



COLORADO
Department of Education

Colorado Farm to School Task Force Legislative Report

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The Senate Agriculture, Livestock and Natural Resources Committee

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Executive Summary

Farm to School Task Force

In 2010, the Colorado General Assembly created the Colorado Interagency Farm-to-School Coordination Task Force (SB10-81), most commonly referred to as the Colorado Farm to School Task Force. The main objectives of the Colorado Farm to School Task Force are:

- Increasing awareness of farm to school opportunities and partnerships;
- Disseminating farm to school resources, materials and toolkits;
- Assessing policy and regulatory opportunities and barriers; and
- Identifying and supporting opportunities to further farm to school efforts.

The Colorado Farm to School Task Force supports the development of regional farm to school networks across the state and are committed to providing training, technical assistance, and resources to all farm to school stakeholders.

Significant Accomplishments

- Strategic Planning Re-evaluation Coordinated by USDA
- Colorado Proud School Meal Day
- Farm to School Month - Colorado Crunch Event
- Colorado Food System Advisory Council (COFSAC) Partnership
- School Food Authority Needs Assessment

Technical assistance, strengthening partnerships, and redefining strategic plan

In fall of 2017, the Colorado Department of Education School Nutrition Unit conducted a needs assessment (Appendix B) to better understand Colorado's current efforts around farm to school. The goal of the needs assessment was to identify current areas of opportunities for growth or expansion within Colorado's farm to school programming. Colorado has seen a successful increase in farm to school participation over the years; however, there are still opportunities for growth. As CDE's strategic plan includes key initiatives of "All Means All" and "Organizational Excellence", the needs assessment revealed that Colorado still has room to expand upon existing and new opportunities to grow farm to school in historically underserved areas as well as maintaining the highest level of customer service in farm to school with training and resource development. These areas of growth will continue to remain a focus in future farm to school efforts, as CDE continues to refine training, resources, and opportunities in farm to school.

Due to limited funding and staffing, the need for partner collaboration and resource sharing has grown. The Farm to School Task Force has indicated interest in strengthening its partnership with COFSAC, as they share similar initiatives in local food procurement in Colorado schools. Efforts to combine the two councils/committees, both through proposed legislation and formal meetings, are underway.

In March of 2018, the Farm to School Task Force conducted a full-day strategic planning session coordinated by USDA. The main purpose of the meeting was to redefine the strategic plan of the Farm to School Task Force given limited staff and financial resources while redefining their structure, operations, and future direction.



Introduction

Legislative History

In 2010, the Colorado General Assembly created the Colorado Farm to School Task Force to “study, develop, and recommend policies and methods to best implement a Farm to School program.” In 2013, the legislature reauthorized the Task Force, to be continued indefinitely. The 15 appointed members and 15 ex-officios meet to report on farm to school efforts in Colorado as well as strategically plan for the future of local food procurement in Colorado. For a complete list of current members, see Appendix A.

Funding

The Task Force receives no state funds for operation. Funding included in prior legislative report of 2017 included:

- The Colorado Health Foundation, total grant funding- \$312,666, 2013-2016;
- The Gates Family Foundation, total grant funding- \$150,000, 2013-2016;
- The USDA Farm to School Grant, total grant funding- \$25,000, 2015-2017; and
- CoBank, total grant funding- \$150,000, 2015-2017.

Statewide Collaboration

The Task Force collaborates with state, regional, and local stakeholders across Colorado through business meetings, community events and technical assistance workshops. Since 2010, the Task Force has traveled to Pueblo, North Conejos, Longmont, Yuma, Las Animas, Montrose, Carbondale, Alamosa, Fort Collins, Telluride, Durango, Grand Junction, Oak Creek, Akron, Broomfield, Boulder, Colorado Springs and Denver. The Task Force also presents at several national conferences annually and collaborates with key national organizations including the National Farm to School Network, USDA Farm to School Program, The Edible School Yard Project, School Food FOCUS, Healthy Farms Healthy People Coalition, Colorado Enterprise Fund and CoBank. The Task Force has developed strong partnerships that have brought new resources to Colorado’s farm to school efforts. Partnerships, such as with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, have given farm to school stakeholders funds towards building gardens, as well as opportunities for culinary training. Other partnerships, such as with the Colorado Department of Agriculture, have increased awareness and resources in promoting Colorado Proud School Meal Day.

