 63% had not <p>Percentage of parents who report their children would eat school lunch more often if it contained local produce:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60%
Tasting events in local schools	Snowville Elementary	Student Survey for preference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 83 (36%) students thought the raw carrots “Tasted Great”, • 80 (34%) students thought the carrot salad “Tasted Great” • 37 (16%) students thought the carrot fries “Tasted Great”. • 94 (41%) students voted for the raw carrots to be in their school meals • 80 (35%) students would like the carrot salad in their school meals.
Local farm field trips	<p>Snowville Elementary- 3rd Grade field trip</p> <p>Critzer Elementary (Pulaski)- 5th Grade field trip</p>	Teacher Survey	<p>4 teachers were surveyed.</p> <p>Teachers found:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All 4 thought the students enjoyed the field trip, though the trip was engaging, and thought it was educational. • 3 (75%) were able to connect the trip with their current curriculum • 2 completed follow-up activities

Qualitative Feedback

The evaluation team conducted several interviews to assess the success of the Farm to School planning grant and partnerships created.

Interviews were conducted with:

- Shelly Rasnick, Farm to School Coordinator
- Pamela Ray, Farm to School Assistant Coordinator

- Ethelene Sadler, School Nutrition Director
- Rosita Perry, Family and Consumer Sciences teacher at Dublin Middle School
- An attempt was made to contact School Nutrition Managers, but unfortunately they were out of school already in May 2016, and multiple attempts to contact them did not prove successful.

Partnerships

The Farm to School Team has created some lasting relationships and partnerships during this planning grant period. Partnerships include New River Valley Glean Team, Commission on Children and Families, Pulaski County High School FFA & Agriculture, Beans & Rice, Inc., Pulaski Grow, Pulaski County Chamber of Commerce, Virginia Cooperative Extension, and Floyd County Farm to School. An especially important partnership has been with SO Fresh, a program that links schools to local farms and encourages community participation. As more people and groups hear about the work that has been done, more are stepping up to participate as partners. These partnerships will help the team continue into the future.

The budding partnership with the NEW RIVER VALLEY Plus - Vibrant Community Food System Group will help the team move forward and ensure sustainability of Farm to School efforts. Many current Farm to School partners are active in this group, which values the Farm to School mission and is committed to its success.

The Farm to School team has established a forward contract with Pear Tree Hill Farms who has committed to planting an acre of sweet corn for Pulaski County Schools. In addition, the recent distributor switch from Woods to Roanoke Fruit offers more local product options.

Finally, Farm to School has negotiated the allocation of DOD (Department of Defense) Fresh funds to allow purchasing from Riverstone Organic Farm which has made produce that was previously too expensive for purchase affordable for the school system.

The Farm to School team will need to ensure that it actively continues to engage these and other partners through excellent and targeted outreach strategies.

School engagement

The team had many successes during the planning grant period that helped develop and strengthen the program. A big success that they have had is engaging the schools and community through various activities that have taught children and community members about local foods.

Ms. Perry, a family and consumer sciences teacher in Dublin reports that her students benefited greatly from the fruits, vegetables and educational materials shared by the Farm to School team. Ms. Perry plans to continue incorporating Farm to School activities in her classroom instruction.

The Farm to School team established a great relationship with the School Nutrition Managers from each school. Managers have begun to take ownership of the program and seem to enjoy putting in the extra effort to serve local foods. Many of them have designed displays and signage to accompany special, local menus. Administrators have gained an understanding of

the goals and importance of the program and are now open to setting aside time and resources to promote Farm to School activities.

The Farm to School team should continue to engage the schools, School Board, Superintendent, Principals, Cafeteria Managers and key teachers to ensure continued success of the Farm to School Program in schools.

Challenges

Several challenges emerged during the course of the planning period. A Farm to School Coordinator was hired at the beginning of the grant period, however, ten months into the grant period, she was offered another full time position somewhere else, so she reduced the hours that she contributed to Farm to School to ten hours per week. Another Coordinator was brought on board for 10 hours per week, but job specifications were not well defined. Communication between the Program Coordinators and the School Nutrition Managers was not always as prompt and direct as it could have been. In the future, we would suggest bi-weekly or monthly meetings to keep the projects moving forward successfully. In addition, the evaluation team was not always informed of all ongoing activities, therefore was not able to evaluate everything as planned.

Ms. Perry reporting having some issues with communicating with the Farm to School team, specifically not knowing who the appropriate contact was. This might have been due to the fact that there were two Coordinators for the last half of the grant period.

The team still faces some challenges as they move forward. The biggest challenge seems to be finding local farms that can provide food at a reasonable price with enough produce to suit the school needs. Developing food items and recipes takes time and has slowed the process as well. The team also found that changing routines and distribution of local foods and having to work with foods that are more labor intensive is also challenging. Changing the people's food habits and getting children to try new foods has also proved to be a challenge. Even once the children have tried the new foods, the team has found that it was hard for families to use the new foods at home due to preferences or economic restraints.

Moving forward

"There has been so much progress throughout this grant period. I feel like the foundation has been laid and with the partnerships we have established we can continue to promote & serve locally grown food items to our students." -Ethelene Sadler, School Nutrition Director

The team plans to utilize their current fruit and vegetable distributors and purchase Virginia grown or fruits and vegetables that are within a 200-mile radius of Pulaski County as often as possible. They also plan to purchase produce locally when farms are able to supply fruits and vegetables for one or more schools. The Farm to School team is dedicated to keeping these supply relationships going and efforts must be made to continue negotiating with local farmers to ensure continued success.

