

Building a Culture & Staying Power of Farm to School Programming



FOOD EDUCATION EVERY DAY

A project of NOFA-VT and Shelburne Farms

Context

Vermont FTS Network Goal

“By 2025, 75% of Vermont Schools will lead the **cultural shift** to a values-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.”



VERMONT
FARM TO SCHOOL
NETWORK

Context

- Built on evaluation of FTS Institute where 9/10 schools reported improvements in school culture
- Interested in what causes staying power of innovative programming



FTS Rubric & Values

Section IV: Integration and Staying Power

Administrative Support

School Culture

Communication

Funding/Resources

Indicator	Emerging	Developing	Deepening	Thriving
Administrative Support	School administration is interested in the creation of a farm to school program.	Administration is in regular contact with farm to school activities and/or farm to school committee.	Administration supports staff-wide farm to school professional development and participates in farm to school activities.	Administration supports inclusion of farm to school tasks into job descriptions and/or provides release time for staff to do farm to school work. Administration is a resource to other school administrators on how to start and sustain a farm to school program.
School Culture	There is general interest in the school community in the creation of a farm to school program.	A farm to school committee has been created and is active with representation from school administration, school nutrition staff, faculty, and community members.	School community members continually revisit their farm to school action plan and develop ideas for the future. All school community members are provided on-going opportunities for farm to school professional development. School community has waste reduction strategies that meet state guidelines and are implemented school-wide (classroom, cafeteria, events, etc).	School community members feel farm to school is integral part of school, part of "who they are." School is showcased as farm to school model for district or state and school practices are shared at local, regional, or national level. When new school staff are hired, interest in and ability to contribute to farm to school program is considered as a hiring criterion.
Communication	Communication about farm to school takes place within peer groups (faculty, administration, school food service, families, community members).	Some members of school community are aware of farm to school program. School community members start to communicate about farm to school across peer groups.	Most members of school community are aware of farm to school program. Vehicles for communication across peer groups have been established (such as meetings, e-mail list, newsletters, website, etc.)	All members of the school community are aware of farm to school program. System in place for communicating about farm to school that allows everyone to have access to information.
Funding/Resources	Funding or resource possibilities identified to launch farm to school program.	Initial funding or resources secured to support farm to school efforts.	Diversified sources of funding and resources developed to sustain farm to school.	System for funding and access to resources in place that can sustain farm to school program over the long-term.

Context

School #	Number of years since participating in FTS Institute
School #1	5 years
School #2	4 years
School #3	7 years
School #4	4 years
School #5	1 years
School #6	5 years
School #7	5 years
School #8	1 years
School #9	5 years
School #10	3 years

Interviewed 10 principals of Vermont PK-12 public schools where at least 30% of students were receiving free or reduced-price lunches.

Research Questions

- ★ How does school culture support the development and sustainability of FTS programs?
- ★ How does engaging in FTS affect school culture?



School Culture Defined:

A school's culture is one of the most powerful predictors of success in implementing new educational strategies (1). School culture is both the explicit and implicit values, traditions, and messages expressed in the day to day affairs of a school, and has been linked to educational value measures including teacher behavior, which impacts curriculum, school climate, and student achievement (2).

1 Anderman, 1991; Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996

2 Meier, 2012, Stolp & Smith, 1995

Major Findings

- ★ Relationships are foundational
- ★ Value of FTS experienced & communicated
- ★ Prioritization leads to embeddedness



Finding #1: Relationships are foundational

- Successful FTS programming was often attributed to strong **foundational community partnerships** and **internal relationships** with school nutrition professionals, teachers, and other school staff.
- FTS often **requires added planning and experimentation**. As such, relationships and **trust** were key in setting the stage for a healthy school culture that could embrace FTS.
- Strong relationships with farmers helped teachers and students **access relevant and meaningful content and gain hands-on skills**.
- School nutrition professionals in relationship with farmers helped them **source local food**.
- Students who engaged with school nutrition staff **better understood the school's menu**.

