

Celebrate Harvest of the Month: Invite a Legislator to Lunch!

Invite a representative from local government to see the great work you are doing to bring healthy foods to students while supporting local agriculture. Mass. Farm to School can help you make this day a success. Follow the six steps below to ensure a successful visit!

1. **Identify a legislator to invite to lunch** (if you don't know your legislators or who to choose, you can search online for your Massachusetts [state legislators](#) and your [Congressional Representatives and Senators](#), at <https://malegislature.gov/People/Search> or contact Mass. Farm to School to help identify an appropriate legislator).
2. **Identify partners at that school to help**
 - a. At a minimum, you need:
 - i. A visit organizer.
 - ii. A principal or assistant who will authorize and participate in the visit.
 - iii. A cook, food service director or garden coordinator willing to help host.
 - b. Consider also including:
 - i. A teacher who does or would use garden-based education.
 - ii. A farmer who sells to the school, or who would like to.
 - iii. A parent.
3. **Select a Date: Talk to the partners about date options**
 - a. What dates in October are particularly good or bad?
 - b. Can you do this on a special day? Food Day is October 24, "Harvest for Students Week" is September 30-October 4.
 - c. Try to identify a few options for the legislator, but making suggestions is ok.
4. **Develop rough draft schedule** for the event based on the school lunch schedule.
5. **Contact the legislator:** See recommended script and follow up until a date is chosen.

As soon as a date is chosen:

1. Ask the legislator's staffer how long the visit can be, and about their preferences:
 - a. Give specific real options, e.g. "Would you like to serve lunch to the kids?" and "Would you like to get dirty in a school garden?"
 - b. Do they have any particular questions or goals?
 - c. Have they been to this school before?
2. Check in with Mass. Farm to School. We may be able to help promote the event.
3. Invite local media outlets: TV, Newspaper, Radio (Mass. Farm to School can help).
4. If the school has a student paper, invite them to cover it.
5. Invite additional partners and revise/refine visit schedule.
6. Plan materials and decorations. See Mass. Farm to School website for resources.

The week before the visit:

1. Confirm date, time, place, & duration of the visit with the legislator, and tell them who will be there, including media. Tell them where to park when they arrive.
2. Make sure the members of your visit team also know the full schedule and the expectations of them. Who is covering which subjects?
3. Prepare handouts for the legislator, in a neat folder:
 - a. Contact information for everyone involved.
 - b. Information about the school.
 - c. Information about Farm to School, school nutrition, and childhood hunger.

Post-visit:

1. Send a thank-you card, with any follow-up materials and a picture from their visit.
2. Recap visit with Mass. Farm to School.
3. Contact parents of kids shown in your best pictures to get permission to use photos.

Sample Schedule for Cafeteria-Based Visit

11:00 **Legislator arrives**, someone is waiting and escorts them inside to the group.

11:05 **Start with an orientation conversation** (Perhaps in principal's office? Or hall.)

- Welcome them!
- Ask (again) if they know the school, and listen attentively to their answer.
- Tell them about the school: what grades, how many students, and other details of interest. Number of languages spoken? Average class size? Recent awards?
- Say “we focused on school nutrition programs and farm to school today, but we would love to answer any questions you have about other aspects of our school.”

11:15 **Go see cafeteria facilities, meet the staff, discuss food programs**

- If media is present, work with them to set-up / prepare for kids (or do beforehand).
- Show them the kitchen and cafeteria and introduce the nutrition staff.
- Share the percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced price lunch [see http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/selectedpopulations.aspx and look for your district and then the number in the “low-income” column].
- Tell them which food programs are offered at the school, and numbers served. Explain the programs if they are not familiar with them.
- Talk about the importance of school meals in the overall nutrition of these kids
- Share about today's menu
- Tell them how state funding for farm to school and school garden programs could make a difference to these students, the community and area farmers (tell them about the farms you work with and how that relationship works for your school).
- Prepare for the incoming kids.

