

# Vermont Farm to School Network

---



## Nourished and Ready to Learn!

### The farm to school connection

---

## School Leaders Campaign Toolkit

How to engage Superintendents, Curriculum Coordinators, School Boards, Principals and Business Managers to build awareness and support for Farm to School and School Nutrition Programs.



VERMONT  
FARM TO SCHOOL  
NETWORK

**This toolkit was produced by the Vermont Farm to School Network**

**The VFSN is a statewide network of FTS advocates, practitioners, and educators that provides leadership, coordination, and advocacy to advance new and existing farm to school efforts in Vermont classrooms, cafeterias, and communities.**



# Nourished and Ready to Learn!

## School Leaders Campaign Toolkit

### WHY THIS CAMPAIGN? WHY THIS TOOLKIT?

The School Leaders Campaign is a statewide effort to directly **ask school leaders to invest in farm to school and school nutrition programs.** The School Leaders Campaign is a 2019 priority of the Vermont Farm to School Network (VFSN). In a time of school district mergers and school consolidations, there is valid concern that years of farm to school work are vulnerable and could be diminished in an effort for district equity.

**Farm to school (FTS) is a powerful tool** for unifying a school district around a positive effort that can create a win-win environment for all involved. By school nutrition personnel offering local foods in school cafeterias, teachers engaging students with FTS experiential learning strategies, schools hosting community dinners, and school communities supporting local farmers, FTS can be implemented in the way that best fits a school district's goals.

**There has been some amazing progress!** Recent research (Vermont Dept of Health FTS Data Harvest 2018) found that 4 out of 5 Vermont schools have some form of FTS activity happening. These efforts have mostly been led by teachers, school nutrition professionals, parents, school nurses, a handful of principals, and other school staff or community members. However, many of the superintendents, school boards, curriculum coordinators, and financial directors that work at the supervisory union offices are unaware of the impact that FTS can have on student learning, student behaviors, student health, and student engagement. These school leaders may not have heard how:

- FTS is increasing cafeteria meal sales and revenue,
- positively impacting school culture,
- integrating into curricular standards,
- strengthening community connections,
- and systemically addressing the overall wellbeing of our children.

**This toolkit is a step-by-step guide** to help you start or restart the conversation with your school leaders and work toward a district commitment for farm to school. You are not alone! If you need support reach out to the School Leaders Campaign (Dana Hudson at [dhudson@shelburnefarms.org](mailto:dhudson@shelburnefarms.org)) will help!



# Nourished and Ready to Learn!

## School Leaders Campaign Toolkit

### WHO SHOULD USE THIS TOOLKIT?

You can use this toolkit to support or grow FTS in your district or supervisory union. This toolkit is designed for the medium-level to advanced FTS advocate that is already involved in some aspects of farm to school in their community.

- Do you work for a non-profit who focuses on community development, agriculture, education, or health and want your schools to see the impact FTS has on student health and learning, plus the overall impact on your community?
- Are you a school-based FTS coordinator who wants to see FTS expand to other schools in your district to better support the district equity goals?
- Are you a school nutrition professional serving meals to students and have been trying to buy more local product but want the tools and resources to advocate to your district financial/business officer?
- Are you a teacher that addresses academic standards as well as core competencies with students through classroom cooking, planting/harvesting in the school garden, community-based projects, or Vermont farm studies? Are you concerned that the intent of curricular equity district-wide will jeopardize these learning experiences?

YES! This toolkit is for you then.

If you are just getting started with FTS and are developing your understanding of the components of successful FTS programming, please reach out to the Vermont Farm to School Network (VFSN) for information. The VFSN can network you with like-minded supporters in your area that are already doing the work to support your learning.  
[vermontfarmtoschool.org](http://vermontfarmtoschool.org)

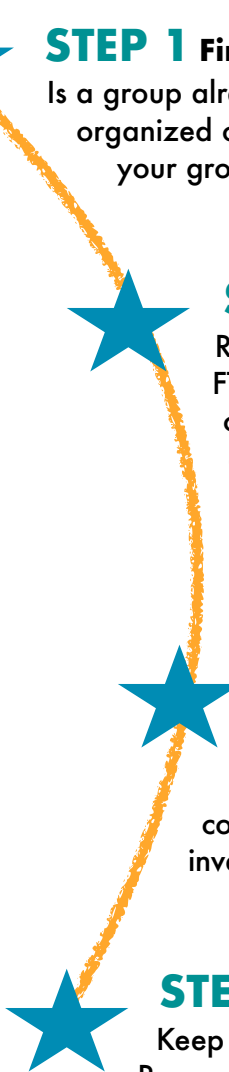
This campaign can be started at any point during the year. You know your district. Evaluate when might be the right time to start this campaign. There are some natural entry points within the school year. Consider school budgeting, school garden planting and harvesting, or community engagement conversations that the district hosts. Keep this in mind as you get started.



