



WAGNER COMMUNITY SCHOOL GEODESIC GREENHOUSE

**DAKOTA RURAL ACTION**  
GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING FOR THE FUTURE

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*Dakota Rural Action is a grassroots, family agriculture and conservation group that organizes South Dakotans to protect our family farmers and ranchers, natural resources and unique way of life.*

SUCCESS STORIES

# Farm to School in South Dakota

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## What is Farm to School?

Farm to School is broadly defined as a program that connects schools (k-12) and local farms to provide fresh, healthy meals for students and financial opportunities for regional producers. Farm to school programs also integrate agricultural and nutritional learning through classroom curriculum and school gardens. “Farm to school empowers children and their families to make informed food choices while strengthening the local economy and contributing to vibrant communities.<sup>1</sup>”

More than 32 million children participate in the National School Lunch Program, and more than 12 million in the School Breakfast Program<sup>2</sup>, so the source of this food has been a growing concern in the minds of parents and caretakers. For this reason the Farm to School Network was launched in the late 1990’s. The program is now operational in all 50 states with over 40,000 schools participating. Dakota Rural Action joined the National Farm to School Network in 2010 as the South Dakota State Lead Organization. This means DRA serves as a hub of information, connections, and resources for Farm to School.

## Why Farm to School?

Farm to School benefits students, farmers, communities, and the environment. Students get hands-on experience with agriculture, and studies show Farm to School Programs increase fruit and vegetable consumption at school and at home, and even increased physical activity and self-esteem as they gain new life skills.<sup>3</sup> Increasing children’s interest in healthier foods has also been shown to impact parents’ food shopping choices as well.

South Dakotans are proud of their agricultural background and Farm to School helps to support our agricultural community. By opening the large venue of schools to farmers and ranchers, it provides significant financial opportunity for not just the producers, but for distributors, laborers, and food service staff. Additionally, purchasing food locally helps local economies. Typically local independent businesses re-circulate a much greater percentage of sales locally compared to absentee-owned businesses. “In one study, each one dollar investment in farm to school stimulated an additional \$2.16 in local economic activity.<sup>4</sup>” Buying local makes South Dakota’s economy strong.



Goodthinking 4 All Our Relations & St. Francis Indian School

Students at St. Francis dig into summer squash after a day of working in the garden. Now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> season, the garden provides both students and the community opportunities to learn, share, and eat together. The goal is to provide all of the vegetable needs for the school’s lunch program in the future.



The Good Earth

Farm tours are another great way to get students engaged in food production. The Good Earth Farm in Lennox, SD hosts student and child care tours each summer. The farm is home to a miniature bull, donkey, and horse as well as 10 acres of vegetables.

On average, food travels 1,300 to 2,000 miles from a farm to the consumer. Purchasing locally reduces that distance significantly, allowing produce to ripen, improving both the flavor and the nutritional content. When food tastes better, kids are more likely to eat it, providing them with the nutrition they need. It also reduces the carbon footprint of food production.

When Dakota Rural Action began working on Farm to School it was difficult to know how many local food programs were already established in the state. Since each school district is responsible for their lunch program there were some schools already serving great local items in their cafeterias while others were not. In order to get a better idea of the established programs Dakota Rural Action sent a voluntary survey to the Food Service Director of each school in the state, and has for the last six years. The results have shown that South Dakota has several school districts already taking advantage of local food

opportunities, and the number of interested schools continue to increase. In 2016, 75% of the 125 school districts that responded are interested in sourcing locally, and 22% purchased directly from a grower this year. Additionally, 18% of schools have gardens for faculty and student use.

School gardens provide a unique opportunity for hands on, participation based experience and are one of the best ways to help children understand where food comes from and how plants grow.

