

Virginia Farm to School Strategic Plan 2021-2026

Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team
Virginia Farm to School Network



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Executive Summary

The Virginia Farm to School Statewide Strategic Plan for 2021–2026 was developed by the Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team as part of a 2020 USDA Farm to School Grant awarded to the Virginia Department of Education, Office of School Nutrition Programs (VDOE-SNP). The five-year Strategic Plan was designed to achieve the USDA Farm to School Grant objectives by July 2023 and to serve as a programmatic farm to school roadmap through 2026. The action-oriented Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team—which comprises Virginia Farm to School Network regional leads, state agency leaders, and farm to school stakeholders with representation from each of the eight [Virginia Superintendent’s regions](#)—used the Racial and Social Equity Assessment Tool developed by the National Farm to School Network (NFSN) to assess and ensure racial and social equity as underpinnings of the Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan details the vision, mission, values, goals, and objectives for the Virginia Farm to School Network; uses a logic model for expected outcomes; and includes evaluative measures to fulfill the grant requirements in addition to current and future farm to school initiatives.

Vision Statement

The Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team seeks to ensure that every Virginia child both has equitable access to and is consuming healthy Virginia grown and regional food, which will result in students’ improved educational performance and greater sustainability for Virginia agriculture and related industries.

Mission Statement

The Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team works to incentivize and thus increase Virginia grown and regional food procurement in federal child nutrition programs by developing nutrition- and agriculture-related educational resources and opportunities for students, by providing training for school personnel and farmers in food safety and purchasing, and by providing distribution resources to stakeholders and end-users.

Farm to School Intent

The Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team’s intent centers on the core elements of the NFSN:

- Procurement: Virginia grown and regional foods are purchased, promoted, and served in school and child nutrition programs and during classroom instruction, such as with taste tests.
- Education: Students participate in educational activities related to agriculture, food, health, and nutrition in the classroom, garden, and cafeteria.

- School gardens: Students engage in hands-on, experiential learning through gardening linked to the curriculum.

Virginia Grown and Regional Food

Though “local” has a geographic connotation, there is no consensus on a definition in terms of the distance between production and consumption. Each school food authority defines “local” in the context of its own procurement needs and availability. The Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team recognizes that a school may purchase food grown or raised outside of the Virginia border yet within the school’s regional foodshed. The Leadership Team uses the phrase “Virginia grown and regional food” throughout the Strategic Plan to ensure inclusivity of all Virginia farm to school efforts.

Statewide Strategic Objectives

Regarding the NFSN’s core elements and in consideration of both strategic alignments and key participating organizations (see below), the Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team developed four statewide strategic objectives:

- **Strategic Objective 1 (Procurement):** Increase annual procurement of Virginia grown and regional foods for Virginia child nutrition programs to \$24 million by 2026.
- **Strategic Objective 2 (Food Safety):** Increase student access to safe Virginia grown and regional food.
- **Strategic Objective 3 (Delivery and Distribution):** Develop communication pathways and tools that promote a more robust and cohesive food distribution system that provides Virginia grown and regional food to all Virginia schools.
- **Strategic Objective 4 (School Gardens and Education):** Foster an innovative and equitable dynamic learning environment for Virginia K–12 students.

Strategic Alignments

Stakeholders from the food, education, support, and agriculture industries convened as a team to develop the Virginia Farm to School Strategic Plan. This section addresses how the team arrived at priority objectives and how team members’ work aligns with identified objectives, starting with the Virginia Farm to School Network.

Established in 2018 by the VDOE-SNP and funded, in part, by a 2017 USDA Farm to School Grant, the Virginia Farm to School Network creates opportunities for vendors, buyers, and educators to meet, share best practices, and develop region-specific goals, including providing more Virginia grown food to Virginia students. Stakeholders in each of the eight [Virginia Superintendent’s Regions](#) gather at regional network meetings led by the Virginia Farm to

School Network Regional Leads and the VDOE-SNP Farm to School Specialist. The team of Regional Leads comprises the following professionals:

- Region 1: Roni LaPelle, Marketing Specialist, Chesterfield County Public Schools
- Region 2: Lisa Winter, Senior Director of School Nutrition, Norfolk Public Schools
- Region 3: *Vacant as of February 2021*
- Region 4: *Vacant as of March 2021*
- Region 5: Andrea Early, Executive Director of Nutrition, Harrisonburg City Public Schools
- Region 6: *Vacant as of October 2020*
- Region 7: Courtney Umbarger, Owner, Laurel Springs Farm; and Tracy Webster, School Nutrition Coordinator, Wythe County Public Schools
- Region 8: Tammy Maxey, Programs Director, Virginia Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom (VA-AITC); and Robin Moore, Director of Food Services, Mecklenburg County Public Schools

With the contribution of these and other members of the Leadership Team, the Virginia Farm to School Network has undertaken the following steps to date:

- Hosted 16 meetings across the Commonwealth
- Developed regional visions and strategic, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals
- Identified needs, both specific to the region and applicable statewide
- Provided feedback in strategic planning processes

The Virginia Farm to School Network determined that communities of practice around key farm to school areas will be useful and is considering appropriate means of implementation. The communities of practice will call in additional practitioners with expertise in each of the strategic objectives and design a method of communication such as a listserv for questions and answers, resource sharing, and information regarding applicable grants.

Alignment of Statewide Objectives

In developing the five-year Strategic Plan, the Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team prioritized statewide objectives set forth by the USDA Farm to School Grant, the Virginia Children’s Cabinet, and the Virginia Roadmap to End Hunger. The Leadership Team also built agreement around statewide objectives and evaluated strategic alignment within key participating organizations. Additionally, the Leadership Team incorporated specific regional goals to create a top-down, bottom-up approach to meeting stakeholder needs. The objective is to prioritize projects and activities that support the grant objectives, meet stakeholder needs, and achieve the

Leadership Team’s mission. Below is a discussion of key strategic alignments that informed the Leadership Team’s logic model, work plan, and timeline.

USDA Farm to School Grant

USDA Farm to School Grants are an important way to help state, regional, and local organizations as they initiate, expand, and institutionalize farm to school efforts. Including the grant received in 2020, Virginia has received and benefitted from 18 USDA Farm to School Grants totaling over \$1.2 million in federal funds to support farm to school efforts.

Grant funds allowed the Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team to develop and implement a five-year Strategic Plan. Key activities during the grant project period will focus on connecting school nutrition personnel to farmers through farm tours, network meetings, trainings, and a statewide conference; providing toolkits for Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) agents and school personnel; developing integrated lesson plans for school-aged children; and evaluating efforts. The plan will also include strategies for sustainability beyond the two-year project period. Key partners include the VCE, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS), and the VA-AITC.

Virginia Children’s Cabinet

The objectives prioritized by the Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team align with one of the three articulated priorities in the most recent Virginia Children’s Cabinet: nutrition and food security. Since 2014, the Virginia Children’s Cabinet has promoted the wellbeing of youth throughout the Commonwealth. Past focus areas have included school nutrition and child nutrition priorities. Strategies within the Children’s Cabinets have entailed the promotion of farm to school efforts and strengthening of local food systems to support Virginia’s agricultural industries.

Virginia Roadmap to End Hunger

The first and fourth objectives prioritized by the Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team are found in the [Virginia Roadmap to End Hunger](#) (Commonwealth of Virginia, 2020). Released in October 2020, the Roadmap encourages cross-sector partnerships to fulfill needs identified through town hall meetings and data collection on hunger within the Commonwealth.