Finding #1: Relationships are foundational

Internal Relationships

*“It’s not as a result of engaging in FTS. FTS is a component... All this stuff is because we’re **engaging in relationships and community building** and we’re putting that first.” ~ Janet*

External/Community Partnerships

*“We’re making an extension, we’re making connections with others schools, other people. **This work cannot be done in isolation.**” ~ Lydia*



Finding #1: Relationships are foundational

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Celebrate the successes** of FTS program development with a variety of stakeholders
- Acknowledge small successes in staff development along the way, with an eye towards **continual, incremental growth**
- School leaders, teachers and child nutrition directors should develop **relationship-building strategies within the school** and with the larger community as a foundation for effective partnerships
- Language around FTS programming should be **aligned to reflect the values** of other educational and/or community-supported initiatives

Finding #2: Value must be experienced & communicated

- Many principals indicated that FTS programs **aligned with their school and community culture** that put “**what’s best for students**” at the heart of their educational practice.
- In addition to the academic outcomes, **students experience benefits through the school nutrition** program.
- Several principals said FTS becomes part of the school culture when the **values inherent in FTS mirror the values found in the community.**
- Previous research reinforces that if FTS is to become embedded into a school and benefit students and the community, **it must be supported by the values, traditions, and messages of the school staff**⁴.

Finding #2: Value must be experienced & communicated

Experienced

*“If we had tried to do that [FTS] in a traditional classroom, there’s always a handful of kids who either aren’t going to get it or they’re going to get frustrated and then it becomes a behavior issue, but... **when they’re seeing it, feeling it, and touching it, they are able to be successful.**”*

~ Brian

Communicated

*“The year after we came back with that [Farm to School action plan], the **school board rewrote the vision** and mission and included the stewardship language in the mission of the school.” ~ Janet*



Finding #2: Value must be experienced & communicated

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Plan and implement **regular communication** about FTS programming through multiple means
- **Highlight the values of FTS to a variety of school stakeholders**, including, but not limited to: families, school board members, all staff members and faculty, and school district administration
- Use **already in-place means of communication** about the school menu - website, Facebook, newsletters - to share stories about local farm partnerships and new recipe taste tests
- **Gather and document stories** to give regular reports and testimony from students on the value of FTS

Finding #3: Prioritization leads to embeddedness

- Embeddedness - or the nature of being deeply ingrained in school and community practices - is recognized when **FTS is explicitly connected to other initiatives**.
- Multiple principals indicated that while turnover in positions is undesirable, they **used open positions to embed FTS in the job application** criteria.
- Other means of prioritizing FTS included providing stipends for FTS committee members as a way to **honor the time members spend above and beyond** normal contract hours.
- Another strategy to make FTS easier to use and get teachers on board with **school-wide taste tests** is to provide support staff.
- As **relationships are developed among multiple stakeholders in the school community** and FTS value is experienced, FTS becomes more deeply embedded into school culture

Finding #3: Prioritization leads to embeddedness

*“Part of that is that there’s a plan... we **made it a priority to hire someone to manage it [the greenhouse and garden], so that it’s not dependent on teachers giving up their free time.**” ~ Thomas*

*“... I want to emphasize that... **teachers need way more than contracted time to collaborate and imagine and also to make mistakes and celebrate the learning from those mistakes.**” ~ Charles*



Finding #3: Prioritization leads to embeddedness

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- FTS needs to be **seen as part of a larger system of policies and activities** supporting healthy food choices for children
- Inviting administrators, school board members, and outside personnel to **dine with students** and see students engaging in hands-on learning experiences through FTS
- Set goals with staff and departments in a way **tailored to meet individual needs and comfort levels** with FTS programming
- **Advocate for increased planning and reflection time**, stipends and committees to support integration of FTS programming
- **Dedicate time during contract hours** or **allocate funds** to support staff and faculty in planning for FTS programming

Question, Comments,
Considerations?

Poll

Q1: The content presented in this workshop helps me better understand the role I can play in farm to school

Respond on scale of Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree

Q2: The workshop presenters informed, motivated and/or inspired me!

Respond on scale of Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree

Q3: The resources and information in this workshop has/will impact (Multiple Choice)

- A. Our team's action plan**
- B. My professional practice**
- C. Students in my school**
- D. Me, personally**

Resources

★ Journal of Child Nutrition and Management

★ VT FEED Research Brief

