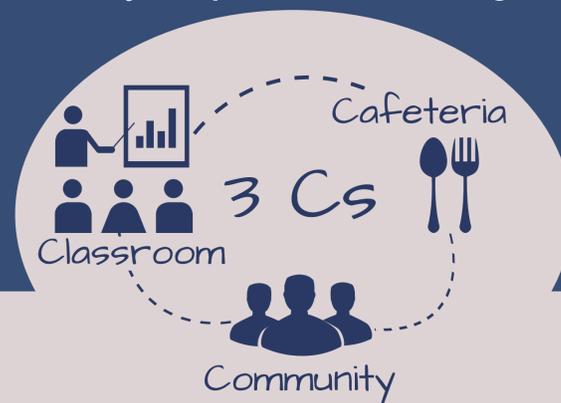




Chefs in Schools

Community Farm Alliance
Kentucky Department of Agriculture



Overview

Farm to School programs in Kentucky are designed to meaningfully integrate food access, health, education and community support by leveraging a “3 Cs” model – Community, Cafeteria and Classroom. Community Farm Alliance’s (CFA) Chefs in Schools program primarily addresses the Cafeteria component of the Farm to School model by bringing in a professional chef to boost the knowledge, skills and confidence of dining services staff to create healthy meals for kids using fresh ingredients.

The hired chef spends a month in a school, teaching staff the basics of large-scale, fresh-from-scratch cooking. The chef works with staff to develop recipes for cooking in volume, balancing the need to use flavors and seasoning that kids will eat, with Federal guidelines for school meals. Over the course of their time spent in the school cafeteria, the chef assesses kitchen equipment and provides recommendations to staff to both help them maximize the utility of what they have now and prioritize their needs for new equipment that will enable better fresh food preparation.

CFA partnered with the Kentucky Department of Agriculture to expand the program into four Eastern Kentucky counties. The Kentucky Department of Agriculture now fully runs the program. This case study reflects the takeaways from CFA's role in launching the program in Eastern Kentucky in 2016.



Opportunity Seized

Many school cafeterias rely on “heat and serve” meal preparation, so their staff and facilities are not well equipped to implement fresh-from-scratch cooking advocated by the Farm to School model.

“These investments [in the chefs in schools program] will help the next generation of Kentuckians grow up healthy and strong, and they also will teach them to value farmers and local food systems as a way of life.”

~Kentucky Commissioner of Agriculture, Ryan Quarles



Key Ingredients

A COMMITTED CHEF

The hired chef needs to be someone with a deep commitment to achieving the outcomes of the program. This role can be challenging, as changing mindsets takes time. Identifying the right chef, someone who is both highly qualified and deeply committed, makes all the difference.

CHAMPION WITHIN THE SCHOOL

Whether it’s the food services director, a teacher or a principal, identifying a champion within each school to launch the program and sustain early momentum is critical to changing mindsets about school meals in the long-term. The most successful efforts have been in schools where leadership has already made a commitment to prioritize serving healthy meals.

EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT AT ALL LEVELS

The Kentucky Department of Agriculture manages all of the relationships with school districts that make the program work. Accountability within the school or school district is also required to manage the program, particularly when it comes to local food procurement.





Lessons & Best Practices

IDENTIFY WHO NEEDS TO BE AT THE TABLE TO MAKE THIS WORK IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Each community has its own assets, and the benefits of kids eating better are tangible community-wide, not just within the school. Bringing other community voices to the table will help schools recognize, and ultimately reap, greater benefit of implementing this program.

BUILD FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES INTO GRANT FUNDING APPLICATIONS

A month of hands-on training from a professional chef can make a major difference in the quality of the food coming out of school cafeterias, but often that is where the program budget ends. By including subsequent follow-up activities by the chef in program planning and budgeting, you can ensure the longer-term, sustained shift in the way school meals are prepared.



ADAPTING PROCUREMENT PRACTICES CAN PRESENT A MAJOR HURDLE

A number of schools incorporated fresh foods into their menus, which is a huge step in the right direction, but since they continued to rely on standard distributors, the food wasn't procured locally. Establishing new relationships with local farmers and distributors requires a commitment on the part of the school or school district.



Impact on Health

HOLISTIC COMMUNITY HEALTH

The Chefs in Schools program, as part of the overall Farm to School model, is very community-focused. It starts with community conversations about what health looks like and means to them, and takes a holistic approach to community health that addresses physical, economic and social health. Integrating fresh, healthy eating in schools is often an early win that enables longer-term healthy decision making for communities in the future.

1.1 million lunches served in the 2015-16 school year



Impact on the Economy

REDUCING FOOD WASTE

Preparing meals that kids will actually eat means less food goes to waste. By developing chef-inspired recipes, using flavors and seasoning that kids enjoy, the healthy meals end up in bellies and not trash cans. In addition, providing a consistent market for local farmers to sell their fresh foods reduces food waste across the entire food system.

INCREASING SCHOOL LUNCH PARTICIPATION RATES

Preparing meals that kids will actually eat also benefits schools financially. Since school lunch funding is based on participation by students, more kids enjoying school lunches can translate into more funding for the school.

KEEPING FOOD PROCUREMENT DOLLARS LOCAL

When schools and school districts adapt their procurement practices, direct transactions between farms and schools keep dollars within the community. In rural areas especially, the way schools spend their money can be hugely influential on the local economy.



What's in Store

CFA's role in launching Chefs in Schools in Eastern KY was pivotal in getting kids access to fresh food. Their recommendations moving forward are to:



Communicate to schools and communities the benefit that occurs when kids are eating better, and fresh food is coming from local sources



Encourage schools to collect more data around their school lunch program to complement the data available to CFA and the Kentucky Department of Agriculture



Deepen partnerships within schools and communities to collaboratively implement all "3 Cs" – Community, Cafeteria and Classroom – of the Farm to School model



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