

BUILDING CAPACITY TO SUPPORT FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAMS:

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY ASSETS IN LOCAL FOOD PROCUREMENT

This research leveraged qualitative data from an exploratory study (n=14) of Farm to School (F2S) programs in Oregon. With these data, we explore:

1. How do school district assets—in terms of their community capitals¹—shape participation in F2S procurement?
2. What is the role of financial incentives in F2S procurement?
3. How do available community capital stocks shape how incentives are utilized and the ultimate success of F2S programs at the school district level?

In other words, here we explore how F2S procurement outcomes might have been different had financial incentives been invested in broader or different aspects of a school district's community capitals—social, cultural, financial, built, natural, human, and political capital (see Table below). Doing this also helps us talk about the embeddedness of procurement incentive effectiveness.²

CAPITAL	DEFINITION
Natural	The natural biophysical assets of any given locale—can include natural resources (e.g., water, soil, air, minerals), amenities (e.g., trout streams and sandy beaches), and natural beauty.
Cultural	Institutionalized (widely shared) cultural symbols—attitudes, preferences, beliefs—that shape how we see the world, what we take for granted, and possible alternatives for social change.
Human	Includes the skills, knowledge, and abilities of the people within a community to enhance local as well as access to outside resources.
Social	The social glue of a community—includes levels of mutual trust, reciprocity, and a sense of share identity and future.
Political	Access to structures of power and power brokers as well as the ability to influence the rules and regulations that shape access to resources.
Financial	The financial resources available to invest in things like community capacity building and social entrepreneurship.
Built	Infrastructure (also includes built “natural” areas, like reconstituted wetlands, ski runs, and artificial coral reefs).

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Key Takeaways

- » A growing number of states have enacted policies to support FTS; the most frequently enacted policies support local procurement activities
- » Incentives work most effectively when school districts are already in possession of rich community capital stocks.
- » More investment is needed to build capacity in school districts when trying to expand F2S adoption.
- » F2S “champions” have their place and can play a significant role in fostering F2S adoption, but their presence might also mask community capital deficiencies that might later become apparent when those individuals leave.



Main Findings

“Procurement intensity” is positively related to a school district’s community stocks.

Procurement intensity is a measure that includes (i) the number of activities involved in procuring and serving local foods in the school cafeteria, (ii) the frequency of serving local foods, including fruits, vegetables, protein, and grains, (iii) the expenditure on local foods as a proportion of total food expenditure, (iv) the number of education and promotion activities directly related to procurement activities, and (v) strategic activities at schools to facilitate and assist in procurement of local foods.³

We “mapped” school districts according to their community capital stocks. Districts with the highest intensity measures also had higher levels of community capital stocks. The figure on right overlays the school districts studied in terms of their community capital stocks. (Note: we refer to “cultural capital” as “symbolic capital” to utilize language we thought would be more accessed to respondents.) We also learned that urban school districts consistently had higher levels of community capital stocks than rural school districts.

Available community stocks influence the perceived value of procurement incentives.

While all respondents supported receiving procurement incentives, those in school districts with lower levels of community assets expressed that they would have preferred to use those financial resources in other ways, if given the option. These preferences often had to do with building up community capital stocks, such as in terms of F2S capacity (e.g., onboarding, training, purchasing kitchen equipment, more freezer space).

Heavy reliance on “champions” is unsustainable.

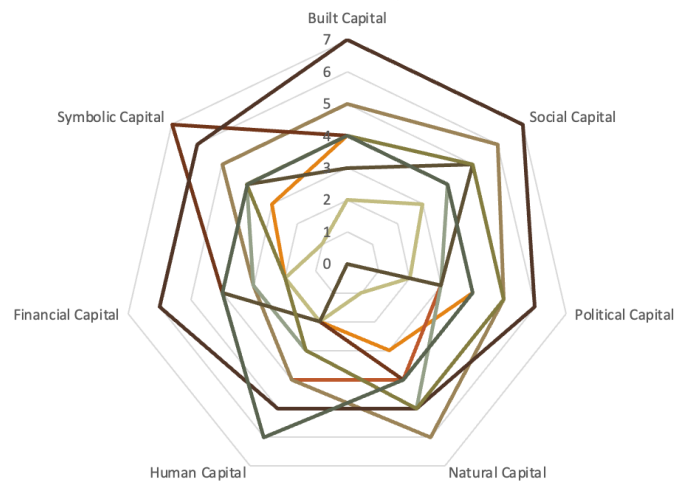
Champions “subsidized” school districts, as they were able to leverage their own social and political capital stocks—those things that made them appear “energetic,” “passionate,” and “connected,” according to others—for the F2S program’s benefit. (“Champions” refers to F2S actors who “bring to the table personal passions and commitments, or prior organizational agendas.”⁴) This is not a sustainable practice, however, as these capitals rarely “stick.” In other words, when “champions” leave a district, so too go those resources.

This research comes from: Carolan, M., Hale, J., and Johnson, A. (under-review) Building capacity to support farm to school programs: Leveraging community capitals to explore the

What is Farm to School?

F2S activities take place in the cafeteria (e.g., procurement of local foods and cafeteria promotions), the classroom (e.g., integrating nutrition and/or agricultural education), and outside the classroom (e.g., school gardens, farm visits). The activities vary by school and school district.

All School's Capital



opportunity costs of procurement incentives that support local food procurement. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*. Copy available upon request.

¹ Emery, M., Fey, S., & Flora, C. (2006). Using community capitals to develop assets for positive community change. *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice*, 13: 1-19.

² Hinrichs, C.C., 2000. Embeddedness and local food systems: notes on two types of direct agricultural market. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 16(3), pp.295-303.

³ Kashyap, P., Jablonski, B.R. and Bauman, A., 2024. Exploring the relationships among stocks of community wealth, state farm to school policies, and the intensity of farm to school activities. *Food Policy*, 122. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2023.102570>.

⁴ Bagdonis, J.M., Hinrichs, C.C. and Schafft, K.A., 2009. The emergence and framing of farm-to-school initiatives: Civic engagement, health and local agriculture. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 26, pp.107-119.

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