11:40 **First students arrive**

- Legislator goes through the lunch line – highlight the local options!
- Sit and eat with some kids (and the principal, or another known adults).
- Talk to the kids about what new foods they are eating and learning about at school.
- Make sure someone from your team takes pictures of legislator eating school lunch.

12:15 **Visit garden and/or other on-campus food programs**

- If there is a school garden, go see it and discuss its educational components.
- Include legislator in brief garden lesson or project, if possible.
- Include teacher who uses garden or food-based concepts in classroom.
- If there is a food pantry on campus, show them and explain the program.
- If there is media there, ensure that there are good photo opportunities.

12:45 **Thank them and wrap up**

- Make sure the principal is there to shake hands and thank them again for coming.
- Hand them folder of info, including contact info for all participants.
- Reiterate any commitments you have made during the visit for follow-up info.

Making the Initial Invitation

- Plan to use both telephone and email to make the invitation.
- You may start with either format
- Do both in the same day or else start with one, wait a day or two, and do the other.
- If you do not hear back within four business days, call again.
- Make specific commitments about when you will call back or send more information, and then follow through on them.
- If you personally are a constituent, as well as the school being in their district, make sure to say so. If you are *not* personally a constituent, don't mention it.
- Usually a staff member will answer the phone, but sometimes it is the legislator or their family members (as employees). Listen closely for their name when they answer. Write down their name – ask them to repeat it if you didn't hear.

By phone

Hello, my name is ____ I am calling to invite the Representative/Senator to come to (name specific school, and location area, eg “in Boston,” or “in the Brighton neighborhood”) for a lunchtime visit during the month of October. October is National Farm to School Month, and ... (say one sentence explaining why that specific school, eg. “... Brighton Elementary has a great head cook and a new salad bar in place this year.”) Do you have access to the representative/senator's calendar, and could you work with me to find some date options?

- If they can pick some dates options already, great! If not, say you will send more info by email and ask when you should call back again.
- Leave your name, address and telephone number.
- Thank the person with whom you are speaking.

Voicemail version – speak slowly and clearly

Hello, my name is _____. I am calling to invite the Representative/Senator to come to (name specific school, and location area, eg “in Boston,” or “in the Brighton neighborhood”) for a lunchtime visit during the month of October, which is National Farm to School Month. We would love to work around your schedule to pick a date. Please call me at (phone number.) Again, that's (name) calling about a school visit to (school name.) and you can reach me at (phone number.) Thank you!

(Making the initial Invitation, continued)

By Email

Subject line: Invitation for lunchtime visit to (fill in the blank) school

Dear [Representative/Senator]:

(If applicable: This is a follow-up message to a phone message I left earlier today / earlier in the week / or to a conversation I had earlier with ___ in your office.)

As a [food service director, parent, teacher, local org, etc] from [_____] School, I would like to invite you to visit our school during lunchtime one day in October.

October is National Farm to School Month. Additionally, September 29th - October 4th is Harvest for Students Week, and October 24th is the third annual "Food Day." With all this great momentum, we would love to invite you to observe first-hand the many wonderful things going on in our school [and garden(?)] along with the many challenges we face as we work to make sure every child has a nutritious lunch! I will be more than happy to coordinate all the arrangements with your office and our local media to help showcase your visit with our school community.

Please let me know how to move forward on finding a good date and making arrangements.

Thank you,

your name

your affiliation

eg. "food service director at Dufur Middle School" or "concerned parent of Dufur Middle School Students,"

A few facts about Farm to School and School Garden programs,

which may come in handy while talking to legislator's staff about scheduling:

- **Reduce hunger and food insecurity**

School meals provide an essential part of a child's nutrition to many students in MA. 16.5% of students live in food insecure households. Over 350,000 students in MA qualify for free & reduced priced meals.

- **Support economic development**

Local food purchasing represents jobs for local farmers, fishers, ranchers, food processors and food manufacturers. Farm to School funding can help schools keep more of their total food budgets in-state.

- **When kids grow it, they eat it!**

Studies show that students who have a hand in growing fruits and vegetables are much more likely to try these healthy foods.