Farm to School- growing need for technical assistance & strengthening partnerships

In 2017, the Colorado Department of Education developed a needs assessment to understand barriers and opportunities for growth in farm to school in Colorado school districts. School Food Authorities (SFAs) were the target audience of the needs assessment which had a total of 63 respondents, or relatively 1/3 of SFAs in Colorado. SFAs identified funding, time, resources, and overall understanding and program knowledge as the main barriers to participation. Identifying these gaps helps to provide a focus for training and educational opportunities for SFAs and producers within Colorado to strengthen the farm to school program. With key initiatives to expand access and opportunity for historically underserved students, the needs assessment accurately pinpointed areas where farm to school opportunities existed and focus areas that could empower those SFAs with limited resources to pursue farm to school activities. Although farm to school involvement varies across Colorado, the majority of SFAs participate through purchasing local products. While about a third of respondents in the needs assessment identified as not participating in any farm to school activities, 40 percent of total respondents indicated they were interested in future participation through purchasing local



products. In addition, two-thirds of respondents indicated they were interested in connecting with local producers. For a summary of the needs assessment, please reference Appendix B.

Significant changes in staffing of key organizational positions of the Colorado Farm to School Task Force have reinforced the need to strategically plan for the future. Given limited resources, the growing need for partner collaboration and resource sharing has been identified. The Farm to School Task Force has indicated a growing interest in strengthening its partnership with COFSAC, as they share similar interests in local food procurement in Colorado schools which will ultimately strengthen Colorado's local food system. COFSAC, a Governor-appointed Council initiated through state legislation in 2010, has a charge to advance recommendations that strengthen healthy food access for all Coloradans through Colorado agriculture and local food systems and economies. COFSAC currently has staffing and coordination support through the Colorado State University (CSU) Food Systems team and is focused on developing a series of issue briefs that promote food systems issues with the state legislature. COFSAC also maintains robust participation that brings together multiple state agencies and stakeholders from agriculture, nutrition, and public health. These perspectives are all necessary in advancing farm to school activities. Although previously proposed legislation to align the COFSAC with the Task Force was unsuccessful, the partnership between these groups has begun to form as Task Force members have been invited to attend COFSAC quarterly meetings. Partner organizations have proposed legislation to align the two groups in past and possibly future legislative sessions. In doing so, both COFSAC and the Task Force aim for collaboration and reducing duplicative efforts in local food procurement.

Redefining the Strategic Plan

The Colorado Farm to School Task Force defined broad roles when creating a "Road Map" in 2012 to further clarify its goals, objectives, and activities. In 2015, this Road Map was refreshed after the Task Force accomplished early goals, such as receiving grants, hiring staff, and producing deliverables. In subsequent years, grant funding had depleted, and many of the original Task Force members no longer held their original positions within the organizations they represented. In March 2018, the Colorado Farm to School Task Force held a day long strategic planning session, led by the USDA Mountain Plains Regional Office. This session was followed by a subsequent follow up meeting. In coordination with a USDA team, the Task Force was able to redefine current and future needs to include:

- Acknowledging past successes
- Revisiting the "need" in the Colorado farm to school community
- Mapping key farm to school players in the state and their contributions to the movement
- Discussing options for Task Force structures and models
- Reflecting on what had worked and what had not worked in the past
- Considering how to gather input from additional farm to school stakeholders beyond the Task Force
- Beginning a conversation on the structure and operations of the Task Force

The meeting resulted in a strategic plan to accommodate the uncertainties of the Task Force future structure. The strategic planning deliverable may serve as a guide for the Task Force's work, regardless of structure, funding, and staffing levels, by indicating the over-arching "niche" and goals for the Task Force. It also presents specific "next steps" that can be accomplished without external funding or a Task Force staff member, and more in-depth activities which can be accomplished as funding and staffing become available. As the future of proposed legislation was not certain and continues to remain uncertain, the strategic plan development must incorporate thoughts for both contingencies. The Final Task Force Strategic Planning Deliverable (Appendix C)



details information for the future of the Task Force, such as the needs of each organization, role in farm to school, and a proposed structure that the Task Force should adopt.

Significant Accomplishments

Colorado Proud School Meal Day

The Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA) and CDE partner to promote Colorado Proud School Meal Day, which takes place in September of each year. This is a day to celebrate Colorado agriculture and educate school children about healthy eating. More than 250 schools across Colorado participated, reaching 130,000 students.