The relevant farm to school goal in the Roadmap is to “grow access to local foods for schools and families,” which is to be accomplished by increasing the “procurement of Virginia grown and regional foods in child nutrition programs to \$22 million annually.” To evaluate progress toward this goal, the VDOE-SNP will collect data from the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years.

The Roadmap suggests taking the following steps to assist with achieving this goal:

- providing financial incentives to defray administrative costs and/or to offset the additional costs of Virginia grown and regional products to encourage the purchase of Virginia grown and regional foods and
- developing resources and training for farmers, schools, child nutrition staff, early care education sites, and educators with interagency support from the VDACS, the Virginia Department of Health, and the VCE.¹

Key Participating Organizations

Virginia Department of Education (VDOE)

By design, the mission of the Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team aligns with the mission of both the VDOE (“to advance equitable and innovative learning”) and the SNP (to ensure “all Virginia children have equitable access to good, healthy food”). Studies show a direct correlation between farm to school practices and academic achievement. According to the [National Farm to School Network Benefits Fact Sheet](#) (2020), farm to school programming directly influences student engagement and whole child development; academic achievement; and family, educator, and staff engagement. Improved educational performance and equitable access to fresh, healthy, Virginia grown and regional foods are at the forefront of the Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team’s efforts.

Hungry students cannot learn, so equitable access to good, healthy, Virginia grown and regional foods in federally funded child nutrition programs is foundational to meeting the basic needs of food security and nutritional quality that support health and wellness. Through Virginia farm to school programming, the school cafeteria becomes the practical learning lab for nutrition and agricultural education opportunities.

Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE)

The VCE—an educational outreach program that provides the resources of Virginia’s land-grant universities, Virginia Tech and Virginia State University, to the people of the Commonwealth—is an essential partner of the Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team. Extension agents and specialists form a network of educators whose classrooms are the communities, homes, and businesses of Virginia, where they bring research-based solutions to the problems facing Virginians today. The VCE is well-positioned to coordinate with the Leadership Team to provide research-based programming in existing program areas that address agricultural production, food safety, and agricultural, food, health, and nutrition education.

¹ “Local foods” and “local products” noted in the Roadmap are referred to as “Virginia grown and regional” foods and products in the strategic plan for consistency.

The VCE’s farm to school efforts build internal capacity to conduct educational programming aligned to broader statewide farm to school stakeholder goals. The VCE addresses farm to school issues in the following areas:

- improving agricultural viability, profitability, and sustainability;
- enhancing community viability;
- focusing on food, nutrition, and health;
- addressing the preservation of natural resources and the environment and slowing climate change;
- strengthening Virginia families; and
- developing youth.

Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS)

Another valuable member of the Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team is the VDACS, the state agency that promotes the economic growth and development of Virginia agriculture, provides consumer protection, and encourages environmental stewardship. The Division of Marketing and Development, in which the farm to school program is located, serves producers, commodity boards and associations, retailers, and buyers by providing marketing assistance. The mission of the VDACS Farm to School program (itself part of the Office of Food Distribution) aligns with training for school personnel (buyers) and farmers (retailers/sellers), which promotes economic growth and the development of Virginia agriculture.

Virginia Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom (VA-AITC)

The mission of the Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team directly aligns with the VA-AITC’s mission: “to educate Virginia’s children about the importance of agriculture.” To support schools, educators, and volunteers so they can meaningfully connect children to agriculture, the VA-AITC provides lessons and resources, educator training workshops, newsletters, school grants, teacher awards, volunteer projects, and initiatives, such as Agriculture Literacy Week. These efforts are also complemented by the Virginia Farm to School Network’s work in developing educational opportunities, training, and resources for educators, school nutrition professionals, and students and in enriching educational opportunities regarding the Virginia agriculture industry.

Cooperative Extension at Virginia State University (VSU) Small Farm Outreach Program (SFOP)

Another participating organization of the Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team is the SFOP, a VCE program at VSU that educates and empowers small, limited-resource, socially disadvantaged, and veteran farmers and ranchers to own, operate, and sustain farms and ranches

independently. SFOP agents provide training programs to improve farm management skills and quality of life.

The missions of the Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team and the SFOP are in direct alignment. The Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team and Network develop training and resources for farmers and encourage schools to incorporate values into procurement documentation in alignment with the Virginia Public Procurement Act, Va. Code [§ 2.2-4310](#), in support of small, women-owned, minority-owned, and service-disabled veteran-owned businesses (2020). This partnership with the SFOP also supports the Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team’s priority of advancing racial and social equity.

Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth (VFHY)

A key concern of the Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team is echoed in the VFHY’s mission to empower Virginia’s youth to make healthy choices by reducing and preventing youth tobacco use, substance use, and childhood obesity. The Leadership Team and the VFHY programs align in the area of childhood obesity, where the VFHY improves access to healthy foods and opportunities for physical activity to prevent and reduce childhood obesity in Virginia.

Preventing childhood obesity is among the aims of the Leadership Team’s efforts in procurement, distribution, and education. Similarly, the VFHY includes farm to school initiatives as part of the approved activities for funding Healthy Community Action Team (HCAT) grants. The VFHY will collaborate with the VDOE-SNP to provide technical support for farm to school trainings, webinars, and workshops using the Foundation’s existing infrastructures and systems.

Local Food Hub and 4P Foods

Because the Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team seeks to provide resources to all parties within the value chain to make school and child nutrition purchases more feasible, there are multiple connections between the goals of the Leadership Team and those of the nonprofit Local Food Hub and the for-profit, mission-driven 4P Foods.

Local Food Hub, founded in 2009, is a nonprofit organization that advances equitable access to fresh food, independent farms, and fairness in farming. It provides support services to Virginia farmers who want to sell into wholesale markets, including schools. It also works in the community to increase access to healthy, nutritious foods, grown by small farmers in Virginia. Local Food Hub is especially committed to connecting Black farmers with new markets for their products and will be releasing a Virginia Black Farmer Directory in early 2022.

4P Foods is a wholesale distributor of regional foods that can help schools bring the farm to school. It exists to support small and midsize family farms in the Mid-Atlantic region by providing access to new markets while also working to ensure that all Virginians have equitable

access to healthy, local food. With two warehouses, a fleet of refrigerated delivery vehicles, premier food safety certification, and high-quality local products, schools can incorporate Virginia grown and regional food into school cafeterias by making purchases directly from 4P Foods.

4P Foods’ guiding principles are that good food provides nourishment and enables people and communities to thrive; that it must be equitably accessible to everyone regardless of income, race, or zip code; that it should be produced in an environmentally regenerative manner; that it can employ a supply chain in which every being is treated with respect and dignity; and that it improves health outcomes and economic security for all. Both the Virginia Farm to School Network and 4P Foods prioritize the outcomes of a healthy diet (such as educational performance and healthy living) and racial and social equity.

Alignment among the Leadership Team and 4P Foods can improve equitable access and supply chain fairness within the network of growers, producers, distributors, and school and child nutrition professionals.

Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team Statewide Strategic Objectives

Strategic Objective 1 (Procurement)

- Increase annual procurement of Virginia grown and regional foods for Virginia child nutrition programs to \$24 million by 2026

Strategic Objective 1 Outcomes, Activities, and Metrics

Long-Term Outcomes

- Increased farm economic stability and resiliency
- Increased sustainability of and knowledge in community food systems
- Healthier students, staff, and communities
- Improved carbon footprint of Virginia’s food system

Short- and Medium-Term Outcomes

- Increased procurement of Virginia grown/produced and regional foods: By 2022, Virginia child nutrition programs are procuring \$22 million in Virginia grown/produced and regional foods annually
- Greater availability of procurement resources for school nutrition directors, producers, and trainers (i.e., solicitation templates, memoranda of understanding (MOU), and tracking tools)
- Increased understanding of federal and state procurement requirements and methods of procuring local foods
- Strengthened relationships between school nutrition directors and producers
- Increased access to and consumption of safe, nutritious fresh fruits, vegetables, grains, and proteins
- Increased Virginia producer sales to Virginia school systems
- Increased farm to school market development resources and trainings for producers
- Increased connections between growers, school personnel, and students through Virginia Farm to School Network meetings, farm tours, and school-based events
- Increased student knowledge of the benefits of consuming fresh fruits and vegetables
- Improved farm to school data
- Increased capacity of trainers to deliver educational programming to producers
- Increased diversification in farmer and school participation

Activities to Achieve Objective and Outcomes

- Select four state agency representatives to attend the USDA “Bringing the Farm to School” curriculum release for agricultural producers
- Feature 10 regionally diverse farmers, grower cooperatives, and food hubs at school nutrition conferences
- Implement four farm tours for school nutrition professionals across Virginia
- Train VCE/Virginia Tech Cooperative Extension and VCE/VSU SFOP agents using the USDA “Bringing the Farm to School” curriculum for agricultural producers
- Train 100 farmers by 2026 using the USDA “Bringing the Farm to School” curriculum for agricultural producers throughout the eight regions
- Create and package comprehensive resources for a Virginia farm to school toolkit
 - Identify and form a toolkit team with subject matter experts in procurement
 - Create toolkit content related to procurement
 - Finalize and distribute the toolkit
- Improve or redevelop a Virginia farm to school website
 - Determine the appropriate Virginia farm to school website location and coordinate points of responsibility within agencies and organizations
 - Compile statewide procurement resources and other web links to include on the Virginia farm to school website
- Develop resources, such as factsheets, webinars, web content, videos, toolkits, and templates, including the following:
 - Produce request for proposals template incorporating geographic preference, values, and evaluation rubrics
 - Template forward contract for use with growers
 - Template MOU between school nutrition programs and school garden operations
- Conduct webinars/workshops/conferences:
 - Virginia School Nutrition Association (SNA) Conference
 - Virginia Farm to School Conference
 - Farm tours
 - Regional Virginia Farm to School Network meetings
 - Webinars for growers and distributors explaining how to sell more local food to schools
 - “Bringing the Farm to School” curriculum for agricultural producers
 - Food safety training for growers, processors, distributors, and school garden educators
- Capture and collect key farm to school, farm to summer, and farm to Child and Adult Care Program (CACFP) data
- Seek funding to support and reach all goals

Metrics and Indicators

- Measure local food dollars procured by child nutrition programs
 - VDOE: Use the existing tracking tool, 2021
 - VDOE: Simplify the tracking tool and redefine the required data, 2022; use the SNP website applications and annual financial reports for local food reporting by 2025
 - Virginia CACFP: Align data collection training, 2022; align data points of collection with the VDOE, 2022; and research and implement farm to CACFP data collection method, fall 2023
- Track the number of agents and farmers trained using the USDA/NFSN/National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) curriculum, 2021–2026
 - Track attendance and registration with assistance from the VFHY
 - Obtain post-training data one year after the training regarding new sales to schools
- Track the number of webinar, workshop, and conference attendees
- Track the increase in Virginia grown and regional food availability through various sources
- Track the number of growers, food hubs, and produce companies carrying Virginia grown and regional products represented at school nutrition conferences
- Track the number of school nutrition professionals attending SFOP Farm Tours, 2023
- Ensure representation of growers, distributors, processors, and school nutrition buyers in the Virginia Farm to School Network
- Track long-term vendor/buyer relationships

Inputs

- 4P and Local Food Hub (LFH)
- Appalachian Sustainable Development (ASD)
- Go Green Farms 757
- Growers
- Local Environmental Agriculture Project (LEAP)
- Lulu’s Local Foods
- Produce and broadline distributors
- Produce Source Partners (PSP)
- Virginia Farm to School Network leads
- The Common Market
- USDA Agricultural Marketing Service Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program (AMS FSMIP)
- USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant

- VCE Farm to School Program Team
- VDACS
- Virginia Department of Health (VDH)
- VDOE
- Virginia Farmers Market Association (VAFMA)

Reach and Audience

- Distributors
- Growers
- Nonprofit partners
- School nutrition professionals
- State agency stakeholders
- VCE agents

Assumptions

- All participating agencies on the Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team will contribute to the work of developing resources and training
- Growers are interested in selling to schools

External Factors

- COVID-19 and impacts on stability
- Leadership priorities
- Food markets and availability

Strategic Objective 1 Project Work Plan Table

| Activity | Anticipated Completion Date | Responsible Parties |
|--|---|--|
| Four key state agency representatives attend the USDA “Bringing the Farm to School” producer train-the-trainer education session | December 2021 | Primary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP) Secondary: Amber Vallotton (VCE), VCE SFOP, and Seth Benton (VDACS) |
| Feature 10 farmers, grower cooperatives, and food hubs at School Nutrition conferences, trainings, and events (e.g., Virginia Farm to School Conference/School Nutrition Directors Conference, SNA-VA conferences, etc.) | October 2023 | Primary: VDACS Secondary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP) |
| Implement four farm tours for child nutrition professionals and institutional purchasers (colleges and hospitals) across Virginia | Spring 2023 | Primary: VCE SFOP Secondary: Amber Vallotton (VCE), Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP) |
| VCE/VT and VCE SFOP agents train 50 farmers by 2023 and 100 farmers by 2026 using the USDA “Bringing the Farm to School” curriculum for agricultural producers throughout the eight regions | February 2023; October 2026 | Primary: Amber Vallotton (VCE) Secondary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP) |
| Create and package comprehensive procurement resources for a Virginia farm to school toolkit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and form a toolkit team with subject-matter experts in procurement • Create toolkit content related to procurement • Finalize and distribute the toolkit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and form a toolkit team: April 2021 • Toolkit content: March 2022 • Finalize toolkit: Oct 2022 | Primary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP) |

VIRGINIA FARM TO SCHOOL STRATEGIC PLAN 2021–2026

| Activity | Anticipated Completion Date | Responsible Parties |
|---|---|--|
| <p>Improve or redevelop a Virginia farm to school website</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine the appropriate Virginia farm to school website location and coordinate points of responsibility within agencies and organizations • Compile statewide procurement resources and other web links to include on the Virginia farm to school website | <p>Timeline will be determined by the Leadership Team based on the host agency for the site</p> | <p>Primary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP)</p> |
| <p>Develop resources (toolkit, factsheets, Market Ready webinar, web content, and videos)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources including fact sheets, templates: June 2023 • Toolkit: Oct 2022 • Videos: March 2023 • Website: Timeline will be determined by the Leadership Team based on the host agency for the site | <p>Primary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP)</p> <p>Secondary: Amber Vallotton (VCE), Seth Benton (VDACS), Hannah Robbins (VFHY)</p> |

