Farm to School Fuels Economic Growth and Job Creation[1]

NATIONAL FARM to SCHOOL NETWORK

Introduction

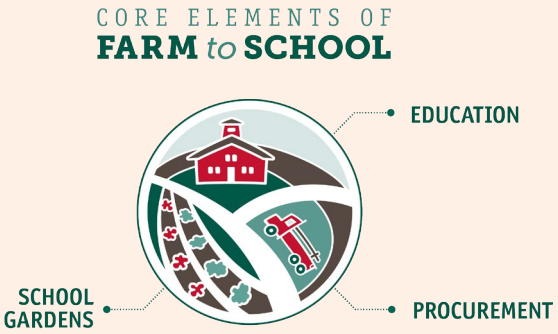
Farm to school offers cross-sectoral benefits for children, farmers and communities; however, limited data is available to truly understand the economic impacts of farm to school procurement. This study, ***Economic Impacts of Farm to School: Case Studies and Assessment Tools***, a collaborative project of the National Farm to School Network and Colorado State University, aims to fill this knowledge gap by documenting economic impacts of farm to school procurement and developing a standardized framework for farm to school impact analysis. The findings of these case studies provide new insight into the potential for farm to school procurement to positively impact local economies.

Farm to school strives to strengthen the connection communities have with fresh, healthy food and local food producers by changing food purchasing and education practices at schools and early care and education settings. Farm to school differs by location, but always includes one or more of the following three core elements of farm to school:

Procurement: local foods are purchased, promoted, and served in the cafeteria or as a snack or taste-test

Education: students participate in education activities related to agriculture, food, health, or nutrition

School gardens: students engage in hands-on learning through gardening.



Methods

The methodology used in this study elaborates our understanding of how school districts procure local foods (direct from farms, food hubs, processors, etc.) and how the structure of these supply chains impacts local economies. This is the first study attempt to accurately customize the farm to school production sector using primary data while taking into account the changing ways in which farm to school product is getting to schools.

Surveys: conducted with 26 producers in nine states selling products to schools.

Case studies: Minneapolis Public Schools and the state of Georgia. Conducted using primary data (survey results) and secondary data integrated in a modified IMPLAN analysis.[2]

Tools used:
(1) A widely adaptable survey and assessment protocol that can be used by others interested in evaluating the economic impacts of farm to school procurement.

(2) A standardized, replicable framework created to assess the local economic impact of a school or school district's shift to local food procurement.

Survey Findings

Most surveyed farmers started selling to schools after 2011 and all farmers planned to continue to sell to schools in the future. Farmers were most satisfied with delivery requirements, prices, reliable payments, delivery logistics, time commitment, and ease of communication. The biggest challenge identified by farmers was the volume of sales to schools.

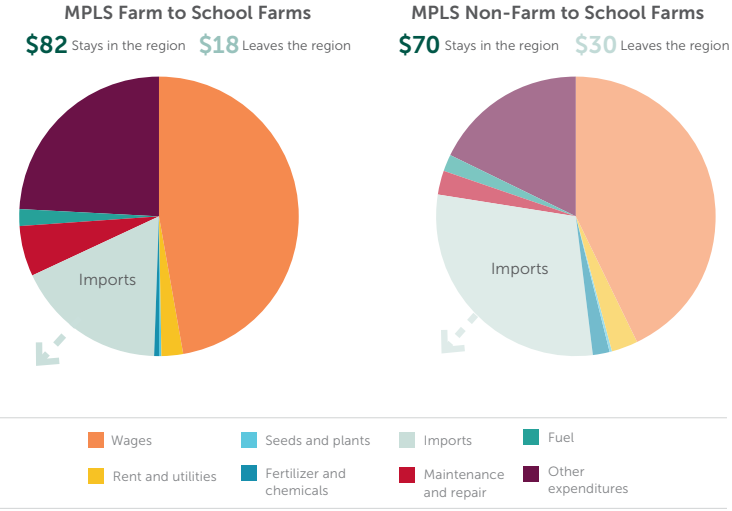
1 A summary of findings from Christensen L.O., Jablonski B.B.R., Stephens L., Joshi, A. (2017), Economic Impacts of Farm to School: Case studies and assessment tools, National Farm to School Network. Full report available at www.farmtoschool.org/resources-main/economic-impacts-of-farm-to-school. The study was a collaboration between National Farm to School Network and Colorado State University, with generous support from CoBank and AgriBank.

2 IMPLAN provides the most widely used proprietary data and software for economic impact assessments.

Case Studies

This economic analysis is unique in its rigor as it uses information from the farmer survey and information from previous studies (including the USDA Farm to School Census and the USDA ARMS data) to construct a model for farm to school economic impact. Unlike previous studies, this economic impact analysis takes into account reported farmer expenditures, direct to school and intermediary sales to schools (food hubs, processors, etc.) and opportunity costs of local sales. Researchers used this model to present farm to school case studies for Minneapolis Public Schools (MPLS) and the State of Georgia.

Distribution of $100 in variable costs for farm to school and non-farm to school farm businesses inside and outside of MPLS



Key Case Study Findings

Farm to school farms purchase more inputs locally, keeping more money in the local economy: .

For every $100 spent, MPLS farm to school farms keep $82 in the region (vs. $70 for non-farm to school farms).

For every $100 spent, Georgia farm to school farms keep $82 in the region (vs. $79 for non-farm to school farms).

Without considering opportunity cost, for every additional dollar of final demand for farm to school farm products:

An additional $0.93 is generated in related sectors in MPLS.

An additional $1.11 is generated in related sectors in Georgia.

Economic output multipliers and employment multipliers for farm to school farms from the case studies are larger than the more traditional fruit and vegetable production sector:

Economic Output Multipliers
Minneapolis = 1.45, Georgia = 1.48

Employment Multipliers
Minneapolis = 1.96, Georgia = 3.35

Call to Action

Use the farmer / producer survey protocol: The sample size for the producer surveys in this study was small. We hope you will adapt and use the survey tool to collect additional information from farmers selling to schools.

Use the economic impact assessment methodology created for farm to school procurement: While the two case studies in this study clearly demonstrate that farm to school farms purchase more inputs from the local economy per unit of output, which results in positive local economic impact, additional research and support is needed to better understand the benefits of farm to school and to reach more stakeholders with this information.

Farm to school planning, implementation and advocacy: Use the data presented in this study to facilitate more rigorous and comparable economic impact assessments of farm to school in your area. This will fill an important gap in knowledge and open new opportunities for farm to school implementation and advocacy.

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