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Arkansas Department of Agriculture Launches Farm to School and Arkansas Grown Website

First of its kind website connects Arkansas schools to local farmers, farm to school program

LITTLE ROCK, AR – The Arkansas Department of Agriculture is pleased to announce the launch of a new multi-platform website that partners Arkansas Farm to School, arfarmtoschool.org, with Arkansas Grown, arkansasgrown.org, the first website of its kind that connects farm to school to a state's local food branding programs.

"Agriculture impacts every citizen in every community throughout our state," said Arkansas Secretary of Agriculture Wes Ward. "This new website offers unique opportunities for producers, schools, and other institutions to connect with each other and form partnerships that have positive, long-lasting impacts on our communities and state."

The connected website was developed by MHP/Team SI and offers many features, including interactive maps of school gardens, local procurement activities, farms, and producers across the state. Farmers and producers can search the multi-site platform to find contact information for school districts that buy local food. Alternatively, schools can find contact information for farmers and producers when searching the site for sources to buy local food. The website enables schools and farms to create profiles and customize listings to include information on the local products they buy or sell respectively. This is a free service for schools, farmers, and producers.

"When students grow, eat, and learn about local food, we see the triple win of farm to school in action: the health of Arkansas children improves, local farmers are supported, and communities join together," said Farm to School and Early Childhood Education Program Coordinator Sarah Lane. "This new website offers a space for us to learn, share, and connect around the collective goal that all schools in Arkansas have the opportunity to participate in farm to school."

"We have seen a significant increase in shopping online for local food, especially during the pandemic. The new website is a free online resource that is user-friendly and enables our farmers and producers to showcase their products and tell their stories with photographs and videos," said Karen Reynolds, Arkansas Grown and Arkansas Made Program Manager. "Partnering with Arkansas Farm to School streamlines the process for institutions to procure locally grown and produced food."

The Arkansas Department of Agriculture 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 ensuring safe food, fiber, and forest products for the citizens of the state and nation. Visit agriculture.arkansas.gov. The Arkansas Department of Agriculture offers its programs to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability and is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

The Farm to School and Early Childhood Education Program (Program) was established at the Department in 2019 after the passage of Act 506. The Program connects schools, local growers, and communities to food and farm education experiences paired with healthy, locally grown food.

The Program is the current facilitator of the Arkansas Farm to School Collaborative (Collaborative). The Collaborative is a group of 12 state agencies and nonprofits with a mission to develop supportive policies and programs alongside effective marketing, as well as streamline communication and procurement processes to make farm to school an integrated cultural norm. The Collaborative's goal is that by 2025, 100 percent of schools in Arkansas will have the opportunity to participate in farm to school. For more information about the Program or the Collaborative, contact Sarah Lane, Farm to School and Early Childhood Education Program Coordinator, at sarah.lane@agriculture.arkansas.gov.

The Arkansas Grown program began in 2012 to help promote the many agricultural products that are grown in the state of Arkansas. The Arkansas Made program began in 2014 to promote products made in the state. Both programs are administered through the Department. For more information contact Karen Reynolds, Program Manager, at karen.reynolds@agriculture.arkansas.gov.