



# FARM TO SCHOOL

**Innovative Approaches from the Youth Perspective**

## **The farm to school movement is growing, and empowered youth are playing key roles — bringing youthful originality and leadership to the table!**

A growing movement across the U.S., “farm to school” describes the practice through which school districts purchase and serve regionally grown and raised food from local farms as part of school meals. Accompanying these purchase decisions and menu options are often experiential learning opportunities around environmental stewardship, recycling, food-waste reduction, farm experiences, garden-based learning, food insecurity/hunger, culinary innovations, and more.

GENYOUth is dedicated to helping further youth involvement in this important community-minded movement. Through GENYOUth’s flagship **Fuel Up to Play 60** program — the nation’s largest in-school wellness program — and our student social-entrepreneurship program, **AdVenture Capital**, students are innovating and pioneering original farm to school solutions in their schools and communities. The goal? Even more wholesome and nutritious foods that kids need for growth and development.

### **An important and timely topic**

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s **Farm to School Census**, more than 42,000 schools nationwide have farm to school programs, which operate in conjunction with the National School Lunch Program and other school meal programs. Seventy-five percent of districts cite benefits that come from farm to school, including more students choosing school meals, lower costs from buying locally grown food, increasing support from parents and the community, and less wasted food and resources.

Farm to school is serious business, too. School districts across the country invested more than half a billion dollars (nearly \$800 million) in local foods in the 2013-2014 school year, an increase of 105 percent over two years earlier. Among schools serving local foods, those foods account for about 13 percent of the school’s food budget on average.

### **Empowering youth as farm to school “solution-generators”**

GENYOUth is helping youth to create, champion, and implement farm to school initiatives that strengthen connections with fresh, nutritious food and local farmers. Student projects are demonstrating again and again how those ideas can shape everything from school food-purchasing policies and agriculture in the curriculum to deep connections and respect for where food comes from.

Schools and youth are using GENYOUth’s **Funds for Fuel Up to Play 60** and AdVenture Capital

## Students Connect Dairy Farms to Food Banks

When West Virginia fifth-grader REAGAN BLASHER learned that local food banks need milk donations, she raised more than \$1,600 to help by creating a service project through Fuel Up to Play 60.

On average, food banks are able to provide only the equivalent of less than one gallon of milk per person per year — far short of the 68 gallons per year needed to meet the Dietary Guidelines. Americans are generous in donating canned and dry goods to food banks, but many don't think to donate milk because it's perishable, despite the high-quality protein it provides.

That fact inspired Reagan to develop and launch her own version of **The Great American Milk Drive** by creating a fundraiser on



her [gofundme.com](#) page to help purchase milk sourced from regional dairy farms for local West Virginia food banks. And she set her expectations high.

"My goal was \$1,250," Reagan says. "I wanted a goal that would be a challenge to raise."

She involved classmates in

fundraising efforts by coordinating a school-approved hat day. In order to wear a hat to class for one day, students could donate \$1 to Reagan's milk drive. By engaging friends and others at school, Reagan inspired them to continue to volunteer throughout the service drive.

Her passion paid off. Community members donated more than \$1,600. The National Dairy Council thanked Reagan for her efforts by matching her donation to The Great American Milk Drive so even more families would receive the nutritious foods and beverages they need.

America's dairy farmers support the fight against hunger. Learn more about how you can help those in your community at [www.milklife.com/give](http://www.milklife.com/give).

grants for farm to school-related basics, such as starting, maintaining, and improving school gardens, and making field trips to local dairy farms. There, they're learning about everything from the nutrients required in cows' diets to how dairy farmers are responsibly stewarding our environment.

Students are also leading efforts to organize visits from, and hold cooking classes with, professional local chefs. They're helping to revamp cafeteria designs with inspirational local-farm-themed murals and artwork. Students are constructing chicken coops and then developing original egg recipes and food-handling procedures suited to school and home use. They're developing sustainability solutions, like rain-barrel irrigation in drought regions, and they're putting in place natural composting routines for less-than-ideal garden soil.

