



Arkansas Department of Agriculture

Farm to School Annual Report 2023



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Respectfully submitted to:

*The Honorable Sarah Huckabee Sanders, Governor
House and Senate Committees on Agriculture, Forestry, and Economic Development*

Prepared by:

The Arkansas Department of Agriculture in collaboration with the Arkansas Department of Education, Arkansas Department of Health, Arkansas Department of Human Services, and the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service.

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- *Jessica Chapman, Farm to School and Early Childhood Education Program Coordinator*
- *Joby Miller, Graphic Artist*

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BACKGROUND

Farm to school enriches the connection communities have with fresh, healthy food and local food producers by changing food purchasing and education practices at schools, early childhood education sites, and alternative learning environments. Students gain access to healthy, local foods as well as educational opportunities such as school gardens, cooking lessons, and farm field trips.

Farm to school empowers children and their families to make informed food choices while strengthening the local economy and contributing to vibrant communities. Farm to school implementation differs by location, but always includes one or more of the following:



SCHOOL GARDEN

Students engage in hands-on learning through gardening and farming;

EDUCATION

Students participate in education activities related to agriculture, food, health, or nutrition; and

LOCAL PROCUREMENT

Local foods are purchased, promoted, and served in the cafeteria as a snack or taste test.

At the national level, the birth of the phrase “farm to school” can be traced back to the 1990s when pilot projects began in California and Florida to explore the possibility of transforming children’s relationship with food by exposing them to fresh, local food.

Arkansas’s initial steps with farm to school also occurred in the 1990s. More information on the history of farm to school in Arkansas can be found at arfarmtoschool.org/about/history.

FARM TO SCHOOL IN ACTION IN FISCAL YEAR 2023

In fiscal year 2023 (FY2023), schools, farms, state agencies, nonprofits, and other organizations helped the Arkansas farm to school movement grow. Below is a summary of the cumulative impact of farm to school efforts in Arkansas in FY2023.



SCHOOL GARDENS, EDUCATION, AND LOCAL PROCUREMENT

The three pillars of farm to school are school gardens, education, and local procurement.

SCHOOL GARDENS

A garden is considered a school garden when it supports the learning of children aged 18 or younger. This includes gardens located at schools, early childhood education facilities, and alternative learning environments.

School gardens are fantastic educational tools and provide students with opportunities to eat healthy foods, connect to nature, and learn about nutrition. School gardens also provide an avenue for students to engage in hands-on learning through gardening and farming. Studies show that when kids are involved in growing food, they are more likely to eat fruits and vegetables and more willing to try different kinds.

As of October 12, 2023, there are 350 school gardens across the state of Arkansas. These gardens vary in type and include greenhouses, raised beds, and/or containers inside a classroom.

Schools grow and produce all types of products, including fruits, vegetables, herbs, chickens, bees, flowers, and more in an effort to teach students about our local food system. A map of all the school gardens can be found at arfarmtoschool.org/school-gardens/map/?category=school-gardens&sort=a-z.

EDUCATION

Schools, early childhood education facilities, and alternative learning environments all play a critical role in providing students with avenues to increase their knowledge of how food is grown and produced, their understanding of the importance of healthy, nutritious food to their health and development, and their ability to make healthy food and beverage choices.

In a farm to school program, students participate in educational activities related to agriculture, food, health, or nutrition, which can take on many different forms. Nutrition education can happen through hands-on lessons in a school garden or in the classroom. Schools may utilize curriculum tailored to teach healthy nutrition while providing take-home recipes for children to try with their family. Educational opportunities can also happen in the cafeteria by conducting taste tests of locally grown fruits and vegetables and providing learning materials that enhance children’s understanding of the foods they are consuming.

Additionally, more advanced lessons in science and math can focus on plants, animals, the natural world, and how our overall health is connected to other processes. There is no specific mold for delivering farm to school components, but education can easily connect to existing state academic standards.

The following organizations have prioritized farm to school in their education work across Arkansas:

- Apple Seeds, Inc.
- Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance
- FoodCorps Arkansas
- University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service



Apple Seeds, Inc. is a nonprofit based in Northwest Arkansas that creates garden-based programs to educate young students about healthy food and works to increase students’ access to nutrient-rich foods.

Apple Seeds operates a teaching farm and teaching kitchen in Fayetteville as a place for students to learn, cook, share healthy meals together, and be inspired to do the same in their kitchens at home. The nonprofit also provides cooking education in schools and through farm-to-table cooking classes.

Accomplishments in FY2023 include:

- Farm to school educational programs reached 6,556 students, grades K-5;
- Trained 55 Growing My Plate facilitators across the state on how to implement the curriculum with students;
- Taught 1,614 students through Growing My Plate Program; and

- Grew, harvested, and donated 9,224 pounds of fresh, farm-grown produce, which accounted for 7,686 meal equivalents shared with food-insecure students and families.



The Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance (The Alliance) is an association of hunger relief organizations, advocates, and state/federal programs that seek to reduce hunger through

emergency food assistance, education, empowerment programs, and advocacy. The mission of The Alliance is to collaborate as a statewide voice advancing equitable solutions to hunger.

The Alliance supports a network of partners throughout the state of Arkansas that implement Cooking Matters, an evidence-based nutrition education program that teaches families on limited food budgets how to shop for and prepare healthy meals at home. The Alliance assists community partners through training and funding support by providing

curricula and participant incentives. The Cooking Matters Program provides hands-on, interactive food skills education based on the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) My Plate, and is held in convenient, community-based locations and schools. Accomplishments in FY2023 include:

- Supported partner network to reach 1,742 participants with 63 classes and grocery store tours, giving out 28 class stipends to help partners pay for groceries, cooking equipment, and gas cards for participants; and
- Attended 13 outreach events and educational opportunities to share quick nutrition tips and recipes with 1,899 individuals.



FoodCorps is part of the AmeriCorps service network that receives a portion of its funding from the federal AmeriCorps program. FoodCorps service members connect kids to healthy food in schools. Members focus on hands-on learning, healthy school meals, and a schoolwide culture of health.

FoodCorps Arkansas places trained FoodCorps AmeriCorps service members in schools across the state for a year of service. Ten FoodCorps Arkansas service members served in the Springdale, Conway, Van Buren, and Cedarville school districts. Accomplishments in FY2023 include:

- Reached 5,678 students;
- Led 2,638 hands-on lessons; and
- Led 721 taste tests in the classroom.



The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture (UADA) Cooperative Extension Service Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - Education (SNAP-Ed) is a

federally funded, multi-level program that focuses on assisting low-income individuals and families to establish healthy eating habits and a physically active lifestyle. The program consists of direct education, indirect education, and policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change components. The program is the result of a partnership between the UADA Cooperative Extension Service, the Arkansas Department of Human Services, and the USDA Food and Nutrition Service. The goal of SNAP-Ed is to improve the likelihood that persons eligible for SNAP will make healthy food choices within a limited budget and choose physically active lifestyles consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and USDA Food Guidance System.

The program is designed to teach skills that help participants to:

- Buy and prepare healthful meals and snacks based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and USDA Food Guidance System;
- Become more physically active;
- Improve safe handling, preparation, and storage of food; and
- Develop spending and savings plans to make food dollars last throughout the month.

Some PSE change activities at schools include:

- Promoting healthy snacks, fundraisers, and concessions;

- Incorporating physical activity into classroom activities and the school day; and
- Implementing garden-based nutrition education classes.

Extension agents across the state bring nutrition education lessons to schools to assist in farm to school activities that grow students' knowledge of locally grown, healthy foods.

Accomplishments in FY2023 include:

- 254 lessons in early care education centers and K-12 schools;
- 36,691 children participating in nutrition education (all youth participating in all locations, unduplicated);
- 9,942 children (unduplicated) with K-12 school-based PSE interventions designed to make the school environment healthier for the students and staff;
- 14,879 total direct education contacts with children using garden-based curricula (duplicated + unduplicated);
- 9,536 total direct education contacts with children using Arkansas Foods curriculum (duplicated + unduplicated);
- 54% of individuals taught increased their knowledge of Arkansas-grown foods;
- 4,419 children participated in the interactive Farm to You exhibit through SNAP-Ed and learned how food is grown and processed, along with how their bodies use the food they eat;
- 2,939 children learned cooking skills through the Kids in the Kitchen and Teen Cuisine programs;

- After trying a locally grown food as part of the Arkansas Foods program, 70% of children surveyed reported they would want to eat it again;
- Parents surveys showed 72% of children were more willing to try new foods at home, 73% were eating fruit more often, and 67% were eating vegetables more often; and
- Students surveyed showed 81% of children intended to follow MyPlate guidelines as a result of participating in the SNAP-Ed program.

Students participating in Arkansas Foods programs in Nevada County made the following comments about trying new foods:

- About catfish: "It is so good!"
- About peaches: "I would love peaches at school."
- About spinach: "It is the best!"