VIRGINIA FARM TO SCHOOL STRATEGIC PLAN 2021–2026

| Activity | Anticipated Completion Date | Responsible Parties |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Conduct webinars, workshops, and conferences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farm to School Conference • SNA-VA Conference • “How-to of Institutional Sales” (MarketMaker, other) • “Bringing the Farm to School” curriculum for growers • Farm tours (school nutrition director and farmers) • Food safety training | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farm to School Conference: October 5, 2021; October 2022 • SNA-VA: March 9–13, 2022 • “How-to” webinar: Fall 2022 • “Bringing the Farm to School” curriculum: October 2022; October 2026 • Farm tours: October 2022 • Food safety training: ongoing | <p>Primary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP)</p> <p>Secondary: Amber Vallotton (VCE), French Price (VCE)</p> |
| <p>Use the data collection tool to train child nutrition program operators on how to collect and report local food and school garden data</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 2021; April 2022 • VDH: Spring 2022 | <p>Primary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP)</p> <p>Secondary: VDH CACFP Specialist</p> |
| <p>Use feedback from the data reporting process to incorporate key questions into the SNPweb program through Colyar</p> | <p>School year 2025-2026</p> | <p>Primary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP)</p> |
| <p>Train SNP and child nutrition program directors on how to enter the new financial data in SNPweb</p> | <p>Fall 2025</p> | <p>Primary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP)</p> |

VIRGINIA FARM TO SCHOOL STRATEGIC PLAN 2021–2026

| Activity | Anticipated Completion Date | Responsible Parties |
|--|------------------------------------|---|
| VDH CACFP: Research and implement a data collection tool that aligns with VDOE-SNP data collection | Fall 2023 | Primary: VDH CACFP Specialist |
| Seek funding to support and reach all goals | Ongoing | Primary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP) Secondary: Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team |

Strategic Objective 2 (Food Safety)

- Increase student access to safe Virginia grown and regional food

Strategic Objective 2 Outcomes, Activities, and Metrics

Long-Term Outcomes

- Healthier students, staff, and communities
- Increased farm economic stability and resiliency
- Increased sustainability of community food systems

Short- and Medium-Term Outcomes

- Strengthened relationships between school nutrition directors and producers
- Increased awareness, knowledge, and skills of on-farm food safety risks and post-harvest handling requirements
- Increased implementation of best food safety handling practices, good agricultural practices (GAP), and good handling practices by farms selling to schools
- Increased opportunities to sell food from Virginia farms to Virginia school systems
- Increased capacity of trainers to deliver educational programming to producers
- Increased skills for food preparation and food safety handling for school nutrition professionals, classroom educators, and school garden coordinators
- Increased implementation of best practices for reducing food handling safety risks in school nutrition programs, classrooms, and gardens
- Increased connections between growers, school personnel, and students
- Increased strategic coordination and streamlined user accessibility of farm to school resources
- Reduced redundancy of efforts
- Increased knowledge and skills of growing and using locally produced and school-grown food (e.g., students, teachers, etc.)
- More engaged teachers, students, school administrations, school nutrition professionals, and communities
- Increased consumption of fresh fruits, vegetables, grains, and proteins
- Increased self-sufficiency

Activities to Achieve Objective and Outcomes

- Create and package comprehensive resources for a Virginia farm to school toolkit
 - Identify and form a toolkit team with subject matter experts in food safety
 - Create toolkit content related to food safety
 - Finalize and distribute the toolkit

- Create and conduct a toolkit webinar series
- Improve or redevelop a Virginia farm to school website
 - Determine the appropriate Virginia farm to school website location and coordinate points of responsibility within agencies and organizations
 - Compile statewide food safety resources and other web links to include on the Virginia farm to school website
- Create food safety resources and conduct webinars, workshops, and conferences to target different audiences (i.e., trainers, growers, and schools)
 - “Bringing the Farm to School” training curriculum for agricultural producers
 - Food safety training and technical assistance
 - Federal, state, and regional guidelines
 - Provide training on becoming a certified food protection manager, an employee food handler, and/or on using HACCP-based standard operating procedures
 - “Enhancing the Safety of Locally Grown Produce” (ESLGP), GAP-ready, and GAP audit certification mentoring
 - School garden food safety trainings with food safety logs
 - Best food safety handling practices for teachers, students, etc.
 - Provide food safety-related professional development opportunities and trainings
- Retool food safety-related resources as website content, factsheets, webinars, and videos
- Develop coordinated statewide food safety technical assistance network
- Develop evaluation for targeted food safety trainings
- Seek funding to support and reach all goals

Metrics and Indicators

- Changes in participants as a result of food safety activities
 - Number of trainings held with the number of participants
 - Number of farms and distributors implementing food safety plans and practices
- Evaluative tools to measure
 - Surveys and focus groups
 - Interviews (pre- and post-, longevity check-ins)
 - Incorporate diversity and equity into all trainings

Inputs

- 4P
- ASD
- Fresh Produce Food Safety (FPFS) team
- Go Green Farms 757

- LEAP
- LFH
- Master Food Volunteers
- Master Gardeners
- NFSN
- PSP
- Teachers
- USDA “Bringing the Farm to School” training curriculum for agricultural producers
- USDA farm to school funding
- VCE agents and specialists
- VCE Farm to School Program Team
- VCE funding support
- VDACS
- VDOE
- VDH

Reach and Audience

- Growers, school nutrition professionals, administration, teachers, students, families, and communities
- State agency stakeholders, nonprofit partners, distributors, and growers

Assumptions

- The Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team and VCE regard farm to school programming as a priority area and are dedicated to strengthening farm to school efforts.
- A team approach is the most effective strategy for reaching programmatic goals
- The Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team can provide a vital link between state planning goals, regional efforts, and key stakeholders
- The VCE Farm to School Program Team and Virginia Tech have the necessary expertise to support statewide farm to school food safety efforts

External Factors

- COVID-19 and impacts on stability
- Shifting food safety regulations by the FDA, the USDA, the VDACS, and VDH for the procurement and handling of Virginia grown and regional food (e.g., requiring food safety audits and inspections)
- Disparate food safety oversight by different entities makes it challenging to align training needs for growers, school nutrition professionals, and other stakeholders
- Rise of novel foodborne pathogens

Strategic Objective 2 Project Work Plan Table

| Activity | Anticipated Completion Date | Responsible Parties |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Create and package comprehensive resources for a Virginia farm to school toolkit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and form a toolkit team with subject matter experts in food safety • Create toolkit content related to food safety • Finalize and distribute the toolkit • Create and conduct a toolkit webinar series | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and form a toolkit team: April 2021 • Toolkit content: March 2022 • Finalize toolkit: Oct 2022 • Toolkit webinar series: Fall 2022 | <p>Primary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP State toolkit), Amber Vallotton (VCE webinar Series)</p> <p>Secondary: Stuart Vermaak (VCE), Melissa Chase (VCE), VCE Farm to School Program Team</p> |
| <p>Improve or redevelop a Virginia farm to school website</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine the appropriate Virginia farm to school website location and coordinate points of responsibility within agencies and organizations • Compile statewide food safety resources and other web links to include on the Virginia farm to school website | <p>Timeline will be determined by the Leadership Team based on the host agency for the site</p> | <p>Primary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP), Amber Vallotton (VCE)</p> |