Whether it's recycling, local food sourcing, carbon-footprint monitoring, or addressing and reducing the amount of wasted food, farm to school-themed projects vividly illustrate how student leaders and student entrepreneurs are advancing the movement nationwide.

■ In Springfield, Massachusetts, schools, "Ag Ed" (Agriculture Education) is becoming a cornerstone of the district's wellness curriculum. One school, as part of its Fuel Up to Play 60 Farm to School Play, purchased yogurt- and cheese-mak-

ing equipment for all classes to use as part of weekly labs. Food-supplier Sodexo helped make the equipment purchase possible. These students are getting hands-on knowledge not just of where their food comes from, but of how dairy products are actually created.

■ In Highland Park, Illinois, students are overhauling the ways in which school lunch programs are run by implementing direct district partnerships with farmers to bring fresh and wholesome produce to schools. Unused perishable food is distributed through food banks to families in the community who otherwise would not be able to secure these nutritious foods, including fresh fruits and vegetables.

■ In Sacramento, California, students dedicated a common area for gardening that, due to poor soil quality, struggled to grow healthy plants. Students built and installed a compost system and connected with local coffee shops and the cafeteria to recycle food-waste compost to make the soil crop-ready.

■ In Waverly, Iowa, students rolled up their sleeves to learn about the importance of agriculture in the state by organizing a farm to school week that involved a convening of local farmers, school nutrition directors, and students to showcase locally grown agricultural products.

■ Across the country, students on farm to school field trips learn where their milk, cheese, and yogurt comes from, or students learn about the farm origins of nutritious foods.

### **Making farm to school happen: What schools and students need**

Through GENYOUth's school-funding initiatives, we have learned a great deal about what schools and students most need in order to bring the farm to school. And happily, many of our like-minded partners are stepping up to the plate to provide funding and other resources to meet these needs, which include:

- Field trips to nearby farms
- Farmer visits in schools, including mobile dairy farms
- Supplies to start, maintain, or improve school gardens
- Cafeteria/kitchen equipment to prepare and serve locally produced food, especially for salad bars and yogurt smoothies
- Yogurt- and cheese-making equipment
- Supplies for taste test events including food carts, blenders, and promotional posters
- Visits from professional chefs to host cooking classes or taste tests
- Milk coolers or other food storage equipment
- Murals, paint, and other supplies for a cafeteria revamp
- After-school cooking classes with friends and family
- Rain barrels and watering cans
- Composting systems
- Virtual farm tours

### **Vital sponsor support: Planting seeds for success with school grants**

GENYOUth's corporate, non-profit, and business supporters are key players in advancing farm to school efforts. State and regional dairy councils are providing Funds for Fuel Up to Play 60 to help thousands of schools launch and expand their farm to school initiatives. Technology giant SAP underwrites GENYOUth's AdVenture Capital program, many of whose student-originated project funding pitches are farm to school-centered.

Jamba Juice, a longtime GENYOUth partner, sponsors a GENYOUth-created school-garden grant program within California's Sacramento



## Good Thinking!

**Student ideas are a key element of GENYOUth's signature initiatives.**

### **FLOWERS, FRUITS, AND VEGGIES**

With funding from Fuel Up to Play 60, Ryan, an 8th grader from Yardley, Pennsylvania, proposed — and helped to build — a school garden to supplement nutritious meal options at the school that also generates produce for distribution to local homeless shelters. Annual and perennial flowers grown in the garden are used to improve the emotional wellbeing of the less fortunate by delivering them to community hospitals and the homebound.

### **DAIRY AND FRUIT SMOOTHIES**

At Stony Point North Elementary School in Kansas City, Kansas, students used their Funds for Fuel Up to Play 60 grant to stage a school taste-testing of smoothies made with only local dairy and fruit. Local celebrity chef Margaret Turner from KC Healthy Kids' "Farm to School Academy" was the tasting event's guest star, showing students how to make tasty, original, healthy, cool treats. And because students want to grow produce for future tastings, the school has installed six raised garden beds on-premises.