Garden-based nutrition education programs in Madison County resulted in the following comments:

- "I love that our school has a garden for the kids to get outside, get dirty, and learn where their food comes from." - Parent
- "My students love 'garden time.' They learn so many skills and concepts while also learning about healthy foods."- Teacher
- "Garden time is so much fun!" - 3rd Grade Student

LOCAL PROCUREMENT

Schools, early childhood education facilities, and alternative learning environments have the opportunity to serve local foods to students. Local foods can be served in the classroom, cafeteria, or other locations depending on the structure of the learning environment. USDA feeding programs such as the National School Lunch Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and Summer Food Service Program, as well as food service programs that do not operate under that umbrella, have the opportunity to purchase, promote, and serve locally grown foods in schools, early childhood education facilities, and alternative learning environments. In the USDA's vision, child nutrition programs championing United States agriculture and proudly promoting locally sourced foods are the norm, not the exception.

The Arkansas Legislature defines local food as food products that are grown in Arkansas and/or packaged and processed in Arkansas. This definition comes from the Local Food, Farms, and Jobs Act, found at A.C.A. 15-4-3801. In addition to the definition, the act requires institutions that receive at least \$25,000 in state funding annually and operate a food service program to report information about their local procurement efforts to the Arkansas Department of Agriculture.

The FY2023 reporting form was completed by 284 institutions that serve children aged 18 and younger. Of those, 222 were school districts, 59 were early childhood education centers, and 3 were alternative learning environments. The 284 institutions serving children 18 and younger reported:

- Spending \$194,080,230.16 total on food; and
- Spending \$38,403,413.30 (19.8% of their food budget) on local foods, including fluid milk.



ARKANSAS FARM TO SCHOOL MONTH

Each year in October the state celebrates Arkansas Farm to School Month. This recognition is part of nationwide efforts to connect schools, early childhood education sites, and other organizations with farms to bring local, healthy food to children.

The National Farm to School Network first started this trend in 2010 by having National Farm to School Month designated by Congress. Since then, more and more states have joined in with celebrations.

Arkansas has been formally recognizing Arkansas Farm to School Month since 2014 when then-governor Mike Beebe first proclaimed October as Arkansas Farm to School Month. Former Governor Asa Hutchinson and Governor Sarah Sanders have continued the tradition every year since.

In October 2022, our commitment grew to new heights as Arkansas schools embraced all aspects of farm to school. To celebrate Arkansas Farm to School Month, we gathered together at Pinnacle View Middle School in Little Rock to announce the winners of the 2022 Arkansas Grown School Garden of the Year Contest.

More information on Arkansas Farm to School Month can be found at arfarmtoschool.org/about/farm-to-school-month.



Arkansas Farm to School Month 2022 Poster, designed by Joby Miller, Arkansas Department of Agriculture



FARM TO SCHOOL FUNDING, EVENTS, RESOURCES, AND STATE LEGISLATION

The growth of farm to school is contingent on funding for programming. In addition, events, resources, and state legislation are important to the increase of farm to school activities. Below are summaries of major funding received and managed, events hosted, and resources created from October 2022 through September 2023.

FUNDING

Funding for farm to school comes from federal, state, foundation, and other organizations. The largest amount of farm to school funding in Arkansas comes from federal sources. The main sources of federal funding are the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and AmeriCorps.

The following represents current farm to school funding available throughout the state:

- Arkansas Department of Agriculture’s Farm to School and Early Childhood Education Program:
 - USDA Farm to School Grant Program 2021- \$97,915
 - USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program - \$75,705
 - USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program 2022 - \$70,382
 - USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program HR133 - \$66,819
- FoodCorps Arkansas
 - AmeriCorps - \$510,000
- Apple Seeds, Inc.
 - USDA Farm to School Grant Program - \$99,400
- Carroll County Resource Council
 - USDA Farm to School Grant Program - \$98,617
- Communities Unlimited, Inc.
 - USDA Farm to School Grant Program - \$498,950

- Dan-Harton Farms
 - USDA Farm to School Grant Program - \$99,626

The State of Arkansas funds the Arkansas Department of Agriculture’s Program Coordinator position and partially funds the State School Garden Manager position. The numbers below reflect salaries and fringe benefits:

- Arkansas Department of Agriculture Farm to School and Early Childhood Education Coordinator Position - \$62,052.15
- Arkansas Department of Agriculture State School Garden Manager - \$15,497.73

Finally, foundations and other sources of funding are available to increase farm to school activities:

- Arkansas Department of Agriculture:
 - Farm Credit Associations of Arkansas - \$10,500
 - Vermont Food Education Every Day (FEED) - \$7,500
 - National Farm to School Network, a project of Tides Center - \$2,000

EVENTS

- “Bringing the Farm to School” training hosted by the Arkansas Department of Agriculture and the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture
- Farm to school presentation at the Arkansas Grown Conference and Expo hosted by the Arkansas Department of Agriculture

- Arkansas Farm to School Month Celebration and Arkansas Grown School Garden of the Year Contest announcement hosted by the Arkansas Department of Agriculture