VIRGINIA FARM TO SCHOOL STRATEGIC PLAN 2021–2026

| Activity | Anticipated Completion Date | Responsible Parties |
|---|---|--|
| <p>Create food safety resources and conduct trainings for target audiences: Trainers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Bringing the Farm to School” training for agricultural producers • Training for certified food protection manager • HACCP-based standard operating procedures training | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Bringing the Farm to School” train-the-trainer workshop: December 2021 • Training for certified food protection manager: Ongoing • HACCP-based standard operating procedures training: Ongoing | <p>Primary: Amber Vallotton (VCE), Melissa Chase (VCE), Stuart Vermaak (VCE)</p> <p>Secondary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP), VDH, Sandy Stoneman (VCE)</p> |
| <p>Create food safety resources and conduct trainings for target audiences: Growers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Bringing the Farm to School” training for agricultural producers • VCE ESLGP online grower training • GAP-ready and GAP audit mentoring with USDA GAP pilot grant • Delivery and distribution of food safety best practices | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Bringing the Farm to School” training for producers: October/November 2022; January/February 2023 • VCE ESLGP grower training: Ongoing • GAP training and mentoring: Ongoing • Delivery and distribution: Ongoing | <p>Primary: Amber Vallotton (VCE), Stuart Vermaak (VCE)</p> <p>Secondary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP)</p> |

VIRGINIA FARM TO SCHOOL STRATEGIC PLAN 2021–2026

| Activity | Anticipated Completion Date | Responsible Parties |
|---|-----------------------------|---|
| <p>Create farm to school food safety resources and conduct trainings for target audiences: Schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming a certified food protection manager, food handler, and/or on HACCP-based standard operating procedures • School gardens (existing publication) and classrooms • School garden food safety trainings with food safety logs • Best food safety handling practices for teachers, students, etc. • Food safety-related professional development opportunities and trainings | Ongoing | <p>Primary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP), Amber Vallotton (VCE), Melissa Chase (VCE)</p> <p>Secondary: Sandy Stoneman (VCE), Stuart Vermaak (VCE)</p> |
| <p>Retool pertinent resources as web content, webinars, and videos</p> | July 2022 | <p>Primary: Amber Vallotton (VCE), Stuart Vermaak (VCE), VCE Farm to School Program Team</p> |
| <p>Develop a coordinated food safety technical assistance network</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Bringing the Farm to School” trainers • Mentoring GAP-trained trainers • Certified ServSafe instructors/proctors | Ongoing | <p>Primary: Amber Vallotton (VCE), Melissa Chase (VCE), Stuart Vermaak (VCE), Sandy Stoneman (VCE)</p> <p>Secondary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP)</p> |

VIRGINIA FARM TO SCHOOL STRATEGIC PLAN 2021–2026

| Activity | Anticipated Completion Date | Responsible Parties |
|--|------------------------------------|---|
| Evaluation for targeted trainings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use existing evaluation plans • Develop evaluation plans for above outputs where relevant | Late Winter 2022 | Primary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP), Amber Vallotton (VCE) Secondary: Sarah Baughman (VCE) |
| Seek funding to support and reach all goals | Ongoing | Primary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP), Amber Vallotton (VCE) |

Strategic Objective 3 (Delivery and Distribution)

- Develop communication pathways and tools that promote a more robust and cohesive food distribution system that provides Virginia grown and regional food to all Virginia schools

Strategic Objective 3 Outcomes, Activities, and Metrics

Long-Term Outcomes

- Increased sustainability of Virginia and regional food systems
- Healthier students, staff, and communities
- Greater support to Virginia and regional agriculture from Virginia school nutrition programs

Short- and Medium-Term Outcomes

- Increased collaboration of partners within and among school nutrition directors' groups, distributor groups, food hubs, and growers' groups
- Increased opportunities to sell food from Virginia farms to Virginia school systems (i.e., light processing and portion-sized packaging)
- Increased development of place-specific delivery and distribution systems for school regions
- Increased implementation of best practices for reducing food handling safety risks during delivery and distribution
- Increased access to safe, nutritious fresh fruits, vegetables, grains, and proteins
- Increased financial support to build and maintain the system
- Improved efficiencies within the farm to school continuum
- Increased market access and sales by Virginia farms to Virginia schools
- Increased consumption of fresh fruits, vegetables, grains, and proteins

Activities to Achieve Objective and Outcomes

- Compile a list of members in each type of group throughout the network and each region
- Establish a statewide delivery and distribution (D&D) core team with regional representation whose purpose is to support, monitor, and connect the regional groups' work to increase farm to school viability
- Develop tools to describe the purpose of the D&D core team and how this effort will be a critical functioning system that actively connects the dots
- Each member of the core team will connect with current regional Farm to School Network groups or identify representatives from each type of group (directors, distributors, food hubs, and growers) to establish a regional collaborative effort

- Create communication channels to share resources between each region and promote collaboration throughout the network
- Each regional representative from the core team will identify a particular barrier, issue, skill gap, or missing connection, etc. among their regional team to share back with the core team and identify solutions
- Provide technical assistance using resources or referrals to help establish place-specific D&D systems for school regions
- Develop and distribute tools to distributors to increase Virginia grown and other regionally grown items in schools
- Identify where there are places to coordinate supply and demand so that product, processing, storage, and distribution needs can be shared between regions
- Create and package comprehensive resources for a Virginia farm to school toolkit
 - Identify and form a toolkit team with subject-matter experts in D&D
 - Create toolkit content related to D&D
 - Finalize and distribute the toolkit
- Improve or redevelop a Virginia farm to school website
 - Determine the appropriate Virginia farm to school website location and coordinate points of responsibility within agencies and organizations
 - Compile statewide D&D resources and other web links to include on Virginia farm to school website
- Seek funding to support and reach all goals

Metrics and Indicators

- Number of people who join the Virginia Farm to School Network per region
- Number of active participants in the network communities of practice and meetings
- Money spent on Virginia grown and regional food purchased by schools

Inputs

- 4P
- ASD's Appalachian Harvest
- Growers
- Go Green Farms 757
- Lulu's Local Foods
- LEAP
- LFH
- Produce and broadline distributors
- PSP
- Regional Farm to School Network leads
- Southside Vegetable and Fruit Growers Association

- The Common Market
- USDA AMS FSMIP
- USDA farm to school funding
- USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant
- VCE Farm to School Program Team
- VDACS
- VDOE

Reach and Audience

- Distributors
- Growers
- Nonprofit partners
- School nutrition professionals including cafeteria staff
- State agency stakeholders

Assumptions

- Farmers are interested in expanding into wholesale markets (i.e., schools, universities, and institutions) where GAP certification may be required
- Distributors are willing to consider partnerships to increase access to local food for children

External Factors

- COVID-19 and impacts on stability

Strategic Objective 3 Project Work Plan Table

| Activity | Anticipated Completion Date | Responsible Parties |
|---|--|---|
| Compile a list of members in each type of group throughout the network and each region | May 2022 | Primary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP), Leadership Team |
| Establish a statewide D&D core team with regional representation | May 2022 | Primary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP), Leadership Team Secondary: Regional Leads |
| Develop tools (e.g., presentation, handout, etc.) to recruit D&D representatives | Timeline will be determined by the D&D Core Team | Primary: D&D Core Team Secondary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP), Regional Leads |
| Connect with current regional Farm to School Network groups or use the list of members to identify representatives from each type of group (directors, distributors, food hubs, and growers) to establish a regional collaborative effort | Timeline will be determined by the D&D Core Team | Primary: D&D Core Team Secondary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP), Regional Leads |
| Create communication channels to share relevant information and resources between each region and promote collaboration | Timeline will be determined by the D&D Core Team | Primary: D&D Core Team, Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP) Secondary: Regional Leads |
| Identify regional barriers, issues, skill gaps, or missing connections among regional teams to share with the core team | Timeline will be determined by the D&D Core Team | Primary: D&D Core Team Secondary: Regional Leads |

