

Advocating for Farm to School: How to Host Site Visits



This resource contains the following to help you host a successful site visit:

1. Background
2. Who Can You Invite?
3. General Considerations
4. Messaging
5. Coordinating Site Visits: Before, During, After
6. Reaching out to Press and Press Release

Background

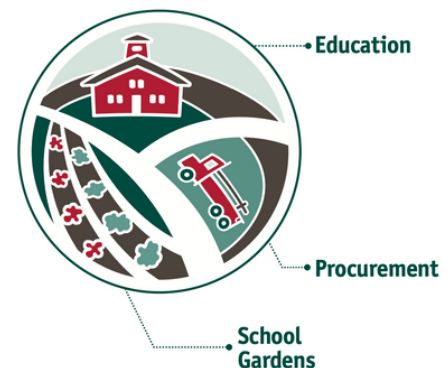
Showcasing your farm to school program in person is one of the most impactful ways to advocate for farm to school.

Some officials may have never heard of farm to school before, and site visits are a great opportunity for them to learn more. Giving decision makers at any level or branch of government the opportunity to experience your farm to school program firsthand will not only make them familiar with farm to school, but also allow them to interact with those who benefit the most. Inviting them and community leaders to see your farm to school efforts also establishes and builds relationships that can drive meaningful policy change.

We have a broad view of 'farm to school' that includes 'farm to early care and education' and alternative education sites.

The tactics outlined in this resource are applicable to these systems as well.

Implementation differs by location but always includes one or more of the below core elements.



General Considerations

Who Can You Invite?

Federal:

Legislators:

Your Senator or House Representative and/or their Staff

Federal Agency Staff:

A staff person from USDA Food and Nutrition Service or from the US Department of Education

Regional Government District:

For example, Delta Regional Authority staff

State:

State Representatives:

Your state districts Senator or Representative and/or their Staff

State Agencies:

Staff from your state department of agriculture, or agency overseeing early childhood education or early childhood nutrition programs

Local:

School Board Members

School District Administrators:

Superintendents and Staff

City Government Officials:

Mayor or City Council or City Board Members

County Government Officials:

Education or Environmental Offices or County Board of Supervisors

Plan Ahead

- Having a decision maker visit is a chance to show off your students and your contributions to the community. It is often good to have a "Welcome [decision maker's title] [name]" banner or a sign in an area with high visibility. Create an agenda to follow, talking points, and prepare relevant data. Always have a camera to take pictures of the tour.

Work Together

- Be sure to plan together with everyone on your farm to school team. Depending on the purpose of the visit, it may be helpful to seek planning advice from your state farm to school network, or from the National Farm to School Network, to increase the relevance and impact of the visit.
- You should also include a local farmer or business leader with whom your program has a positive working relationship. If a farmer or business cannot attend, obtain a letter of support or testimonial to include in the materials for your guest.

Engage Students and Teachers

- Encourage students, teachers, and staff to actively participate in the site visit, ensuring that those who participate reflect the diversity of your community. Prepare students to act as greeters, share their experiences, talk about the benefits of the program, and interact with the legislators. Teachers can also share their experience integrating farm-to-school concepts into the curriculum. If time allows, include demonstrations, such as taste tests or a sample garden activity.

Track the Clock

- Given the demands on a decision maker's time, it is best to keep the visit concise and on schedule. A walk-through the day prior to the event is recommended to ensure that all participants understand their roles, the purpose of the visit, the route that will be taken in and around the buildings, and how much time will be allotted for each portion of the presentation.

Tour Your Program

- Your visit should include a very brief tour of your facility, be it a school garden, cafeteria, or other feature of your program.
- A tour helps them understand what's involved, particularly any funding required for putting physical infrastructure or staffing into place. It also helps them to picture the benefits in action, and is a good photo op!

Messaging

- **Identify what you want to accomplish with your visit.**
 - This will help narrow down what you want your decision maker to do. Some examples could be, asking a legislator to support a farm to school bill; pushing local leadership (like school district or county officials) to prioritize farm to school activities in how they allocate resources and funding; or raising awareness among appointed officials so that they value farm to school activities to help their agency accomplish its mission.
- **Practice telling your own story succinctly; make sure to talk about why what you do is important!**
- **Research the decision maker's previous record, personal background, and priorities.**
 - Determine if they have cosponsored previous versions of the Federal Farm to School Act, or perhaps a relevant [state bill supporting farm to school](#). Ask what they know about F2S already, including thanking them for previous support.
 - Find out about their background such as a previous career as a teacher or remarks they may have made about what they believe are the most pressing issues. Whatever a decision maker's interest is, there is likely a farm to school benefit!
- **Familiarize yourself with specific policy "asks" (such as asking for their commitment to cosponsor a bill) and practice asking the question.**
 - Make your verbal ask for support, such as "We would like [Senator/Representative] to be a cosponsor on this bill."
 - Listen for their reaction and address any questions.
- **Gather info and supporting materials on the benefits of what you're asking for.**
 - Research the cumulative amount of farm to school grants the state has received, or community stories about the need for certain programs.
 - Gather any materials - such as NFSN's Farm Bill platform, the Benefits of Farm to School brief, or your own communications - that you would like to provide them to read in advance or bring with you to discuss.
- **Focus your storytelling on the specific needs you would like the legislator to act on - such as expanding funding for a program because there is demand in your community.**
- **Introduce the policy changes you are asking for.**
 - If you don't feel like you can speak in enough detail, you can always get more information and get back to them later.
- **Leave your materials with them to review at the end.**
 - If you provide them at the beginning of the meeting, staff may focus on the materials.