RESOURCES

- 2022 Local Food, Farms, and Jobs Act Annual Report
- 2022 Arkansas Farm to School Annual Report
- Series of 47 farm to school handouts
- Arkansas Farm to School website maintenance



STATE LEADERSHIP

In addition to creating the Farm to School and Early Childhood Education Program, Act 506 of 2019: Farm To School And Early Childhood Education Act also required an annual farm to school report be prepared in collaboration with the following stakeholders:

- Arkansas Department of Agriculture
- Arkansas Department of Education
- Arkansas Department of Health
- Arkansas Department of Human Services
- University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service

The act also mentioned the Child Nutrition Unit at the Arkansas Department of Education, which is listed under the Arkansas Department of Education due to the Transformation and Efficiencies Act of 2019.

Updates on fiscal year 2023 (FY2023) farm to school leadership from the noted stakeholders are included on the following pages of the report.



ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE The Arkansas Department of Agriculture (Department) is dedicated to the development and implementation

of policies and programs for Arkansas agriculture and forestry to keep its farmers and ranchers competitive in national and international markets while conserving natural resources and ensuring safe food, fiber, and forest products for the citizens of the state and nation.

The Department is recognized as a partner by the National Farm to School Network and joins the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Southwest Region in regional farm to school development and growth.

The Department's Farm to School and Early Childhood Education Program leads farm to school efforts. The Department's Arkansas Grown, Arkansas Made, and Homegrown By Heroes branding programs support farm to school efforts in the state.

FARM TO SCHOOL AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Farm to School and Early Childhood Education Program connects schools, local growers, and the community to food and farm education experiences paired with healthy, locally grown food. The program provides equitable and just programming, resources, funding, and technical assistance to schools, farmers, and partners in the local food system. The program is the current facilitator of the Arkansas Farm to School Collaborative.

Websites: agriculture.arkansas.gov/arkansas-department-of-agriculture-programs/farm-to-school and arfarmtoschool.org

Team: Jessica Chapman, Farm to School and Early Childhood Education Program Coordinator and Katie Matthews, State School Garden Manager

Programs: Arkansas School Garden Grant Program, Arkansas Grown School Garden of the Year Contest, Arkansas Taste Test Grant Program, and Harvest of the Season

Accomplishments:

- Provided technical assistance to 94 schools, farmers, agencies, and nonprofits;
- Participated in 51 regional and national farm to school meetings;
- Hosted and spoke at 21 farm to school educational trainings, webinars, and events with 412 attendees;
- Visited 14 schools, farms, and organizations to outreach about farm to school;
- Facilitated six Arkansas Farm to School Collaborative bi-monthly meetings that engaged 18 state agencies and non-profit partners;
- Coordinated one Governor's proclamation, distributed four press releases, and responded to one interview request on farm to school;
- Wrote two reports and one letter of support on farm to school;
- Created 47 handouts and infographics on farm to school;
- Produced one video and two webinars on farm to school;
- Increased total Arkansas Farm to School Facebook followers to 3,082;
- Distributed 12 newsletters, attracting 114 new subscribers, reaching a total audience of 2,214 with an average open rate of 37.50%, a click rate of 2.70%, and an unsubscribe rate of .17%;

- Managed and awarded \$6,000 total to 10 winning schools and early childhood education facilities as part of the Arkansas Grown School Garden of the Year Contest;
- Managed and awarded \$23,500 total to 47 schools, early childhood education facilities, and alternative learning environments as part of the Arkansas School Garden Grant Program; and
- Managed and awarded \$4,750 total to 19 schools, early childhood education facilities, and alternative learning environments as part of the Arkansas Taste Test Grant Program.

THE ARKANSAS GROWN, ARKANSAS MADE, AND HOMEGROWN BY HEROES BRANDING PROGRAMS

The Arkansas Grown, Arkansas Made, and Homegrown by Heroes branding programs were established to equip farmers and producers with marketing tools to identify their goods as products grown and produced in Arkansas. The programs focus on generating exposure and creating new opportunities for local farmers and producers to increase sales and transactions. The Arkansas Grown branding program promotes the many agricultural products that are grown in the state and supports the farmers, ranchers, and producers who grow them. The Arkansas Made branding program promotes goods and products made in our state by local producers, craftsmen, and artisans. In 2015, the Department adopted the national Homegrown by Heroes branding program that enables farmer veterans to market their local agricultural products by labeling them as veteran-produced. Homegrown By Heroes is administered by the Farmer Veteran Coalition and is offered as a

free program to farmers who have veteran, active duty, National Guard, or Reserve member of the United States Armed Forces status. These three programs help make the critical connection between producers and buyers.