# Nourished and Ready to Learn!

## School Leaders Campaign Toolkit

### TABLE OF CONTENTS - STEPS OF THE CAMPAIGN

- 
- STEP 1 Find Partners and Plan** **Page 6 & 7**  
Is a group already meeting and discussing FTS? Join the group if they are already organized or seek out partners if no group exists. Take time to learn and plan with your group.
- STEP 2 Engage Your School Leaders** **Page 8 & 9**  
Reach out to your school leaders by inviting them to school lunch or other FTS activity to build relationships and their knowledge. After initial conversations/luncheon with school leaders, share stories with your community about your district farm to school work. Reach back out to your school leaders to organize a time to present at their administrative team meetings or possibly to the school board. This will be the time to use the variety of resources accompanying this toolkit.
- STEP 3 - Work Toward Commitment** **Page 10**  
Based on your informal luncheon with leaders and formal presentation to school board or administrative team, now you are ready to ask for their commitment. What this commitment looks like (policy, district-wide language, investment in meal programs, etc...) is dependent on the identified need.
- STEP 4 Circle Back to the Network** **Page 10**  
Keep connected to the statewide network of advocates.  
Reconnect to the School Leaders Campaign by connecting with Dana Hudson, [dhudson@shelburnefarms.org](mailto:dhudson@shelburnefarms.org)

**MORE CAMPAIGN MATERIALS ARE AVAILABLE AT**  
[www.vermontfarmtoschool.org/school-leaders-campaign](http://www.vermontfarmtoschool.org/school-leaders-campaign)



# Nourished and Ready to Learn!

## School Leaders Campaign Toolkit

### FIND PARTNERS and PLAN

One golden rule of farm to school, is **don't go it alone**. Identify people in your district to be working partners. Talk to the School Nutrition Director(s) or other school staff champions who can help you. Before you start planning what shared goals you have for your campaign, do some homework. Read the background information, do a little research, and answer the question of the **Farm to School District Puzzle**.

- more than 80% of the Vermont school districts report they participate in farm to school activities of some kind; That is great news, but there is much work to be done to deepen FTS work and reach schools that aren't involved.
- The Vermont Farm to School Network VFSN (established in 2009) is a statewide network that provides leadership, coordination, and advocacy to advance new and existing farm to school efforts in Vermont classrooms, cafeterias, and communities. Network members include farm to school advocates, practitioners, and educators across the state.

*The network goal is: By 2025, 75% of the Vermont Schools will lead the cultural shift to a value-based food system that engages 75% of our students in integrated food system education; community-based learning; nourishing universal meals; and the experience of self-efficacy; purchasing at least 50% from a socially just and environmentally and financially sustainable regional food system.*

- There are a number of valuable resources available to learn more about how farm to school brings together the learning in classrooms, cafeterias, and communities to improve the overall wellbeing of our children. Throughout Vermont there are also organizations that are available to help you. You can learn more and find local organizations on the VFSN website [vermontfarmtoschool.org](http://vermontfarmtoschool.org)

- **FILL OUT THE FARM TO SCHOOL DISTRICT PUZZLE!** It's not hard and it will help your group reflect on what is already happening in your district. Who has school gardens? What food on the menu is local? This is a great way to gather some information and you can familiarize yourself with this puzzle tool before asking school leaders to complete it too! (Puzzle is posted at [www.vermontfarmtoschool.org/school-leaders-campaign](http://www.vermontfarmtoschool.org/school-leaders-campaign) )



# Nourished and Ready to Learn!

## School Leaders Campaign Toolkit

Overall, this campaign is an **ask for school leaders to invest in Farm to School and School Nutrition Programs**. This is a chance to educate and connect people, but also have in mind some attainable outcomes or next steps you can share with your school or district. This investment can look like an investment of: time, money, policy, capital improvements or integrated language. Identify what your school/district is doing well and where you need to put energy. How do you bring it to the next level? Here are some examples of what you could advocate for:

- **Invest in the school nutrition program** - maximize the use of federal programs and reimbursements, increase the number of families returning meal program paperwork, increase support for school nutrition staff (labor, respect, money, and inclusiveness in overall school activities), increase time for lunch, and consider committing to self-operating meal programs for overall service to the school and community. Do away with language that says meal program is running at a “deficit” and move toward language about investing in meal program
- **Embrace district-wide curricular experiences** in Farm to School, with support for teacher professional development, school gardens, classroom cooking, farm field trips, and prioritize Farm to School experiential learning as a core value in quality teaching.
- **Create a culture of wellness** by adopting values-based language throughout district, look toward the highest denominator of what can be offered to our children. This could be within each school, the school board, the district wellness committee, and/or the supervisory office.
- **Support district level coordination** and funding for Farm to School efforts, that will ensure equitable access for all students. This coordination can function as a committee or as a single district-level staff person implementing district plans.