VIRGINIA FARM TO SCHOOL STRATEGIC PLAN 2021–2026

| Activity | Anticipated Completion Date | Responsible Parties |
|---|---|---|
| Provide technical assistance using resources or referrals to help establish place-specific D&D systems for school regions | Ongoing | Primary: D&D Core Team Secondary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP), Regional Leads |
| Develop and distribute tools to distributors to increase Virginia grown and other regionally grown items in schools | Timeline will be determined by the D&D Core Team | Primary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP), D&D Core Team Secondary: Regional Leads |
| Identify where there are places to coordinate supply and demand so that product, processing, storage, and distribution needs can be shared between regions | Ongoing | Primary: D&D Core Team Secondary: Regional Leads |
| <p>Create and package comprehensive resources for a Virginia farm to school toolkit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and form a toolkit team with subject-matter experts in D&D • Create toolkit content related to D&D • Finalize and distribute the toolkit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and form a toolkit team: April 2021 • Toolkit content: March 2022 • Finalize toolkit: Oct 2022 | Primary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP) Secondary: D&D Core Team |
| Seek funding to support and reach all goals | Ongoing | Primary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP), D&D Core Team |

Strategic Objective 4 (School Gardens and Education)

- Foster an innovative and equitable dynamic learning environment for Virginia K–12 students. This goal will be accomplished by taking the following steps:
 - Integrating farm to school curriculum and school gardens into career and technical education (CTE), health and physical education, and core academic subjects
 - Drawing farm to school connections between cafeterias, school gardens, and classrooms
 - Including farm to school language in local school wellness policies

Strategic Objective 4 Outcomes, Activities, and Metrics

Long-Term Outcomes

- Improved agricultural literacy for students and teachers
- Increased knowledge of community food systems
- Community awareness and participation in school gardens and farm to school education programs
- Equitable and inclusive school garden and farm to school education programs
- Education of and career interest in farm ownership and agriculture-related industries
- Greater diversity in farm ownership and agriculture-related industries
- Healthier students, staff, and communities

Short- and Medium-Term Outcomes

- More students and teachers engaged in school gardens and farm to school education programs
- More training and professional development opportunities for teachers in school garden, agriculture, and nutrition education
- Improved student and teacher knowledge and skills in agriculture education and literacy
- Improved student and teacher knowledge of cultural and ethnic foods, healthy eating patterns, and nutrition
- Improved student and teacher knowledge of food safety practices and preparation techniques for garden- and farm-grown foods
- Increased percentage of students pursuing agriculture-, food-, and community food system-related higher education and careers
- Increased opportunities for the community to learn about and participate in garden, farm, and agriculture events
- Increased percentage of local educational agencies with strong farm to school or school garden language in the divisionwide local school wellness policy
- Improved access to and consumption of local garden and farm foods

- More active school gardens in Virginia
- Greater recruitment of school garden coordinators and CTE agriculture educators

Activities to Achieve Objectives

- Create and package comprehensive resources for a Virginia farm to school toolkit:
 - Identify and form a toolkit team with subject-matter experts in school gardens and farm to school education
 - Create toolkit content related to school gardens and farm to school education
 - Finalize and distribute the toolkit
- Improve or redevelop a Virginia farm to school website
 - Determine the appropriate Virginia farm to school website location and coordinate points of responsibility within agencies and organizations
 - Compile statewide school garden and farm to school educational resources and other web links to include on the Virginia farm to school website
- Obtain and/or develop evidence-based lessons to align with the Virginia Harvest of the Month featured produce
- Create a video series following a local product from a farm or garden to a student. The video series will highlight school procurement practices, agriculture information, and the impact of local foods on students' health.
- Collect existing resources developed by school divisions across Virginia. Current educational lessons, factsheets, webinars, and resources include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - SNAP-Ed
 - Harvest of the Month
 - Agriculture in the Classroom
 - Cooking demos
 - Food for Thought (Roanoke)
 - Healthy Plate (INOVA)
 - FRESH Chef (Fauquier)
 - 4-H programs
 - In-classroom and on-farm visits with farmers
 - How-to teacher training (Loudoun County, Virginia Beach, etc.)
 - Agricultural education programs
 - Agricultural land labs (Isle of Wight, Giles, etc.)
 - School gardens
 - Master Gardener programs and demonstration sites
- Develop fact sheets, webinars, web content, videos, trainings, workshops, and toolkits for educators, school garden coordinators, and school administrators
- Develop a marketing plan to disseminate resources

- Promote the use of farm to school language in the school division local school wellness policy through education and examples provided in webinars and trainings
- Educate agricultural education teachers and garden educators on advocating for farm to school language in the local school wellness policy
- Develop a webinar for CTE directors and agricultural educators on how to partner with local school nutrition programs
- Seek funding to support and reach all goals

Metrics and Indicators

- Number of trainings and professional development opportunities provided to teachers annually
- Number of active school gardens used for educational or food production purposes
- Number of students participating in school garden and farm to school activities
- Number of school garden coordinators and CTE agriculture educators
- Percent of divisions that have included farm to school or garden policy language in the divisionwide local school wellness policy

Inputs

- Producers and distributors providing educational tools
- Regional Farm to School Network representatives
- USDA farm to school funding
- USDA Specialty Block Grant
- VCE Farm to School Program Team
- VCE SNAP-Ed/Family Nutrition Program
- VDOE-SNP
- VDOE CTE
- Virginia AITC
- Virginia Association of Agricultural Educators (VAAE)
- Virginia Association of Garden Clubs
- Virginia Farm Bureau
- Virginia Farm Credit
- Virginia K–12 educators and school health advisory boards

Reach and Audience

- Farm to school staff, horticulture teachers, school health advisory boards
- School nutrition professionals
- General teachers, administrators, and school boards
- Nonprofit partners
- VCE Family Nutrition Program, 4-H, and Master Gardener programs

- Farmers, producers, and local food distributors

Assumptions

- Virginia Standards of Learning will remain the standards in the Commonwealth (as opposed to Common Core Standards used throughout the U.S.)
- School gardens will continue to increase in popularity and usefulness for educators of nutrition and agriculture education programs throughout the Commonwealth

External Factors

- COVID-19 and impacts on stability

Strategic Objective 4 Project Work Plan Table

| Activity | Anticipated Completion Date | Responsible Parties |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Create and package comprehensive resources for a Virginia farm to school toolkit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and form a toolkit team with subject-matter experts in school gardens and farm to school education • Create toolkit content related to school gardens and farm to school education • Finalize and distribute the toolkit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and form a toolkit team: April 2021 • Toolkit content: March 2022 • Finalize toolkit: Oct 2022 | <p>Primary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP), LaVeta Nutter (VDOE)</p> <p>Secondary: Hannah Robbins (VFHY), Tammy Maxey (Virginia Agriculture in the Class)</p> |
| <p>Improve or redevelop a Virginia farm to school website:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine the appropriate Virginia farm to school website location and coordinate points of responsibility within agencies and organizations • Compile statewide school garden and farm to school educational resources and other web links to include on the Virginia farm to school website | <p>Timeline will be determined by the Leadership Team based on the host agency for the site</p> | <p>Primary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP)</p> |
| <p>The VCE’s Family Nutrition Program will create or obtain evidence-based lessons to align with Virginia Harvest of the Month featured produce item</p> | <p>December 2021</p> | <p>Primary: Pegi Wright (VCE)</p> <p>Secondary: Elena Serrano (VCE Family Nutrition Program)</p> |