Website: arkansasgrown.org

Team: Karen Reynolds, Grants and Program Manager and Beth Moore, Program Manager

Programs: Arkansas Grown, Arkansas Made, and Homegrown By Heroes

Accomplishments:

- Collaborated with five state associations to host the first-ever statewide gathering of producers in the local food system, the Arkansas Grown Conference and Expo with over 450 registrations and 70 vendors;
- Cross-promoted Arkansas Farm to School in 66 Facebook posts;
- Increased membership in Arkansas Grown, Homegrown By Heroes, and Arkansas Made programs by 152 new members;
- Secured 18 Arkansas Grown and Arkansas Made supporter members;
- Increase social media followers to:
 - Facebook followers: 10,266
 - Instagram followers: 2,391
- Received USDA Specialty Crop Block 2021 – HR133 Grant Program to develop two programs;
- Launched the Arkansas Grown Advertising Campaign, promoting local food and local food producers with advertising: print, television, and radio;

- Awarded Round Two of the Arkansas Grown Grant for Northwest Arkansas Farmer pilot program, funded by the Walton Personal Philanthropy Group, awarding grants of up to \$15,000 to eight farmers in Northwest Arkansas to increase their capacity to sell wholesale, bringing the total number of grantees in the pilot program to 33 farmers. Follow up site visits to 16 farms and annual performance reports are planned for Round One grantees;
- Continued assisting in connecting Arkansas Grown farmers with the Arkansas Department of Human Services for the \$3.7 million Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative grant program funded to the state through USDA;
- Worked with the Local Food, Farms, and Jobs Act team to update the reporting form, conduct a webinar, develop the annual report, and analyze data to be used in support projects and grants;
- Participated in Local Food Forum panel hosted by the Arkansas Local Food Network;
- Attended bi-monthly Arkansas Farm to School Collaborative meetings;
- Coordinated and promoted Arkansas Farmers Market Week proclamation presentation, estimated 38 total attendees;
- Managed USDA National Organic Cost Share Program, providing reimbursement to six organic farms around the state;
- Managed the Farmers Market Promotion Program providing 25,750 bags to 19 farmers markets and \$9,000 in promotional funds to 25 farmers markets around the state;

- Awarded Homegrown By Heroes scholarship to one veteran farmer to attend the Center for Arkansas Farms and Food farm school;
- Delivered presentations at seven conferences and events;
- Manned booths at five conferences and events; and
- Conducted six media interviews.





ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The mission of the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) is to provide leadership,

support, and service to schools, districts, and communities so every student graduates prepared for college, career, and community engagement.

ADE is a member of the Arkansas Farm to School Collaborative. The Child Nutrition Unit and School Health Services support farm to school efforts in the state.

CHILD NUTRITION UNIT

The Child Nutrition Unit (CNU) provides technical assistance, training, monitoring, and processes claims for reimbursement of federal funds used in the operation of local school nutrition programs in accordance with United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulations.

Website:

dese.ade.arkansas.gov/Offices/District-Operations/child-nutrition-unit

Team: Suzanne Davidson, Director; Sheila Chastain, Associate Director; Krista Jackson, Associate Director; Courtney Erick, Fiscal Support Manager, Kristen Gottshall, Fiscal Support Manager, Area Specialists and Grants Managers

Programs: National School Lunch, School Breakfast, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable, After-School Snack, Seamless Summer, and Farm to School Program

Accomplishments:

- Managed approximately \$300 million federal and \$1.65 million state funding for child nutrition programs that resulted in approximately 33 million breakfast, 51 million lunches, and over 1.75 million snacks;

- Managed \$3.4 million in federal funding for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program in 172 schools, and awarded \$3.6 million to 200 schools for FY2024;
- Hosted in-person Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program grants management training that included a discussion of local purchasing and farm to school;
- The Arkansas Department of Education Child Nutrition Unit and Health and Nutrition Unit and the Arkansas Department of Human Services Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Division collaborated to provide Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) benefits to families during the 2022-2023 school year to replace meals lost by their children as schools closed or restricted their in-person schedules due to a COVID isolation/quarantine;
- For the 2023-2024 school year, 69 school districts (239 schools) qualified for the Community Eligibility Provision and 31 school districts (115 schools) qualified for Provision 2;
- Completed the Local Food, Farms, and Jobs Act survey for the Arkansas Department of Education; and
- Supported the Arkansas Department of Agriculture's Local Food, Farms, and Jobs Act survey by following up with school districts to encourage completion.

SCHOOL HEALTH SERVICES

The Arkansas School Health Services Initiative is an interagency collaboration between the Arkansas Department of Education Division of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH). This state-level infrastructure provides support to Arkansas schools in the implementation of health and wellness activities that create a safe and healthy school environment that supports learning.

Due to the collaboration between ADE and ADH, the information on School Health Services can be found below.



ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH The mission of the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) is to protect and improve the health and well-being of all Arkansans.

ADH is a member of the Arkansas Farm to School Collaborative. The School Health Services office supports farm to school efforts in the state.

SCHOOL HEALTH SERVICES

The Arkansas School Health Services Initiative is an interagency collaboration between the ADE Division of Elementary and Secondary Education and ADH. This state-level infrastructure provides support to Arkansas schools in the implementation of health and wellness activities that create a safe and healthy school environment that supports learning.

Websites:

dese.ade.arkansas.gov/divisions/learning-services/school-health-services and healthy.arkansas.gov/programs-services/topics/school-health

Team: Arkansas Department of Education: Lisa Mundy, Coordinated School Health Director; Shy Whitley-Smith, Act 1220 Coordinator; and Cheria McDonald, State School Nurse Consultant. Arkansas Department of Health: Ariel Schaufler Rogers, Coordinated School Health Director; Amy Davidson, School Based Health Center Advisor; and Shanetta Agnew, Act 1220 Coordinator

Programs: Coordinated School Health, School-Based Health Centers, Act 1220 (BMI), Joint-Use Agreements, Medicaid in the Schools, and Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment

Accomplishments:

- Facilitated the completion of the annual Indistar report which resulted in a completion rate of 98% school districts and 93% of schools;
- Hosted four coordinated school health professional development opportunities for school wellness coordinators;
- Funded and supported six priority school districts: Blytheville, El Dorado, Magazine, Malvern, Marvell-Elaine, and Springdale Public Schools;
- Increased attendance of school personnel and districts represented at the quarterly meetings;
- Cross-promoted farm to school information in two partner updates to school personnel and at a 16-state professional development conference on nutrition, physical activity, and chronic conditions; and
- A link to the Arkansas Farm to School website is provided on the CSH Google Site/Coalition. The Google site averages 70 user visits a month.



ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

The mission of the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS) is to serve, protect, empower, educate, and encourage children, at-risk youth, families, adults, aging adults and seniors, and people with disabilities as they move towards a better future. DHS is a member of the Arkansas Farm to School Collaborative through the Division of Childcare and Early Childhood. The Health and Nutrition Program supports farm to school efforts in the state.

HEALTH AND NUTRITION PROGRAM

The Health and Nutrition Program (HNP) is federally funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service to provide reimbursement for well-balanced, nutritious meals served to individuals enrolled in Child and Adult Care Food Programs (CACFP), At-Risk, National School Lunch Program (NSLP), and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). In Arkansas, these programs are administered by the Arkansas Department of Human Services Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education, and Special Nutrition Programs.

The HNP falls under the umbrella of the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education which ensures that Arkansas children and families have access to a safe, high-quality, developmentally appropriate early-learning environment. The Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education accomplishes this by educating and assisting parents, licensing, regulating, and supporting childcare providers, and working with communities to prepare children for future success. The HNP provides reimbursement for well-balanced, nutritious meals served to individuals.

Website:

humanservices.arkansas.gov/divisions-shared-services/child-care-early-childhood-education/health-nutrition-programs/special-nutrition-programs

Team: Pamela Burton, Assistant Director; Sharon Hagen, Program Administrator; Nora Fawcett, Program Administrator; James Ponzini, Program Administrator; Perry Hunter, Program Manager; Wayne Thornberry, Program Manager; Lauren Dotson, Training Project Manager; Sharon Parker, Quality Assurance; Rayvnn Smith, Program Manager; and Maurice Anderson, Program Manager

Programs: Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), National School Lunch Program (NSLP), Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), USDA Processing, and Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (DoD FFVP)

Accomplishments:

- All CACFP, At Risk, NSLP, and SFSP Online Refresher trainings are available on demand for providers to access. All trainings include farm to school information;
- Began providing on demand New Participant Training for CACFP and At-Risk providers to access any time during the month. All New Participant trainings include farm to school information;
- Continued providing a Health and Nutrition Unit Quarterly Newsletter to sponsors, independent centers, family home daycares, adult daycare centers, potential institutions, and partners;
- Managed \$46,515,083 in funding as part of the CACFP, which served 27,143,671 meals;

- Managed \$1,344,737 in funding as part of the NSLP, which served 639,662;
- Managed \$3,262,749 in funding as part of the SFSP, which served 830,020 meals;
- Managed \$1,899,153 as part of the USDA Processing Program;
- Managed \$3.7 million for the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA);
- Managed \$2.2 million for the Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program (LFS);
- Managed \$1.1 million for FY21 Technology Innovation Project;
- Managed \$968,821 for The Emergency Food Assistance Program Reach and Resiliency Grant;
- Managed \$94,408 in COVID19 Build Back Better Funds; and
- Managed \$40,000 in Supply Chain Assistance Funds.

