



**MASSACHUSETTS
FARM TO SCHOOL**

INSTITUTE

2019-2020
Team Newsletter

Hingham

Lowell

New Bedford

Norfolk Agricultural

Northampton

Springfield

Watertown



Hingham School District

The Hingham Public Schools' Farm to School Team has made a lot of progress through participation in the 2019-2020 MA Farm to School Institute. For the first time, members from many different parts of our community met throughout the school year to discuss ways to improve our farm to school efforts at Hingham High School. The team included members of the Food Service Department, Science Department, Family and Consumer Sciences, High School PTO, the High School Principal, local education farm Holly Hill Farm, and the community. Last fall, educators from Holly Hill Farm taught students how to use our own compost to plant greens in raised beds. In addition, the science department, botany students, and food service staff collaborated to grow lettuce in the greenhouse hydroponics system for use in the cafeteria. Classroom students, botany club students, teaching staff, and food service staff continued to grow and harvest lettuce in the indoor grow racks to serve in the high school salad bar. During the school closure, lettuce grown in the grow racks and greenhouse hydroponics system was also donated to the Hingham Food Pantry, and included in Grab and Go meals for Hingham students, veterans, and seniors in need. To increase awareness of our farm to school activities, we shared our accomplishments throughout the year on various social media platforms. This included the High School Principal's Twitter feed, Hingham Public Schools Facebook page, and the Food Service Department's Facebook and Instagram pages. Although our normal activities have been interrupted by the COVID-19 school closure, we have made a lot of progress this year, and laid a foundation to continue to improve our farm to school efforts in upcoming years.





Lowell School District

Lowell Farm to School has had a foundational year cultivating farm to school advocates, developing communication tools, building from its programmatic strengths and growing in size, now including a district curriculum science coordinator and principal. The team has worked to develop a Farm to School logo, informational flyer, and swag to share with teaching staff, students, families, food services workers and district leadership, notably meeting at length with our district Superintendent to share our efforts and goals. Programmatically we have made important strides in providing farm to school professional development for teachers and food service workers, hosting a Seed Saving School Garden Workshop for 7 district teachers and an Intro to Farm to School Chef Challenge to over 100 district food service workers.

In the realm of procurement, over 3,000 students participated in at least one Harvest of the Month local taste test, allowing us to build relationships with 8 local farmers, creameries, and fish distributors. Moreover, with support from district leadership, the Food and Nutrition Department has taken steps to procure the vast majority of leafy greens across district menus locally – heightening taste and color while decreasing our food miles.

It has been a busy year, however, our team’s greatest success story has been our ability to pivot to ensure community food security and food-based educational resources to our students in the face of COVID-19. It has been in no small part through leveraging our relationships as a cohort that we have been able to accomplish the following:

- hosting a bi-weekly mobile Food Bank
- giving away over 2,500 pot, soil, and seed curriculum kits for remote learning
- distributing seeds, locally grown seedlings, and hyper local produce at reduced or no cost
- adapting our school garden sites into production sites where families can safely grow food or receive produce
- continuing to partner with local farms and fisheries to offer Harvest of the Month grab and go meals and, most notably,
- the swift, effective, and safe transformation of our Food and Nutrition Department and food service workers who have provided almost 400,000 emergency meals to district families to date.

During a difficult time of instability, Lowell Farm to School has found resilience and we look forward to cultivating these strengths to accomplish even more in the coming school years.



New Bedford School District

Our participation in the MA Farm to School (FTS) Institute program over the course of the last year has allowed our New Bedford (NB) Coalition to formalize and take strategic steps toward fulfilling our Farm to School Action Plan. Although we had some minor setbacks as we navigated and adjusted to COVID-19, we continued to make progress and deepen relationships that will allow us to meet our programming goals at six elementary schools in the '20-'21 school year. Our NB Coalition partners, the New Bedford Public Schools (NBPS) Central Administration and Food Service Department, The Marion Institute and Coastal Foodshed have continued to meet monthly to set and meet FTS deadlines; while collectively meeting weekly with community partners to discuss and develop an emergency food response to the pandemic through the Marion Institute's Southcoast Food Policy Council (SFPC).

In the classrooms, the Marion Institute's Grow Education program has planned and piloted an integrated FTS curriculum across the districts' third grade. This expansion

includes the build-out of garden programming at each school, professional development opportunities for science and health teachers, and the introduction of two FoodCorps members. Data collection and evaluation across the school district has been initiated to include nursing and wellness impacts of FTS.