Farm to School Month- Colorado Crunch Event

In an effort to promote Farm to School Month, CDE worked with farm to school coordinators in Montana, Utah, and Wyoming to hold the first ever multi-state Apple Crunch-Off. This “Colorado Crunch Event” encouraged school districts, partners and anyone involved in farm to school to “crunch” on a Colorado grown apple on October 24th. The first year was a success with almost 7,000 participants throughout Colorado. Both students and school stakeholders were able to illustrate farm to school with the highest degree of excellent customer service by showcasing Colorado’s robust local food market.

Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council Partnership

Although previous proposed legislation to align the COFSAC with the Task Force was unsuccessful, the partnership between these groups has begun to form as Task Force members have been invited to attend COFSAC quarterly meetings. Partner organizations have proposed legislation to align the two groups in past and possibly future legislative sessions.

School Food Authority Needs Assessment

In 2017, a farm to school needs assessment was conducted by CDE in order to assess involvement of local food procurement by SFAs. Results outlined farm to school participation in Colorado as well as needs for technical assistance and training. With small and large school districts represented in the needs assessment, CDE was able to identify historically underserved areas that may not have adequate time, staffing, and resources to develop robust farm to school programs.

Cooking Up Healthy Options with Plants (CHOP)

Cooking Up Healthy Options with Plants (CHOP): A three-tiered grant offered through the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) that is available to early childcare centers and homes participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Grant participants receive funds towards building a garden at their site, are provided the “grow it, try it, like it” curriculum and attend culinary trainings in partnership with LiveWell Colorado chefs to build and enhance their skills around utilizing fresh produce within their meal programs.

Social Media

The task force has developed a regular presence on social media. This has been an important way to reach a wide audience that is interested in farm to school but unlikely to attend task force events.

1. Facebook: CO Farm to School (As of November 2018, there are 795 “likes.”). The task force launched its Facebook page on June 12, 2014. Every week new people and groups “like” and follow the postings of the task force. Posts are being shared widely, reaching thousands of people. Individuals that follow the page frequently post comments demonstrating an engaged audience.



2. Twitter: @COFarmToSchool (As of November 2018, there are 117 followers and 123 tweets). On July 9, 2014, the task force began “tweeting.” This form of social media keeps people updated in real time about important information and activities of the task force, such as posting pictures and information from tours of farm to school activities around the state, and announcements about upcoming meetings and trainings. The Task Force found it easier to build a presence on Facebook but continues to grow on Twitter.

Findings and Areas of Opportunity

2017 Farm to School Needs Assessment Outcomes

Colorado has seen a successful increase in farm to school participation over the years; however, there are still opportunities for growth. Identifying these gaps provides a focus for training and educational opportunities for SFAs and producers within Colorado to strengthen the farm to school program. Respondents to the needs assessment rated areas where they wanted additional support to begin or expand participation in farm to school activities. The top four responses, in order of highest identified need, were: training, grants and funding opportunities, making new contacts and networking with producers, and developing bids and procuring local food. As CDE continues to strengthen its organizational excellence and provide the highest degree of excellence in customer service, future areas of work should focus efforts in these needs.

Sustainability Strategy for Farm to School in Colorado

The Colorado Farm to School Task Force is currently working toward collaboration with LiveWell Colorado, CDA and COFSAC. The purpose in collaborating will be to develop a stronger partnership in sustainable food system issues, including solidifying a larger portion of dedicated staff time for farm to school efforts. Although prior endeavors to pass legislation have been unsuccessful, partner organizations have proposed legislation to align the two groups in past and possibly future legislative sessions. To avoid any duplicative efforts, strengthening the partnership with COFSAC can maximize resources with staffing, time, and local food procurement for all stakeholders in farm to school.

Local Food Procurement Colorado

LiveWell Colorado’s Local Procurement Colorado (LoProCO) program is a farm-to-institution initiative that provides tools and training for SFAs and partners to procure, prepare and serve food from local farmers and ranchers, while creating healthier, more resilient communities. The program focuses on developing partnerships between educational institutions, such as K12 schools, along with local farmers, producers and food hubs while creating a model that is replicable to other public and private institutions with pre-existing food service programs. This program will be conducted in the upcoming year.



Appendix A



2016 Colorado Farm to School Task Force Members	
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Appendix B





Appendix C