The UADA is a member of the Arkansas Farm to School Collaborative. The Family and Consumer Science Programmatic Area and the Local, Regional, and Safe Foods Program support farm to school efforts in the state.

FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCE PROGRAMMATIC AREA

The Family and Consumer Sciences Programmatic Area (FCS), founded as home economics, affords Arkansans immediate and timely access to cutting-edge, reliable, unbiased information to develop critical life skills in health, nutrition, family life, and personal finance, empowering individuals and families to thrive. Through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - Education (SNAP-Ed), FCS promotes 20 youth curricula and four are garden focused: Grow It, Try It, Like It; School Gardening Lessons; Eating from the Garden; and Dig In.

FCS Website: uaex.uada.edu/life-skills-wellness/

SNAP-Ed Website: uaex.uada.edu/arsnaped

SNAP-Ed Team: Josh Phelps, Associate Professor of Nutrition; Amy McClelland, SNAP-Ed Program Manager; Sarah David, SNAP-Ed Finance Manager; Katie Holland, SNAP-Ed Curriculum and Evaluation; and County Extension Staff

Program: Arkansas SNAP-Ed

Accomplishments:

- Managed \$2,148,988 in SNAP-Ed funds in FY23 to deliver statewide nutrition education program, with a large emphasis on school-based programming;



UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS SYSTEM DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

The mission of the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture (UADA) Cooperative Extension Service is to strengthen agriculture, communities, and families by connecting trusted research to the adoption of best practices.

- Continued work to develop, pilot, and evaluate Arkansas Foods lesson materials, including inclusion of additional foods, development of new resources, translation of existing resources, and creation of the annual AR Foods recipe calendar to use with nutrition programs;
- Introduced Teen Cuisine curriculum statewide, which helps teens gain skills to prepare healthy meals and snacks; and
- Presented a poster at the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior national conference on the school garden/nutrition education program in Madison County.

LOCAL, REGIONAL & SAFE FOODS TEAM

The Local, Regional, and Safe Foods (LRSF) Program supports specialty crop growers with understanding and implementing food and produce safety regulations and associated practices and fosters the development of local and regional food systems. Food and produce safety cover outreach, education, and technical assistance regarding state and federal regulatory programs such as the Food Safety Modernization Act that protect the public’s health and farms’ viability. Local and regional food systems development covers the food supply chain from farm to table and provides technical assistance from evidence-based research to support production, market access, community and economic development, food safety, value-added food product development, and access to healthy food.

Website: uaex.uada.edu/localfoods

Team: Dr. Amanda Philyaw Perez, Food Systems & Food Safety Specialist, Assistant Professor; Dr. Renee Threlfall, Research Scientist; John Swenson, Food Innovation Associate; Rip Weaver, Program Technician; Gaby Sanders, Program Associate; David Hill, Program Associate

Programs: Arkansas Produce Safety, Share Grounds, and Local Food System Development



COVID-19

The following overview highlights the transition partners are making from COVID-19 program adaptations to the post-pandemic period.

Apple Seeds fully returned to their normal programming post-COVID during fiscal year 2023 (FY2023). This allowed for significantly greater in-person meaningful touchpoints to occur with students in Northwest Arkansas and across the state.

The Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance (The Alliance) continued to offer nutrition education by hosting online trainings and began transitioning back to pre-pandemic programming, which allowed them to reach more families from all across the state. The Alliance has reconnected with more pre-pandemic partners to support traditional, in-person classes and host grocery store event days. The Alliance plans to retain and build on flexibilities improved during the pandemic and facilitate virtual Cooking Matters at Home lessons and new partner trainings.

FoodCorps Arkansas service members resumed their primary service duties while continuing to be responsive to the needs of their school and community. The pandemic increased members' focus on food access. Members supported the opening and stocking of many little free pantries and worked to procure/distribute produce and shelf-stable items for school pantries and summer feeding sites. FoodCorps staff are working to support policy efforts for School Meals for All to ensure that food access is funded and institutionalized on a national level.

The Arkansas Department of Agriculture continued to host webinars and began transitioning back to pre-pandemic in-person events and training opportunities. The Farm to School and Early Childhood Development Program is committed to fostering a sustainable and responsive farm to school ecosystem that is attuned to the evolving needs of our communities and will continue to provide support by offering both virtual trainings and practical, hands-on workshops and outreach initiatives.

The Arkansas Grown, Arkansas Made, and Homegrown By Heroes Programs continue to manage their multi-platform website, in partnership with Arkansas Farm to School, which enables members to create an individual listing and connect farms with schools conveniently.

The Arkansas Department of Health distributed COVID-19 test kits to districts upon request, but did not require schools and childcare centers to submit positive case reports during the 2022-2023 school year unless the COVID-19 sample/test was taken on school grounds.

