

HOPE STARTS HERE

Food Systems Education: Linking Big Ideas Across the School Community

By Jen Cirillo

Farm to School (FTS) programs are cropping up around the country, connecting students to sustainability efforts in their own school communities. The 3Cs framework of FTS puts the learner at the center of the school food system, connecting the Cafeteria, Classroom, and Community through education and action. FTS helps students access nutritious and fresh foods, provides meaningful and relevant curriculum, and connects student learning to the real world of farming and food systems. Most importantly, it highlights each student's role within the food system, as a participant and potential agent of sustainable change.

Food systems education is where educators play a vital role in this whole-school-whole-community approach. You can bring math, literacy, social studies, and science alive when you connect students to the elegant simplicity and complexity of local to global food systems.

The Big Ideas of Sustainability (bit.ly/SFBIGIdeas) can inspire cross-disciplinary connections and school-wide engagement, as well as deepen community partnerships, campus practices, and culture. Try these suggestions.

Start with big ideas, themes and standards: The Big Idea of Change links with thematic strands (www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands) in the National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies such as People, Places, and Environments; Culture; and Time, Continuity, and Change. These standards help us develop learning outcomes—knowledge and skills we want students to gain.

Add inquiry: Learners are naturally curious. Give them a question that they can engage with and develop an understanding of over time. An essential question such as, "In what ways does the land shape culture?" invites deep cross-curricular exploration and learning.

Next, layer on food systems and your local place: By integrating food production and engaging with local farmers, historians, and the

students' families, they begin to see the connections to their place and lives. You can create learning activities to explore why people settled near rivers in your community, how human migration patterns have changed over time, and how shifting demographics have shaped the food and culture of your city.

Wrap up with an assessment: You may have purposefully linked big ideas, standards, the local place, and food systems, but did your students get it? Create an assessment that helps you see what your students understand. For example, a class could create a museum display for their community illustrating how human migration has impacted the natural and agricultural systems in their city. 🍏

Suggested Activities

- Write haikus about your fresh fruit and vegetable snacks.
- Plant seeds for a school garden exploring plant life cycles.
- Learn about food access and healthy foods in your community.
- Start a school-run farmers' market.
- Run a semester-long inquiry into food justice. No matter where you begin, a wealth of resources is available to get you started.

Resources

National Farm to School Network
(farmtoschool.org)
Vermont Food Education Every Day
(VTFEED.org)
Center for Ecoliteracy, Making the Case
(ecoliteracy.org)
Shelburne Farms
(www.shelburnefarms.org)
Classroom ideas linking the Big Ideas of Sustainability with food systems education
(<https://vtfeed.org/feed-resource-library>)



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