VIRGINIA FARM TO SCHOOL STRATEGIC PLAN 2021–2026

| Activity | Anticipated Completion Date | Responsible Parties |
|---|-----------------------------|---|
| Create a video series following a local product from a farm or garden to a student that will highlight school procurement practices, agriculture information, and the impact of local foods on students' health | February 2023 | Primary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP) Secondary: Laura Burns (VDOE-SNP) |
| Collect existing resources developed by school divisions and partners across Virginia, such as curriculum, factsheets, webinars, web content, videos, etc. | August 2022 | Primary: Libby Lyon (Roots and Rows LLC) Secondary: Pat Caulkins (Petersburg Healthy Options Partnerships) |
| Develop new resources to fill in any resource gaps, such as curriculum, factsheets, webinars, web content, videos, etc. | August 2023 | Primary: Pat Caulkins (Petersburg Healthy Options Partnerships) Secondary: Libby Lyon (Roots and Rows LLC) |
| Develop a marketing plan to disseminate resources (i.e., the toolkit and lesson plans) | November 2023 | Primary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP) Secondary: Ashley Roth (VDOE-SNP) |
| Increase farm to school policy language in local school wellness policies through trainings and direct technical assistance | June 2023 | Primary: Laura Burns (VDOE-SNP) |
| Educate agricultural education teachers and garden educators on advocating for farm to school policy language in the local school wellness policy | May/October 2022 | Primary: Laura Burns (VDOE-SNP) |
| Develop a webinar for CTE directors and agricultural educators on how to partner with local school nutrition programs | September 2023 | Primary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP), LaVeta Nutter (VDOE) |

VIRGINIA FARM TO SCHOOL STRATEGIC PLAN 2021–2026

| Activity | Anticipated Completion Date | Responsible Parties |
|---|------------------------------------|---|
| Seek funding to support and reach all goals | Ongoing | Primary: Bee Thorp (VDOE-SNP) Secondary: VA Farm to School Leadership Team |

References and Resources

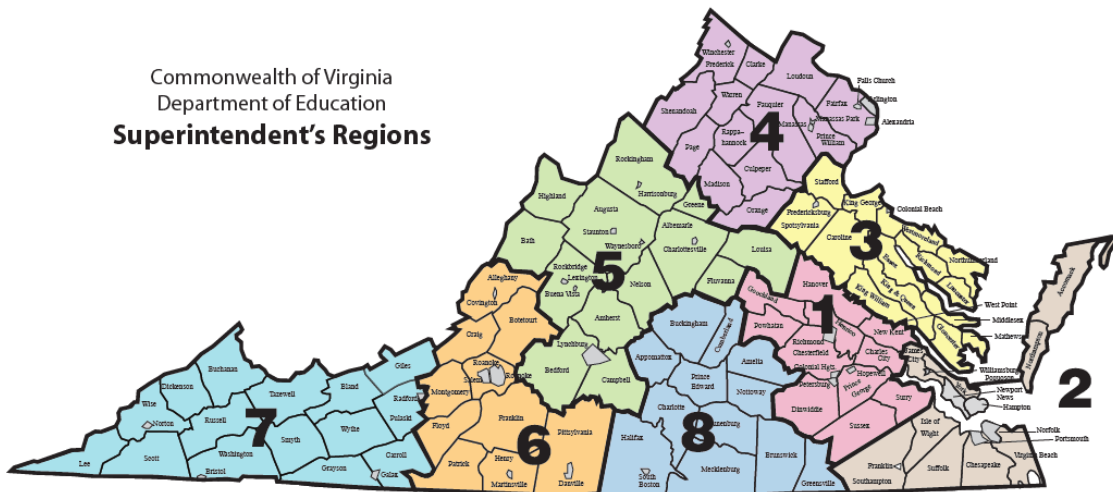
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Appendix A: Virginia Farm to School Network’s Regional Visions and Goals

The Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team initiated the strategic planning process by first building alignment among the larger organizational goals and objectives represented by the Leadership Team. The team then went on to align the regional visions and goals expressed through Virginia Farm to School Network regional meetings held in each of the VDOE Superintendent’s Regions in 2018 and 2019. In this way, the Strategic Plan represents both a top-down and bottom-up approach to meeting the needs of farm to school stakeholders in Virginia.

In 2018, Network members identified their visions of what farm to school would look like by the year 2022. In 2019, Virginia Farm to School Regional Leads used the vision statements from the previous statewide meetings to develop key regional goals and objectives in the areas of procurement, food safety, school gardens, and delivery and distribution. Virginia Farm to School Regional Leads condensed their regional visions and refined their regional goals through outreach to Network members in the spring of 2021. These region-specific goals guide the work of the Network and the Leadership Team.

The following statements demonstrate the linkages between the Virginia Farm to School Strategic Plan and the regional goals and objectives.



Region 1

Roni LaPelle, Lead

Vision

Region 1 stakeholders will follow food safety standards and will participate in an efficient procurement process that levels inequities in the food system. Stakeholders will work collaboratively to ensure students within the region receive equitable food education that supports health and wellness initiatives.

Goals

1. Three workgroups will be established in 2021–2022 to accomplish the Region 1 goals for food safety, procurement systems, and food education.
2. All stakeholders, especially farmers and child nutrition personnel, will be offered food safety training by a qualified state agency at least once per school year beginning in 2021–2022.
3. A standardized purchasing and delivery system will be piloted in at least three school divisions by the 2023–2024 school year. Strategies to address this goal may include the establishment of a physical food hub distribution facility.
4. Students and members of their support system will receive food education in the areas of nutrition and agriculture through experiential activities in the classroom, cafeteria, and school or community gardens. This education will be offered in partnership with community-supporting organizations during the 2022–2023 school year, with at least 50 percent of school divisions participating by the 2023–2024 school year. Strategies to address this goal include encouraging community engagement, increasing the number of school and community gardens, engaging in positive social messaging, and incorporating Farm to School language into school wellness policies.

Region 2

Lisa Winter, Lead

Vision

Within the next five years, Region 2 will develop and grow a diverse canopy of farm to school members and initiatives that work in concert to bridge the gaps in the knowledge, skills, beliefs, attitudes, access, and opportunity of all stakeholders, resulting in an innovative, sustainable, rewarding, and just food delivery system that offers nutritious and desirable products. Efforts to meet this vision will include sponsoring regional and division-wide training programs and networking sessions; developing incentives for growers; providing age-appropriate, culturally relevant nutrition education; and providing fresh, seasonal, healthy, recognizable menu items for children.

Goals

1. Regional focus groups will be held annually through 2025 to solicit input on developing resources, planning menus, and improving summer and after-school program nutrition services—including Virginia grown and regional food use. The Regional Lead will ask the school nutrition director in each school division to provide a list of potential participants that includes at least one person from each of the following categories: school nutrition, industry, allied groups or community partners, school staff members, parents or PTA members, and students.
2. Region 2 will develop and implement a method of collecting and sharing best practices throughout the region by 2022. Best practices will be showcased or promoted to those outside the Network annually by creating a virtual or in-person event and/or partnering with allied groups.

