



Farm to School Institute

Cultivating Vibrant Communities,
Just Food Systems
& Healthy Kids

vtfeed.org/institute



Vermont FEED (food education every day) is a farm to school partnership project of Shelburne Farms and NOFA-VT.

It's time for a paradigm shift in how we think about and engage with our food system.

Farm to school is a powerful way to reconnect us to the land and people who sustain and nourish us. It's an opportunity to create impactful change across school communities by helping students develop positive relationships with food and taking action to support more just food systems.

Farm to school also nourishes students. With 30 million U.S. students eating school lunch each day, school meals offer a means and an opportunity to feed hungry kids and shape how they—and adults!—eat in the future and support more sustainable food systems.

The Farm to School Institute: Accelerating Lasting Change in Classrooms, Cafeterias & Communities

Robust, sustainable farm to school programs don't happen by accident. They require schoolwide capacity and commitment to create a culture of farm to school that is deeply embedded in their values and priorities.

Developed by Vermont FEED, the Farm to School Institute is a whole-school professional development model that builds capacity in school communities to create a culture of wellness, improve food access, engage students, and strengthen local food systems. The Institute's model accelerates whole-school systems change to create farm to school programs that become deeply embedded in a school's culture, making change that lasts.

The Institute is a national model that has helped hundreds of schools, districts, and early childhood programs build enduring farm to school programs. **And there are thousands of schools yet to go!**



Students who know a farmer or grow their own food are more likely to eat fruits and vegetables.

Our Recipe for Farm to School Success & Staying Power

Since 2010, the Farm to School Institute has brought together school and community teams to build relationships, skills, and collaborative action plans for their schools. With the support of a coach, they spend the next year putting their plans into action and strengthening their capacity to impact classrooms, cafeterias, and communities long into the future.

Investing in a proven model of team-building, action planning, and coaching is an investment in the capacity for long-term change and outcomes – for participating schools, communities, students, and farm to school practitioners.

There are four key components of our Institute model:



1 The 3C Approach

Impactful farm to school programs connect classrooms, cafeterias, and communities. The Institute is structured around this 3C model of change, ensuring an integrated and connected program that shifts school culture toward wellness and strengthens school-community partnerships.

2 Whole-School Teams

People with diverse roles in a school make up each team: nutrition staff, parents, teachers, administrators, nurses, and community partners. Team members leave prepared to support one another, integrate activities and learning schoolwide, and build shared leadership and capacity for the long haul.

3 Experienced Coaches

Each team is paired with an experienced coach who helps the team develop and implement its action plan, troubleshoot, connect with resources, and maintain accountability. Teams also have access to experts on farm to school topics, from scratch cooking and local procurement to funding and communications.

4 Action Planning

Custom action plans are the heart of the Institute experience. Each team assesses its school's strengths and opportunities, then creates an integrated action plan that builds on those strengths. Teams learn to set goals, track progress, communicate success, and adapt to changing conditions.

For students in farm to school programs, we have seen twice the national average in vegetable consumption.



Developing Capacity & Commitment for Change

In 2021, PEER Associates completed a retrospective evaluation of the Farm to School Institute to better understand what factors support robust and sustainable farm to school programs and how these were strengthened by participating in the Institute. Key findings include:

The Institute **fosters a culture of farm to school** by promoting its alignment with school priorities; building skills to boost its visibility; and cultivating believers and champions within the school community

The Institute **strengthens capacity and agency** through relationship building, action planning, and making connections to resources and other schools.

The Institute helps teams **sustain an ongoing commitment** to farm to school by creating buy-in and build-in within the school community, applying their knowledge and skills, and building relationships.



“[Through farm to school, you can teach] students at a young age how to connect with the land and where their food comes from. This not only supports student health and learning, but local food producers’ livelihoods as well. Throughout schools and their broader communities, farm to school results in fortified local economies, increased student learning, and overall community well-being.”

ALYSON EASTMAN
DEPUTY SECRETARY
VERMONT AGENCY OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD & MARKETS
pictured at the 2019 Northeast Farm to School Institute

What Institute Alumni Say

Participants report that the Farm to School Institute is invaluable in helping them build strong teams and strong programs. **Here's how:**

Making Change

90% of participants reported progress in creating a culture of farm to school.

This is the beginning of a profound movement for Nashua, and I know it will change our community for the better.

The institute model brings school staff together outside of a school building in a space set up for action planning, long-term thinking, and developing relationships, without interruption. It's been successful in developing teams that can spread curriculum and programs throughout the entire building.

Engaging Whole-School Teams

84% of school nutrition staff were committed to expanding farm to school programming.

Building Capacity

90% of participants said they now have the capacity to solve problems and connect with resources.

Farm to school has always been something I've been very interested in and passionate about. Now, I feel like I have new resources and knowledge to begin to implement it more in my classroom!

The focus on agriculture, local food, and nutrition is paying off in the classroom. Kids are interested, and teachers are given more diversity in the curriculum.

Building Commitment

100% of school administrators indicate they plan to integrate farm to school into the curriculum and have more confidence doing so.



Join the Movement!

Attend the Institute and Build Your Capacity to Implement Farm to School

The Farm to School Institute offers a professional learning experience for school teams that goes beyond learning the basics of farm to school. Our focus is helping school teams build the relationships, skills, and connections they need to implement robust farm to school programs that align with their school's priorities. Institute attendees walk away with more than just an action plan for farm to school.

They forge **strong cross-departmental relationships** that enable classroom teachers to work with cafeteria staff on lesson planning.

They acquire **foundational skills** that reinforce the basics of the 3Cs, which facilitates an integrated, schoolwide farm to school program and culture.

They make **valuable connections** with experienced practitioners, other teams, and like-minded community partners who can provide support, resources, and inspiration.

Perhaps most importantly, the Farm to School Institute opens attendees' eyes and hearts to farm to school's potential for transformative change. Students become advocates for local food systems and food justice by engaging in place-based learning. Cafeteria staff support the local economy by purchasing produce for school meals from local farmers and producers. Community connections lead to hands-on opportunities for students, like planting gardens and visiting farms, that reinforce a food culture committed to healthy, sustainable food choices.

Bring farm to school home to your school community. Learn more about attending the Farm to School Institute.

Contact us to explore the possibilities.

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➔ vtfeed.org/institute



Vermont FEED is a farm to school partnership project of Shelburne Farms and the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT). These two nonprofit organizations have more than forty years of experience in farm to school, supporting teachers, school nutrition staff, farmers, and administrators. vtfeed.org

Shelburne Farms is an education nonprofit on a mission to inspire and cultivate learning for a sustainable future. Our home campus is a working farm located on the unceded homelands of the Abenaki. shelburnefarms.org

NOFA-VT is an association of farmers, gardeners, and consumers, promoting an economically viable and ecologically sound Vermont food system for the benefit of current and future generations. nofavt.org

