



**For immediate release
March 10, 2011**

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About IATP

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy works locally and globally at the intersection of policy and practice to ensure fair and sustainable food, farm and trade systems. IATP is headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota with an office in Geneva.

Minnesota schools embrace Farm to School

Participation rises from 10 to 123 districts in four years, new survey finds

MINNEAPOLIS – Participation in Farm to School is growing exponentially among Minnesota K-12 school districts, benefiting students and local farmers, according to the third annual Farm to School survey published today by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP).

Foodservice leaders at 165 Minnesota school districts, representing 50 percent of the K-12 districts in the state, responded to the survey. The survey found that the number of Minnesota school districts engaged in Farm to School rose from only 10 districts in 2006 to 123 in 2010.

Farm to School programs are designed to help educate children about how and where their food is grown, strengthen local economies and support healthy eating habits. The survey, conducted in partnership with the Minnesota School Nutrition Association (MSNA), also found that Minnesota schools are purchasing a growing variety of foods from local farmers. Apples, cucumbers, tomatoes, potatoes, winter squash, peppers, watermelon and carrots are among schools' locally grown favorites.

“Farm to School efforts bring fresh, less-processed and healthy food to Minnesota’s kids and open up a growing market for our region’s small- and mid-sized farmers,” said IATP’s JoAnne Berkenkamp. “Minnesota is lucky to have the three key ingredients for Farm to School: dedicated food service leaders, innovative farmers seeking local markets, and passionate students and parents.”

“We are excited about Farm to School,” said MSNA President Deb LaBounty. “More schools are diving in and the feedback from our students and farmers has been terrific.”

Among school districts engaged in Farm to School, 70 percent purchased directly from a farmer- or producer-owned business, while 78 percent purchased Farm to School foods via a distribution company. Most districts engaged in Farm to School reported purchasing up to \$25,000 in foods grown or raised in Minnesota during 2010.

“I think that Farm to School will be the next big thing for local foods,” said Riverbend Farm’s Greg Reynolds, who works with the Hopkins school district on Farm to School. “Every farm is located in a local school district, the demand is growing every year and schools serve a lot of meals every day.”

The number of districts engaged in school gardening, farmer visits, Farm to School classroom curriculum and similar activities also rose significantly in 2010, the survey found. The most common barriers to further growth in Farm to School include extra labor and food preparation time, budget constraints and difficulty connecting with local farmers.

In 2010, IATP and MSNA initiated the first Farm to School Week in Minnesota. Given the growing enthusiasm for Farm to School, celebrations will be expanded this year to the full month of September 2011. All schools in the state are encouraged to participate in Farm to School Month.

IATP has also launched a new web site—www.farm2schoolmn.org—for interested schools, parents, farmers and students. The website includes a map of all school districts in the state who are participating in Farm to School. Full results of the Farm to School survey are available at www.iatp.org.

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