In the cafeteria, the success of our Food Service Departments' Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Program (FFVP) encouraged the expansion on the '20-'21 application to include the FFVP in all 19 elementary schools in New Bedford! We have established a purchasing bid to source fresh produce from local vendors, some of which will be locally-grown, in a way that meets the procurement guidelines set by the state. And we continue to deepen our relationships made with farmers through Coastal Foodshed's work and the SFPC meetings. Our participation in the MA FTS Institute has deepened our relationships with our community and expedited our intent to institutionalize Farm to School as part of our city's food resilience plan.



Norfolk Aggie

Norfolk Agricultural High School's farm to school plan focused on developing an integrated program in which students plan, plant, grow, maintain, prepare, market, and harvest food crops on campus for use in the school cafeteria and community.

The farm to school team met each month, bringing in additional team members beyond those who attended the Institute retreat. They launched a farm to school newsletter, began implementing the Harvest of the Month program, conducted an assessment of current produce usage by the school meal program, and incorporated campus raised beef into the meal program. Students quickly got to work researching and planning for how the school could grow, raise, and harvest more food for use in school meals and for sale to the community. From developing crop plans to researching irrigation and fencing needs to evaluating the feasibility of composting on campus, students were at the center of the farm to school effort.

When the campus closed in March, the farm to school program kept going. Teachers incorporated food and agriculture learning into their courses. They started a blog to encourage and support students gardening at home (<https://aggievictorygarden.blogspot.com/>). And the school shifted their existing growing operations to serve their community. When their annual plant sale had to be canceled, the school wanted to ensure that the plants were put to good use and quickly pivoted to a plan they called Aggie Abundance. Plants were donated to first responders in the community as well as to families and staff at the school. The newly empty greenhouse space was then used to plant more food crops that could help address food insecurity in the community. The school is transitioning from what is normally an on-campus pumpkin patch to now be a community garden Aggie Abundance, planted and maintained by teachers volunteering their time during the summer break. Check out [this great story](#) about their efforts in the Boston Globe!

**Year-end wrap up submitted by Institute coach.*

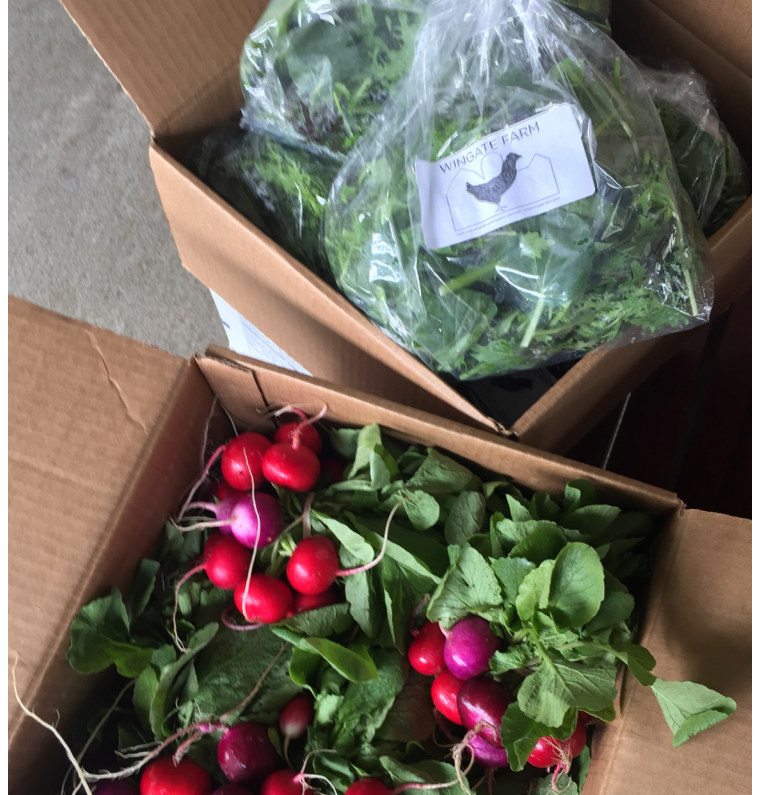


Northampton School District

In March 2020, in response to the needs of the community during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Community Food Distribution Project (CFDP) was swiftly launched by Grow Food Northampton and Northampton Survival Center with other local organizations including Northampton Public Schools (NPS), Community Action Pioneer Valley, the Northampton Housing Authority, the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, and the City of Northampton. The CFDP ensures that members of our community who are experiencing increasing food insecurity during the pandemic have access to nutritious food on a weekly basis.