Coordinating Site Visits

Before the Visit:

- **Identify your most compelling partners to involve/showcase in the site visit**
 - Some organizations might do a site visit entirely focused on their one program, but many others will need to involve multiple people within a district or region to pull together the best storytellers on an issue - eg, for a school you'd need to get the ok from the principal and district administrators. Also, ask for participation from teachers, and notify relevant parents if you need kids to participate outside of school time.
- **Develop your goals and objectives**
 - Brainstorm your purpose and objectives for having decision makers visit your program. For example, one object of the visit may be to educate decision makers about the importance of farm to school at your school or organization.
- **Identify your program's decision makers**
 - To find local decision makers, you can visit your school district, city, or county websites.
 - Most state legislator websites have a "find my legislator" search feature.
 - At the national level, find your [federal legislators' contact information here](#).
- **Identify upcoming decision maker's recess periods**
 - For decision makers at the federal level, know when members of Congress travel to their districts. These recess periods are the best times for members to visit constituents. Typical recess periods include:
 - Most federal holidays
 - The entire month of August
 - In election years, Congress tends to adjourn in October, leaving the rest of the fall open for visits.
- **Invite your decision makers to visit**
 - You should send the invitation letter on behalf of your program several weeks in advance. A sample letter has been provided for you below. The letter should be sent via email to the decision maker's, or scheduler who handles events.
- **Follow up with decision makers scheduler**
 - A few days after your email you should contact the decision maker's or scheduler to make sure they received the invitation.
- **Confirm the date and details**
- **Try to accommodate a decision maker's busy schedule; if the suggested date will not work, offer several dates/times as options. Be sure to provide your contact information, and offer details of the visit.**

Coordinating Site Visits

- **Coordinate with any communications staff**
 - Ask your invited guest whether they are willing to have any media/press presence at the visit. If they prefer no members of the press, ask ahead of time whether you may issue a press release after the event. If they are interested in having media coverage and members of the press there, a press release should be sent at least a week before the event, followed by phone calls to key local press outlets
 - Always ask to take pictures with your guest during the site visit!
- **Invite their staff to accompany them**
 - Staffers covering issue areas like agriculture or education, as well as local staffers in the district, are extremely important to advocacy efforts as they are often the subject matter experts who support policy progress. Treat staff just as you would treat your guest of honor.
- **Perform a walk-through with key staff one day ahead of site visit**
 - The route should be mapped out so that the event and tour run smoothly
- **Distribute schedules to everyone that will be involved**
 - Once the schedule has been finalized, distribute it to all participants and send a copy to the member's scheduler.
 - Remind staff and students ahead of time: Do not debate policy or politics with the member, and do be respectful—always.

Email Template

The following is an example of an email geared towards federal legislators, however it can be adapted to target other decision makers at different levels and branches of government.

Meeting request template to be used for phone or email contact:

Subject: Constituent meeting request for [specific dates]

Hello, My name is [NAME], and I'm [your position, title, or other relevant information on who you are representing for this meeting. If you are doing this in a personal capacity, you can say, "I'm a constituent, as well as a parent/teacher/business owner in [your area]"]. [Add a little background about any farm to school work]

I'm hoping to speak with [Senator's or Representative's name] while they are in the district June 26-July 7 to discuss [my/our] priorities for the Farm Bill reauthorization and support for farm to school. Is it possible to schedule a meeting with [Senator or Representative] during that time? [Include background on priorities, such as NFSN Farm Bill platform, or your own work].

Thank you for your consideration.
Sincerely,
[Your name]

Coordinating Site Visits

During the Visit:

- **Greet the decision maker and/or their staff (2-3 min)**
 - A member of your team should be on hand to greet the decision maker and/or their staff when they arrive on site. It is also preferable to have one or two students accompany the member and director on the tour.
- **Tour your facilities (15-20 min)**
 - Take your visitor(s) through a facility tour led by your program lead. This is an opportunity to showcase your program in action to the legislator and their staff. Include rooms where the program is actively taking place or arrange short demonstrations with faculty and students to exhibit their learning. Introduce the legislator to staff and students involved in the tour promptly, but avoid any delays.
 - Accommodate any specific requests from the legislator and their staff, even if it deviates from the initial agenda. Engage students and staff throughout the tour, as legislators enjoy interacting with them, and doing so creates a personalized experience. Additionally, invite key farmers, community members, or business leaders to demonstrate the benefits your program brings to the district.
- **Brief student program (15 min)**
 - Decision maker's enjoy seeing youth programs and having their pictures taken with children. If possible, have your students prepared to lead or engage in a farm to school activity. This may also be an opportunity for students to lead part of the tour, such as leading the tour of their school garden.
- **Communicating Your Event**
 - Consider sending out a press release. Allowing the press to cover the event will help inform the local community about farm to school programs in your district.
 - Don't forget to take photos.
 - If you have a school newspaper or newsletter, this would be a good opportunity for students to cover the event.
 - Promote the event on your school's social media channels, using photos and videos to create excitement. Encourage parents, teachers, and students to share the event on their personal accounts as well. Use relevant hashtags, such as #FarmToSchool and #[Decision Maker's Name], to increase visibility.
- **DON'T give any gifts - due to lobbying and ethics rules, it is better to refrain from sharing gifts.**
- **DON'T let the site visit run longer than the amount of time that has been allotted - Be respectful of the decision maker's tight schedule and other commitments.**

Coordinating Site Visits

After the Visit:

Follow up afterward with a thank-you email, and any additional information that the decision maker or their staff asked for. This thank-you email example is geared towards federal legislators and can be adapted to target decision makers at different levels and branches of government.

Thank you email template to be used for email contact:

Subject: A Sincere Thank You for Visiting [Name of Farm to School Program]

Hello [Decision Maker's Name and/or Contact Point's Name],

I'd like to express my sincere gratitude for visiting our Farm to School Program at [Location] on [Date]. Your presence was a great honor for our students, staff, and farmers, and we are grateful for your support of this important part of our community.

As you know [Brief background about the impact or background of your program]. Your visit was the highlight of our [school year, month, season] and it was clear that you were genuinely interested in our program. You took the time to [briefly review notable activities or interest points in their visit].

We appreciate your willingness to learn more about our program and speak with our [administration, team, leaders, students, educators, etc.] We know that you are a busy person, so we are especially grateful for your time and attention.

[Make sure to address any additional information or resources that the decision maker or their staff asked for during the visit. Utilize in-text links and attach documents as appropriate. Make the information easy to access.]

Thank you again for your support. We look forward to future collaboration to promote [values of your program that were highlighted during the visit.]

Sincerely,
[Your name]
[Your Title]
[School or Program Name]

Reaching Out to the Press

To ensure your event gets the coverage it deserves, follow these steps:

- Compile a list of local media outlets, including newspapers, radio stations, and television stations. Don't forget online news sources and local bloggers. Local news desks at television stations are particularly receptive to this kind of outreach.
- Find the contact information for the appropriate reporters or editors at each outlet. Look for journalists who cover education, agriculture, or local events.
- Send a personalized email to each contact, briefly introducing your program and the upcoming visit from the legislator. Attach the press release (see template below) and invite them to attend the event.
- Think about the best people who show the story of the program. It might be a student, a teacher, a cafeteria worker, a farmer. Make sure you can confirm that they can attend the event, and coach them to tell the story of why the program matters to them in a few soundbites. Include a few details about them in the press release.
- Follow up with a phone call a few days before the event to confirm their attendance and answer any questions they may have.
- Prepare a media kit for attending journalists, including a fact sheet about your program, high-resolution photos of your garden or program, and any relevant news articles or testimonials.

Opinion Piece Placement

- Compile a list of local media outlets, including newspapers, radio stations, and television stations. Don't forget online news sources and local bloggers. Local news desks at television stations are particularly receptive to this kind of outreach.
- Find the contact information for the appropriate reporters or editors at each outlet. Look for journalists who cover education, agriculture, or local events.

Press Release Template

Use this template to create a press release for your event:

The following template is geared towards federal legislators, however it can be adapted to target other decision makers at different levels and branches of government.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Date]

Contact:

[Your Name]

[Your Phone Number]

[Your Email Address]

[Legislator's Name] to Visit [School Name]'s Farm to School Program

[City, State] - [School Name] is excited to announce that [Legislator's Name and Title] will be visiting its farm to school program on [Date] at [Time]. The visit will include a tour of the school's thriving garden, where students learn about sustainable agriculture, healthy eating, and the importance of supporting local farmers.

During the visit, [Legislator's Name] will have the opportunity to speak with students and teachers about their experiences in the program and the positive impact it has had on their lives. The event aims to showcase the benefits of farm to school initiatives and encourage further support for such programs.

Students and farmers will also be on hand to offer comment.

Members of the press are invited to attend the event and cover the legislator's visit. For more information, please contact [Your Name] at [Your Phone Number] or [Your Email Address].

About [School Name]'s Farm to School Program:

[Provide a brief description of your program, including its history, goals, and notable achievements.]

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