During the 2022-2023 school year, the Coordinated School Health Program (CSH) wrapped up its five-year Center for Disease Control and Prevention funding titled Healthy Schools/1801. There was substantial growth in the number of districts participating in quarterly CSH meetings. This is largely due to COVID-19 and the need to transition from in-person to virtual meetings. This also gave the program the ability to record meetings and post them for later use.

In-person meetings were limited to 100 registrants and attendees often had travel limitations that would prevent them from attending meetings in Little Rock.

The CSH Program was awarded for another five years (2023-2028) to continue the efforts being made to improve health outcomes in Arkansas youth. The program will select one school district as a priority area of focus and provide intensive technical assistance to further the impact on student and staff wellness.

The Arkansas Department of Human Services Health and Nutrition Program saw the availability of waivers for much of the 2022-2023 fiscal year. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, these waivers were instrumental in accommodating the evolving needs of food programs. However, this summer marked the expiration of these waivers as the fiscal year drew to a close on June 30, 2023. Among the waivers that have now lapsed are the Non-Congregate feeding option, also known as Grab N Go, and the mealtime flexibilities that once permitted simultaneous meal and snack service. Additionally, all Family Child Care Homes previously reimbursed at the Tier 1 rate have lost their waiver status. Furthermore, offsite monitoring for flexibilities is no longer an option, with monitoring now mandated to be carried out onsite. The Keep Kids Fed Act of 2022, which had provided an additional 10 cents, has also reached its expiration date.

The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture (UADA) Cooperative Extension Service Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - Education (SNAP-Ed) fully returned to their normal programming post-COVID during FY23. This allowed for significantly greater in-person meaningful touchpoints to occur across the state.



MOVING FORWARD TO FISCAL YEAR 2024

Using the fiscal year 2023 (FY2023) information, the Arkansas Department of Agriculture, Arkansas Department of Education, Arkansas Department of Health, Arkansas Department of Human Services, and the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service will continue to work together to build a comprehensive farm to school program in Arkansas.

As members of the Arkansas Farm to School Collaborative, the stakeholders in Act 506 will continue to 1) collaborate and work together; 2) foster student understanding of where their food comes from; 3) cultivate children's leadership and self-efficacy; 4) create equitable access to local food; and 5) support farmers. Additionally, each stakeholder has set goals for the upcoming 2024 fiscal year.

The Arkansas Department of Agriculture will continue to offer farm to school leadership and support in the state. The Farm to School and Early Childhood Education Program will develop a program to offer kitchen equipment assistance grants to schools, host the first-ever Arkansas Farm to School Institute, and work in collaboration with the Arkansas Department of Education Child Nutrition Unit developing and implementing educational school garden support. The program will also continue to offer the Arkansas School Garden of the Year Contest.



The Arkansas Grown, Arkansas Made, and Homegrown By Heroes branding programs within the Department will partner with Arkansas agriculture associations and organizations to host the second Arkansas Grown Conference and Expo. The Arkansas Grown Conference and Expo will be open to all parties interested in the Arkansas agriculture industry and focus on the farmers and producers who grow for our local food system. In addition, the branding programs will continue to manage a robust advertising campaign to promote the purchase of Arkansas Grown products to consumers throughout the state.



The Arkansas Department of Education will support public and charter schools in Arkansas in the upcoming 2023-2024 school year. The Child Nutrition Unit will continue to provide support to schools to ensure healthy and safe meals are available during the pandemic on regular school days. All National School Lunch Program public and charter schools in Arkansas, administered by the Child Nutrition Unit, are currently operating under National School Lunch Regulations, which require districts to establish free/reduced eligibility for students and claim meals served in the correct category.

The Child Nutrition Unit received a farm to school grant to promote agricultural education. Activities will be in partnership with the Arkansas Department of Agriculture's Farm to School and Early Childhood Education Program and include funding for educational school garden support.

School Health Services will offer trainings and resources to schools on topics relating to the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model (such nutrition and farm to school, physical activity and physical education, management of chronic diseases, and mental wellness) that increase the knowledge and skill level among students, staff, and the community.

The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture (UADA) Cooperative Extension Service plans to continue to incorporate new curriculum, materials, and resources to improve school programming and increase access to Arkansas grown foods. UADA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance - Education (SNAP-Ed) will also be working on a statewide Arkansas Foods e-newsletter to expand the program to reach adults about locally grown foods.

The Arkansas Department of Agriculture is honored to support the goals of Act 506 of 2019 and is pleased to submit the 2023 Arkansas Farm to School Annual Report. For more information about the report, please contact Jessica Chapman at the Arkansas Department of Agriculture.

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