City Unified School District, and awarded 14 area schools school-garden grants totaling \$36,000. The program itself was science-based, with curriculum supported by the concept of gardens as outdoor, living science labs where students can learn about ecosystems, environmental stewardship, healthy food choices, and plant biology. These lessons are especially worthwhile in low-income neighborhoods in which students active in the program grow up, areas designated as "food deserts" because of their lack of grocery stores and farmers markets.

## Everybody wins

Through farm to school programs, students enjoy fresh, local foods, reconnect with the entire food-production system, and gain leadership experiences in their school community. Local farmers benefit from new channels of sales and they can help to educate students about agriculture and **sustainable farming practices**. The support of small farms, local farmers, and regional economies are all elements of the farm to school equation, which is helping to improve the quality of child nutrition and learning opportunities about food/nutrition/agriculture in schools nationwide.

In addition to wins for students and farmers (not to mention ranchers, fishermen, and local food processors and manufacturers), farm to school advocates point out that communities as a whole

profit from the movement, too. Farm to school efforts stimulate the local economy, help reduce carbon footprint thanks to local (rather than long-distance) transportation, and help directly improve local environments through school gardens and composting programs.

GENYOUth is committed to providing funding and programs that make possible everyday youth-led school and community efforts to improve access to healthful, local foods, which in turn strengthen regional food economies, enhance student and community consciousness of the value of “real foods,” and help students exercise their influence around this important responsibility. Most important, students gain in strength of voice, leadership skills, and the satisfaction that they are improving their health, their lives, their schools, and their communities.

## RESOURCES

### [www.dairygood.org](http://www.dairygood.org)

The National Dairy Council’s website offers information about dairy farmers’ commitment to students around the Farm to School movement, as well as on how foods from the farm, including dairy, are a crucial part of school meals, school wellness, and the dairy industry’s commitment to the environment and sustainability.

### [www.FuelUptoPlay60.com](http://www.FuelUptoPlay60.com)

Fuel Up to Play 60 offers funding opportunities for schools. The program’s Farm to School Play has ideas and resources to help students and schools learn about farm-raised food in their area and bring locally produced food into their school.

### [www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/farm-school](http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/farm-school)

The U.S. Department of Agriculture provides valuable farm to school information.

### [www.nationaldairyCouncil.org/Farm-To-Table](http://www.nationaldairyCouncil.org/Farm-To-Table)

Farm to table resources from National Dairy Council include recipes, information on sustainability, and more.

### [www.farmtoschool.org](http://www.farmtoschool.org)

The National Farm to School Network is an information, advocacy, and networking hub for communities around the Farm to School movement. Farm to School has start kits for students and teacher to learn about farmers and farming.

## GENYOUth<sup>®</sup>

EXERCISE YOUR INFLUENCE™

Founded in 2010 through a public-private partnership with the National Dairy Council and the National Football League, GENYOUth empowers students to exercise their influence, develop as leaders and social entrepreneurs, and create a healthier future for themselves and their peers. To support students and schools, we convene networks of private and public partners and raise funds for a range of nationwide nutrition and physical activity initiatives that bolster healthy, high-achieving students, schools and communities. Building on a legacy of passionate and empowered American youth, we believe that all youth, students in particular, are change-agents, who deserve the opportunity to reach their full potential by identifying and leading solutions that positively impact nutrition, physical activity, and student success across our nation. Learn more about GENYOUth partnership, volunteer, funding, and donation opportunities at [www.genyouthnow.org](http://www.genyouthnow.org), or contact us at [info@GENYOUthnow.org](mailto:info@GENYOUthnow.org).



**This brief was produced with generous funding support from National Dairy Council, who believes that youth knowledge of where their food comes from, and their active leadership and involvement in sustainable agriculture, are critical to the health of future generations.**

Established in 1915, National Dairy Council® (NDC), the nonprofit organization funded by the national dairy checkoff program, is committed to nutrition education and research-based communications. NDC provides science-based nutrition information to, and in collaboration with, a variety of stakeholders committed to fostering a healthier nation, including health professionals, educators, school nutrition directors, academia, industry, consumers and media. For more information, visit [www.NationalDairyCouncil.org](http://www.NationalDairyCouncil.org).