In addition to serving healthy foods in schools, it is crucial to teach children and adults alike about why eating healthy is so important. Schools across the state have begun outdoor and indoor gardens, including Wagner Community School, Red Cloud Indian School, St. Francis Indian School, Huron Schools, Sioux Falls, Sturgis, and more. Through gardens and events like school presentations, conference presentations and farm tours education is already underway. The South Dakota

State University Extension has begun several school and community garden projects across the state, and has partnered with Ground Works to begin school gardens in some of the public schools in Sioux Falls. Gardens can be a great fall, spring, and summer activity for children, and lessons learned can apply to an array of classes: life sciences, health, nutrition,

language, and more. And research done in the garden can lend itself to professional development in older students.

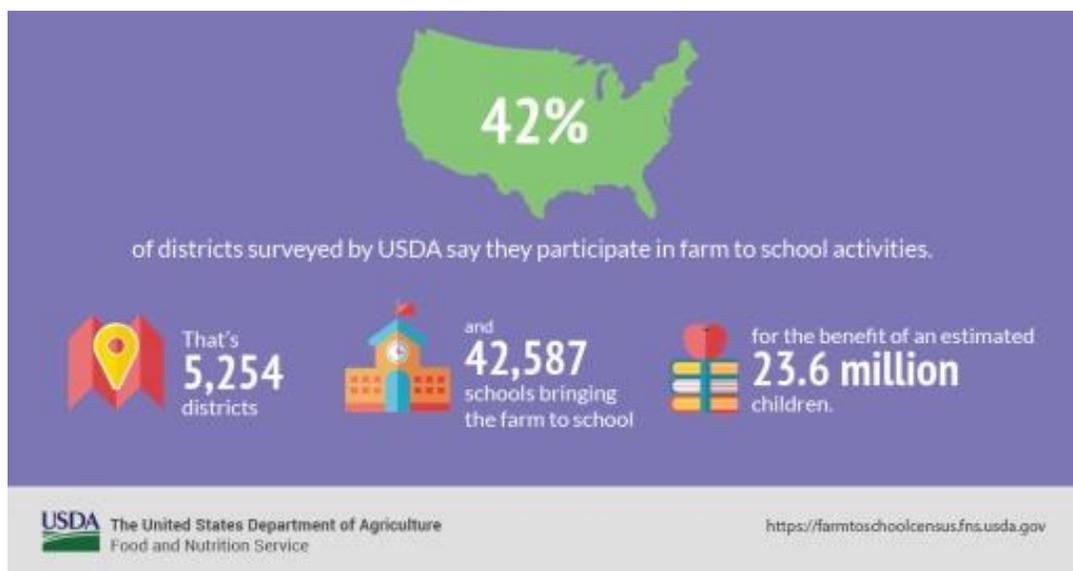
For more information on Farm to School programs, visit DRA's Growing Farm to School in South Dakota Facebook page, [farmtoschool.org](http://farmtoschool.org) or [dakotarural.org](http://dakotarural.org).



In 2016, a South Dakota Farm to School Taskforce was created.

Partners in this Task Force in :

- Farmers
- Food Service Directors
- DRA
- SD Dept. of Education
- SD Dept. of Agriculture
- SD Dept. of Health
- Rural Development
- Specialty Crop Producers
- SDSU Extension
- NRCS
- InterTribal Buffalo Council
- Great Plains Tribal Chairmen's Health Board
- Animal Industry Board



1. National Farm to School Network Homepage. National Farm to School Network. July 2016. <<http://www.farmtoschool.org/>> 2. "National School Lunch Program Fact Sheet". USDA, 2015. Web. July 2015. <[www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/lunch/aboutlunch/NSLPFactSheet.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/lunch/aboutlunch/NSLPFactSheet.pdf)> 3. Benefits of Farm to School Factsheet. National Farm to School Network. Web. August 2016. <http://www.farmtoschool.org/Resources/BenefitsFactSheet.pdf> 4. "The Multiplier Effect of Local Independent Business Ownership". American Independent Business Alliance. Web. 17 October, 2012. <<http://www.amiba.net/resources/multiplier-effect>>





