



VERMONT FARM TO SCHOOL CASE STUDY
The Cafeteria Unifying the Whole Community
Milton High School



This Farm to School case study was developed by the Vermont Farm to School Network. It is one of a series of five that demonstrate the range of Farm to School experiences, successes, and challenges across the state in K-12 schools and early care programs. Vermont defines Farm to School as engagement and connection among the classroom, cafeteria, and community—including farms. We hope that you'll learn and apply some valuable tips or considerations to your own Farm to School programming.

Milton High School bustles with activity. Students munch on healthy snacks from the cafeteria salad bar and discuss the school's garden plans during their breaks. The suburban town, where the Lamoille River lazily flows into Lake Champlain, is vibrant and growing. The community's commitment to the school reflects the school's dedication to innovation and creating great students and staff.



SNAPSHOT

Supervisory union:

Milton Town School District, Town of Milton

Town population: 10,352

School population & grade levels:

500 students, grades 9-12

Food program management structure:

Independently operated

Free & reduced rate: 37%

Meals served:

Breakfast, lunch, after-school, snacks and lunch to two local day cares, summer meals program

How local is “local”? Two tiers define local: Hyper-local is defined as being from the Milton community, and local is defined as food produced or processed in Vermont plus a 30-mile radius of the state.

Sources of support:

- [] Vermont Farm to School grantee
- [x] Northeast Farm to School Institute participant
- [x] Works with local partners, including Milton Parks and Recreation, Milton Community Garden, Milton Town Department of Parks & Recreation, Milton Community Youth Coalition, and Milton Family Practice

How Milton Does Farm to School

Local food served in the cafeteria supports Milton and the broader Vermont community.

The Farm to School coordinator invigorates the program by supporting efforts across the school. The position is funded through the school nutrition budget.

Integration of Farm to School learning across the classroom, cafeteria, and the community creates a unifying presence and culture of healthy habits.

Having food service cater local events builds rapport between the school and community, while helping to fund Farm to School activities and local food purchasing.

A composting program helps reduce food waste and promotes environmental sustainability.

Nutrition education is taught through monthly taste tests.

Farm field trips are an integral part of making learning come alive.



“The food service staff created a cafeteria that is warm and inviting. The culture creates an appreciation for food, and an interest in learning how it grows and where it’s sourced from.”

**—Mary Jane Stinson
Principal**

How Milton Makes It Work

Milton invests in people. School nutrition staff, teachers, and administrators are encouraged to educate themselves on best practices for incorporating Farm to School in teaching and school meals. Continuous learning helps encourage a culture receptive to change, cultivate creative problem solving, and provides ongoing opportunities for student and staff participation.

Milton operates its cafeteria with an open door policy. Hungry students are welcome in the cafeteria for food at all times of day, beyond the designated breakfast and lunch hours. This policy allows both students and teachers to have access to food as they need it. Principal Mary Jane Stinson respects the food service staff and how they created a cafeteria that is “warm and inviting,” resulting in an “appreciation for food, how it grows, and where it’s sourced from.” Food service staff easily build rapport with students by providing an apple for snack in between classes or a leftover lunch to after-school athletes. Anecdotally, the administration believes this policy has positively influenced student conduct and test scores and decreased detention rates and nurse visits. The school has begun to measure these results empirically.

Funding for a Farm to School coordinator is included in the school nutrition budget.

The school values nutritious food, supports student and staff health, and invests in the community by making local purchases. To ensure there was incorporation of these values across the three C’s: cafeteria, classroom,

and community, Milton High School developed a Farm to School coordinator position. Initially, a USDA 2014 Farm to School Grant funded the role, but after two years, the grant funding ended, and the coordinator left. While efforts by a handful of teachers kept the Farm to School program going, school-wide efforts lagged without an individual to spearhead programs in this large school district. Leaders recognized that the coordinator role was key to their academic programs' success, and have subsequently created an annually funded position.

Milton accepts that transformation is an upward spiral. Initially the food service director focused on improving the meal quality. This increased student and teacher participation in the meal program and, subsequently, increased the available funds not only through higher participation, but also through federal reimbursement, greater buy-in from the school board, and elevated support from the broader community. The rising financial and community support is reinvested into Milton's Farm to School efforts.

Milton allows teachers and Farm to School champions to try new things. Risks, within reason, can be taken because the staff is flexible and supported by one another and the administration. Time and workload are spread across the whole school community so no one person feels burdened by extra work. For example, three teachers and the Farm to School coordinator came together to plan and build a hoop house, which would have been too much work for one person alone. The potential hiccups of new, innovative projects are mitigated by being flexible, reworking budgets, and sharing Farm to School responsibilities.



The Economic Value of Engaging in Farm to School

Milton High School's meal participation rate grew by 50% after the school nutrition director implemented more scratch cooking and Farm to School programming. The increased funds were spent directly on increasing food quality and expanding local procurement. The expanded budget also provided the school with funding to create a food service position that focuses part-time on Farm to School coordination. By expanding its food program through catering and community events, Milton High School generates an additional \$75,000 to \$100,000 per year, which it invests back in the meal program and buying local foods. Currently, the school spends approximately 20% of the total food budget (\$200,000) on local food.

How Farm to School Benefits This Learning Community

The school nutrition program has become a community connection. In addition to selling school meals, the program hosts celebrity breakfasts, puts on harvest dinners, and caters events throughout the community. These events not only strengthen relationships between the school and community, but also provide additional funding sources for the program.

Milton's food service director inspires action. The director is a champion and leader within the school, who has developed new leaders to help sustain coordinated Farm to School efforts during times of lower community engagement. He applies for grants and strives to grow the Farm to School program. His passion for school meals and nutrition is felt throughout the school. His ability to expand the meals program, gain national acclaim, and deliver nutritious meals has empowered administrators to further invest in the program.

Community pride was built through national recognition. As the result of an article the school nutrition director wrote in 2013, First Lady Michelle Obama invited Milton High School students to the White House to celebrate the school's innovations in serving fresh fruits and vegetables to students. Excitement and pride continue to exist in the community around its leadership in the local food movement, which continues to boost enthusiasm when challenges arise.



WHAT'S NEXT?

A community garden plot is being established on school grounds that aspires to serve as both a space for community members to garden during the summer months and a teaching space for kids during the school year.

Administrators are beginning to measure the impact of Farm to School activities on student wellness and academic performance.

The food and nutrition services will expand local purchasing by 2% to 5% per year.

Milton School High School will further develop its Farm to School culture so that it does not rely on only a few champions.

MEMBERS OF THE INTERVIEW TEAM: Mary Jane Stinson, High School Principal; Steve Marinelli, Food Service Director; Keely Agan, Farm to School Coordinator; Rick Sharf, Biology Teacher working with the school's gardens; Joanne Davidman, Consumer Economics Teacher.



VERMONT FARM TO SCHOOL NETWORK

Ready to work on your Farm to School plan?

Check out the Farm to
School Planning Toolkit at

vtfeed.org/toolkit

to see how you can begin
integrating the cafeteria,
classroom, and community
in your school! Find
additional resources at
vermontfarmtoschool.org

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The Vermont Farm to School Network is a statewide network engaging students and school communities in a local food and farm culture that nurtures children's health, cultivates viable farms, and builds vibrant communities. **vermontfarmtoschool.org**