



Press Release
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Mass. Farm to School Institute Teams Gather at 2021 Fall Retreat During Farm to School Month

STATEWIDE, MA - On October 1st & 2nd, [Massachusetts Farm to School](http://www.massfarmtoschool.org) hosted school and school district teams from across Massachusetts to kick off the start of the annual Massachusetts Farm to School Institute - a year long professional development opportunity for schools to design and implement effective, school wide (or school-district wide) Farm to School programs—programs that create a culture of wellness, improve food quality and access, engage students in agriculture and nutrition education, and strengthen local food systems.

The school teams selected to participate in the 2021-2022 Institute are: Bridge Boston Charter School, Brockton High School, Public Schools of Brookline, Carver Middle & High School, and Hill View Montessori Charter School (Haverhill), and West Springfield High School.

Last weekend they came together, in a hybrid of remote and in-person gatherings to begin their Farm to School planning process. On Friday, October 1st, teams met remotely and heard a keynote address from Rev. Mariama White-Hammond, pastor, advocate, facilitator, and farmer who was recently appointed Chief of Energy, Environment and Open Spaces for the City of Boston. Rev. White-Hammond spoke of the importance of growing food as a way to heal and build community. (View keynote here.) In the afternoon teams participated in a panel discussion with Mellissa Honeywood (Food Service Director, Cambridge Public Schools), Amber Tulloch (H.A.Y. Coordinator, Hawlemont Elementary School), Jennifer Ferland (Executive Director of Strategic Initiatives & Partnerships for New Bedford Public Schools), & Rebecca Busanksy (Northampton School Committee). The panelists shared their farm to school experiences, highlighting successes in increased local procurement, youth engagement, providing professional development for school staff, and strengthening relationships across school departments to build comprehensive farm to school programs.

On Saturday, October 2nd, teams gathered at [Wright-Locke Farm](http://www.wrightlockefarm.com) in Winchester, MA to participate in a day-long event with three interactive workshops led by Ellen Nylen (Food Service Director, Webster Public Schools), Erika Gorgenyi (Director of Education, Wright-Locke Farm), and Dinah Mack (Program Specialist, Mass. Farm to School). Participants also had plenty of time throughout the day to network with peers and share experiences-- something they have been missing over the past two years. Rebecca Kelly (FoodCorps), who works with Bridge Boston Charter School says, "I'm excited to make connections with peers across the state and [farm to school] sector. I've gotten to meet many interested and talented people working in food justice and school nutrition through this program."

Farm to School programs have exploded across the country in recent years, with a wide range of impacts on local economies, student health, and learning. Massachusetts has been at the forefront of this movement, with a strong statewide program since 2004. The U.S.D.A.'s Farm to School Census finds that Massachusetts school districts are helping 595,000 students gain access to healthy, local foods and helping school cafeterias spend an estimated \$11.4 million on Massachusetts produced food.

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