Delivery sites were chosen to correspond with the Northampton Public Schools meal sites, ensuring that families not only have access to prepared meals from school, but also to pantry items and fresh produce. Northampton Public Schools also contributed use of the Jackson Street School, which acts as the base of operations for the program. To date, products from 9 different farms have been purchased to include in the food distributions. These have included fresh salad greens, lettuce, radishes, potatoes, and even maple syrup.

In addition, Northampton Public Schools and Grow Food Northampton have expanded their partnership to ensure that more fresh local food will be incorporated in meals for our students – Grow Food Northampton will purchase local produce from local farms for Northampton Public Schools' student meals.





Springfield School District

Springfield Public Schools Farm to School team has navigated challenging times with the COVID-19 pandemic. Our Farm to School Institute team has not been able to meet remotely as of yet. Classes moved remotely and the garden team and FoodCorps members developed virtual garden tours and lessons for students at 11 schools, not including those represented on the F2S Institute team. Sadly, our garden team was suddenly furloughed in May, so FoodCorps members, district staff, volunteers, and community partners are stepping in to water and grow the gardens.

Springfield Food Services responded to the crisis, opening 19 meal sites across Springfield and have served over 1.1 million meals to date, many of which have included local produce and our Home Grown Springfield recipes which students helped chefs perfect over the past couple years. Springfield is running the Summer Food Service Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program Monday-Friday to provide breakfast, lunch, dinner and a snack for every day of the week (Fridays include meals for the weekend). Additionally, we are utilizing the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program to distribute fresh, whole fruit to families, and we partnered with the Springfield Food Policy Council and World Farmers from Lancaster, MA to provide over 300 boxes of fresh, local produce through the Food for Families USDA box program. FoodCorps members supported a virtual taste test for Fish Harvest of the Month in May. We are grateful for our staff, volunteers, and partner organizations who have also stepped up to utilize meal sites to provide donated goods (hand sewn masks, toiletries, books, garden grow-kits, etc.).

[Click here to see a sample of our Weekly Report.](#)





Watertown School District

Watertown started 2020 with a strong commitment to their Farm to School program. Their long standing garden committee was renamed the Watertown Farm to School Committee to highlight the district-wide initiative. A meeting in January with stakeholders from across the community, including the superintendent, raised awareness, shared successes, and increased buy-in for the initiative. Remote learning and school closures presented so many challenges to educators, their students and families, however the Watertown Farm to School Team experienced some successes during school closures and made progress towards their goals in their action plan.

USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program

The USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program is an immediate relief program to provide critical support to our farmers and ranchers, maintain the integrity of our food supply chain, and ensure every American continues to receive and have access to the food they need.

At the Watertown School Nutrition grab and go meal site, USDA Farmers to Families Food Boxes full of fresh fruit and vegetables are distributed weekly to any family who utilizes the site for school meals. Over the past three weeks, 936 boxes have been distributed.

Seed and Bean Hand Outs

All teachers in grades K-5 received 6-7 weeks of remote learning science lessons to share with their students. Every science unit was aligned to state science frameworks and included a hands-on experience as well as an additional outdoor experience. To support this work, we handed out bean packets for kindergarteners and flower seeds at our district lunch distribution. Over 150 seed and bean packets were handed out!

Additions to Gardens

Judy Fallows, with help from parent volunteers, drafted guidelines for safe gardening at schools during the quarantine. Then following these guidelines, Judy and Evan, with help from his family were able to install a hand washing station so gardeners can wash hands with soap and water right in the garden. They planted sweet potato slips for fall harvest, three kiwi vines which will become an arbor in 5 - 7 years and some perennial flowers moved from the Cunniff school that can be returned after that school is rebuilt.

These are challenging times, of that there is no doubt, but it is perhaps more important now more than ever that our students have healthy food to eat and an understanding of where that food comes from. School gardens and outdoor learning spaces may be an integral part of the future of education as some of the safest learning spaces on school campuses and Watertown Farm to School is ready for the future.