Consider the calendar when you are working on your campaign. Take advantage of the seasonality of what is happening within your schools but also within the school calendar cycle. Are students planting or harvesting in their school garden? Are teachers in the midst of inservice or at a time to plan FTS activities? Is it School Lunch Week? Is your school board working on the budget and discussing the future of the nutrition programs?



# Nourished and Ready to Learn!

## School Leaders Campaign Toolkit

### ENGAGE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

#### Invite Them to Join You!

Invite school leaders to a school meal, harvest supper or stakeholder meeting. **Reach out with personal invitations to the principals, superintendent, curriculum coordinator, business/financial director, and school board.** Let them know that you are inviting them to enjoy a meal together to see how school meals have changed since they were in school. You can host them as one large group or have a number of smaller group meals based on schedules. Make sure you give a heads up to the School Nutrition Director, so they can join you and plan accordingly.

If you get little response from the school leaders, invite them publicly while keeping the tone positive (not adversarial). As a community member or school staff you can go to a school board meeting and during the mandated public comment period, invite them all to join you at a school meal or stakeholder meeting. If you end up at a school board meeting, reference talking point language at the end of this toolkit.

At the school meal or meeting, share with them how meals work and what are the biggest challenges. This is a great place to give them the “How do We Feed Vermont’s School Children?” primer (see materials on website).

- Try to keep this meal informal and conversational.
- Make observations about how students use the cafeteria, and what messages they may be getting through the food presentation, the cafeteria environment, and the cafeteria staff relationship.
- Ask the school leaders what they remember about their school meals growing up, the good and bad. Emphasize that things have changed.

Share that your small group has been talking and thinking about the vision of how to improve the overall food and FTS experiences that students have in the school. Mention that you have even drafted some ideas that you would like to share, but be careful not to inundated them with too much information. Your goal is to build relationships and support, not to share all your team’s work over a meal. Ask if you could you join them for a district administrative leaders meeting to share what your group has been considering?



# Nourished and Ready to Learn!

## School Leaders Campaign Toolkit

### Eat and Tweet

After your luncheon or stakeholder meeting, tell the community. Publicize that you met or had them at lunch and celebrate. Make sure that the school leaders are reflected positively, thanking them for their time and attention to the wellbeing of our students.

- Tweet about it! Post it on Facebook!
- Write it up in your community Front Porch Forum
- Write a letter to the editor
- Mention it in the school newsletter or school webpage
- **ALWAYS send a thank you note to the school leaders for their time!**

Also, please take a minute to update the School Leaders Campaign about how your gathering went. A quick email or just forward your post to [dhudson@shelburnefarms.org](mailto:dhudson@shelburnefarms.org)

### Administrative Team Meeting and/or School Board

After your successful lunch, ask if you can meet and more formally present at an administrative team meeting. As a response to Act 46, most school districts have started to have monthly team meetings of all the district principals, superintendent and other district leaders. This is perfect place to share your team's vision and ideas. You can also offer a presentation to the school board. Make sure your offer goes through the superintendent and the school board chair. A school board meeting is a public forum and a great place to have more supporters join. At this presentation, go into detail about school meals.

**Do the District Farm to School Puzzle with them!** Give them a chance to learn more about their schools. Then share with them some of your team's vision and potential actions you would encourage them to consider.

*If you are feeling a little nervous about presenting, reach out to the Vermont Farm to School Network and the campaign manager (Dana Hudson [dhudson@shelburnefarms.org](mailto:dhudson@shelburnefarms.org)) to identify a local FTS organization that can help you with this step.*



# Nourished and Ready to Learn!

## School Leaders Campaign Toolkit

### WORK TOWARD COMMITMENT

Maybe your district leaders are not ready to commit at your luncheon or presentation, but how close do you think they are to making a district commitment to farm to school? Follow up with you school leaders with a more official request. Be specific.

- Are they ready to adopt district-wide language from one the schools FTS values statements?
- Will they support more classroom teachers attending a professional development workshop about how to integrate FTS into their curriculum?
- Do they want to focus attention on increasing the cafeteria revenue by getting a greater return on family-based paperwork that qualifies more students for free meals?

Write a quick thank you note that you can send to them personally but also post on social media and/or in the newspaper that asks them again publicly to make a commitment. Review what your team thinks the district should do next to strengthen FTS in your district. Close your thank you note with an invitation for the school leaders to share what their next actions will be to address your request.

### CIRCLE BACK

This School Leaders Campaign is trying to reach schools and districts around the state. Let's see our overall reach.

Inform the campaign manager how your lunch and presentation went. Share any "ah-ha's" and any other needs you see moving forward in your district. Drop a quick email to the campaign manager (Dana Hudson at [dhudson@shelburnefarms.org](mailto:dhudson@shelburnefarms.org)) to share some highlights. Who came to your events? What 3 things were most exciting? Did anyone emerge as a champion of these issues?

**Thank you for your excitement and dedication to the overall wellbeing of Vermont's children!**