Farm to School team leadership will need to prioritize Farm to School efforts to sustain the program. This includes budgeting and pursuing grant opportunities in conjunction with local partners.

The Farm to School team has worked very hard on the planning grant, and as it draws to a close, the team feels it is ready for implementation at a small scale. For this, the Farm to

School team will need to follow the implementation plan and all its components and regularly engage with partners. This will also entail regular team meetings and an advisory board to help keep the program in place. It is recommended that the Farm to School team continue working with the New River Valley Plus - Vibrant Community Food System Group as an advisory body to keep momentum going. Taking small steps and working out issues as they arise will help the Farm to School team successfully implement a Farm to School initiative.

Recommendations

1. Ensure sustainability of the Farm to School Program
 - a. Assign a person responsible for keeping in touch with schools, farms, answering inquiries, representing the Farm to School team at community meetings, etc.
 - i. This could be a current team member, an intern or an MPH practicum student
 - ii. Set specific job responsibilities for this person
 - iii. Set up regular meeting between School Nutrition Director and this person to ensure excellent communication
2. Keep up communication with the community, schools and potential partners
 - a. Keep the Facebook page updated
 - b. Continue producing and distributing the Farm to School newsletter
 - c. Include Farm to School information into existing promotions - such as the school calendar, monthly menus and website
 - d. Develop promotional materials for schools and the community
 - e. Expand into more classrooms in coming years
3. Continue working with NEW RIVER VALLEY Plus - Vibrant Community Food System Group
 - a. Attend their meetings
 - b. Incorporate this group into the Farm to School implementation plan
 - c. Invite them to participate and co-host Farm to School activities
 - d. Utilize the group to explore farmers or other interested community members “adopting” a school that they will work with to keep Farm to School activities going
4. Partner with the New River Health District on their VFHY obesity prevention grant
 - a. Include a Farm to School component in the VFHY grant
 - b. Involve local teachers in grant activities
5. Work with schools to ensure ownership of activities
 - a. Continue engaging teachers and building their capacity to implement Farm to School activities
 - b. Continue regular trainings of cafeteria managers in local food preparation to maintain their interest
6. Contract with local suppliers and farmers
 - a. Continue reaching out to local farmers to include them in Farm to School activities
 - b. Negotiate with local farmers to purchase local produce at a reasonable price
7. Think more broadly beyond direct services to policy/systems/environmental strategies to promote Farm to School
 - a. Work to promote ownership and self-sufficiency on the part of teachers so they do not rely on the Farm to School team as much (such as when dropping off fresh foods and promotional materials)
8. Develop a Farm to School list of contacts/experts that can be shared with schools and in the community
 - a. Develop a comprehensive list of Farm to School-related experts that can be shared with interested teachers or community partners
9. Continue to reach out to new partners
 - a. This work will not get accomplished alone. The Farm to School team must proactively reach out to old and new partners to ensure a sustainable and successful program implementation

Program Sustainability

Background and Progress to Date

Prior to receiving the USDA Planning Grant, a Farm to School program in Pulaski County had been a vision, but needed more efforts in place to make it a reality. Projects in place that set the groundwork for a Farm to School program included:

- USDA's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program
- "Let's Move" Salad Bars to Schools initiatives in Pulaski Elementary, Critzer Elementary and Dublin Middle Schools
- Double stack convection oven for Pulaski Middle School
- Silver HealthierUS School Challenge Award for all elementary schools
- 21st Century Grants at Pulaski Middle, Dublin Elementary and Pulaski County High Schools.

In November 2014 the district was awarded the planning grant and began to build upon this groundwork to create an established Farm to School program for Pulaski County Public Schools. The general focus of this work was to integrate local programs and efforts as well as create awareness and support for locally grown foods so that students could receive the healthier school meals.

Grants

We will continue to seek out grant opportunities including an implementation grant from the USDA. We are in the process of searching for local, regional and national grants to apply for. These funds would be used to develop and purchase more educational materials, distribute more marketing materials to promote Farm to School, and focus on creating sustainable school gardens. We plan to continue to collaborate with other health, nutrition, agriculture and economic development initiatives in the region.

Donations & Fundraising & Partnerships

Current plans are to focus on maintaining and expanding local food awareness within the county. To achieve this, the Farm to School team will rely on the partnership with NRV Plus Community Food Systems Work Group.

This group has plans to seek donations from local businesses and commodity groups. We are exploring donations from grocery stores to fund taste tests during the Harvest of the Month programs. We are also reaching out to commodity groups - such as Sweet Potato Growers Association - for produce donations and marketing materials.

Institutional Support

We believe that our Farm to School program has strong institutional and community support. The school board, superintendent's office, and school administrators have all been valuable supporters of the efforts throughout the planning phase and are willing to give time and resources to ensure success. We have many community partners who are invested in local food efforts and plan to continue to capitalize on school administration support to keep efforts going.

We have laid out a Harvest of the Month plan within our School Nutrition Program for the 2016-2017 school year and are in the process of obtaining volunteers and sponsors to make this program a regular occurrence. We have also identified reliable sources for procuring local

foods and are exploring ways in which we can continue to increase those local produce purchases.

Resources

[USDA Grants and Loans for Farm to School Efforts](#), from the USDA Food and Nutrition Service- links to funding sources provided by USDA that support farm to school initiatives and support local and regional food systems.

[Funding Farm to School](#), from the National Farm to School Network- Resources for government funding, foundations, alternative financial services and social impact investors, business sponsorships and fundraising events.

[Grants and Fundraising](#), from the American Community Gardening Association - national and regional funding opportunities for community gardens.