Region 3

Lead role is currently vacant

Vision

By 2022, students will eat healthier food, waste less food, and pack fewer lunches because they are getting good-quality products and food from our school nutrition programs. Food grown on the agriculturally rich Northern Neck/Middle Peninsula will be used in local schools. Food safety will be standardized across the board. GAP certification will be available to all who desire it. School nutrition programs will procure food from hydroponic growing systems, promote student-grown vegetables, and highlight the interconnectedness between school nutrition programs and career and technical education. Drone delivery, hub delivery, and an Amazon delivery concept will assist school nutrition programs in finding and purchasing Virginia grown and regional foods.

Goals

1. In 2021, partners from the VSU SFOP, the VDACS, and the VDOE-SNP will conduct an online regional information meeting with farmers and school nutrition directors. At least five school nutrition program directors will prepare for the farm tour by completing a request for information.
2. By 2022, partners from the VSU SFOP, the VDACS, and the VDOE-SNP will conduct an in-person farm tour for regional school nutrition program directors. This tour will highlight local farmers' products, and at least five school nutrition program directors will prepare for the farm tour by completing a request for information.
3. The number of people actively participating in the Region 3 Virginia Farm to School Network will increase by 50 percent.
4. Within the region, existing school gardens will be expanded or additional school gardens will be installed.

Region 4

Libby Lyon, Former Lead (*Lead role is currently vacant*)

Vision

By 2026, Region 4 will be an engaged group of farm to school stakeholders that consistently provides students across the region with safe Virginia grown and regional food. By institutionalizing farm to school educational opportunities and establishing procurement and processing systems, Region 4 will empower students to become active food citizens, enhance school nutrition programs, and support Virginia food economies.

Goals

1. A plan for connecting farms to schools to increase procurement within the region will be crafted to reflect a regional goal of “local”—including an assessment of the produce, grain, meat, and dairy available within that definition and an evaluation of the current and projected purchasing power within Region 4 school divisions.
2. A regional Farm to School committee comprising students, growers, school nutrition representatives, and educators from at least 50 percent of Region 4 school divisions will be created to support school gardens and procurement.
3. By 2023, procurement of Virginia grown and regional foods will increase by 10 percent (pending the resumption of normal schooling interrupted by COVID-19).

Region 5

Andrea Early, Lead

Vision

By 2025, schools will have greater access to fresh, affordable Virginia grown and regional foods direct from farmers, food hubs, and mainline distributors through collaboration and partnerships. There will have been no foodborne illnesses from the consumption of Virginia grown and regional foods, and GAP certification will be available to all growers at no cost. In addition to having a statewide ordering system (i.e., Market Maker) through which orders for Virginia grown and regional foods are placed, the VDOE-SNP will provide template request for proposal and invitation for bid procurement language.

School gardens and composting programs throughout the region will help students connect agriculture with the food on their lunch trays.

Goals

1. By June 2025, sales of Virginia grown and regional food products to public schools will have increased by 25 percent.
2. By April 2022, a region-specific guide with a toolkit on school gardens and composting will be available.

Region 6

Lead role is currently vacant

Vision

By 2022, the Virginia Farm to School Network will have formed a food safety team to create and develop food safety resources and to make GAP certification available to all interested parties. The VDACS will have an online database for produce companies with price comparisons and ordering capabilities, and the VDOE-SNP will provide procurement templates. Farmers will be using a one-stop delivery hub option at schools for distribution. With access to more markets, growers will have increased sales by 5 percent to schools, summer food programs, after-school programs, and childcare centers. Over 250 producers will be selling to schools across Virginia and scaling up to meet increased demand. Growers and grower support programs will increase the supply of Virginia grown and regional food, resulting in children enjoying these foods and better understanding the food system.

Goals

1. At least four divisions in Region 6 that did not report Virginia grown and regional food sales in 2018 will source Virginia grown and regional products from producers, prime distributors, food hubs, and farms in the 2021–2022 school year and will track these purchases.
2. School divisions will increase purchases of Virginia grown and regional food by 15 percent in the 2021–2022 school year (pending the return to regular feeding operations, which were interrupted by COVID-19).

Region 7

Courtney Umbarger and Tracy Webster, Co-Leads

Vision

By 2022, the food safety plan for daily school operations will be up to date, nutrition staff will receive annual training, and standard operating procedures for handling fresh produce will exist in each division. The VDACS or other entities will host databases of product availability. School nutrition professionals, who will have developed Virginia grown and regional product specifications, will use cooperative purchasing. Virginia grown and regional product sales will increase by 30 percent, and the Virginia Farm to School Network’s school central hub training and resources will support that effort. Distributors, school divisions, farmers, and nonprofits will have a network that enables farmers to access school system markets. Virginia grown and regional products will be delivered to all schools once or twice a week. A few schools in the region will have school gardens, and all schools will have greenhouses where students grow food for local nutrition programs.

Goal

1. By 2022, at least four divisions will identify and use three new Virginia grown and regional sources, including regional food hubs, with specifications that target Virginia grown and regional produce and beef in solicitations.
2. Virginia grown and regional beef, fruits, and vegetables will be available in 90 percent of Region 7’s schools in five years.
3. School gardens will be established in 80 percent of the schools in Region 7 by 2025— with a 10 percent annual increase in the number of school gardens with a focus on garden installations in schools with the least resources.

Region 8

Tammy Maxey and Robin Moore, Co-Leads

Vision

Regional farm to school initiatives will be strengthened by developing networks with producers and schools to provide healthy, local options for children and to educate children about the importance of food production.

Goals

1. By 2025, a localized food distribution route that is feasible for school divisions and growers in Southside Virginia will facilitate an 80 percent increase in the provision of Virginia grown and regional foods for their school divisions. This goal will be accomplished by developing an ordering system to meet the needs of small and medium schools with varying storage capacities—which is realistic because of existing ordering systems (i.e., the Department of Defense Fresh program) and worthwhile because it provides Virginia grown foods to Virginia children.
2. By 2025, the number of school gardens in the region’s school divisions will have expanded, and 50 percent more schools will have gardens or will have expanded existing gardens. Progress toward this goal will be measured by the increased number of active school gardens in the region and will be accomplished by creating an educational curriculum, videos, and experiments involving farmers, educational partners, and extension members, including targeted outreach to school administrators that highlights school gardens’ benefits. This is realistic because several schools are currently using school gardens for instruction and showing students how food is grown. As a result, children will understand the process of growing and preparing food and will have access to outdoor learning labs that enhance classroom objectives. Crafting educational materials for school administrative use that tout the benefits of school gardens and providing resources for developing and maintaining school gardens will make this possible.

Appendix B: Virginia Farm to School Leadership Team Roster

Current Members

Liz Beling, Farm to School Liaison, Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission
Seth Benton, Food Distribution Manager, VDACS
Laura Burns, School Wellness Policy Specialist, Office of School Nutrition Programs, VDOE
Pat Caulkins, Petersburg HCAT Coordinator, Petersburg Healthy Options Partnership
Melissa Chase, Consumer Food Safety Program Manager, State Coordinator, Master Food
Volunteer Program State Program Leader, VT/VCE
Breon Clemons, Founder, Go Green Farms
Sandy Curwood, Director, Office of School Nutrition Programs, VDOE
Frederick Custis, Field Coordinator, VSU/VCE SFOP
Paula Garrett, Director, Division of Community Nutrition, VDH
Brick Goldman, Owner, Goldman Farms
Daniel Judkins, Farm Manager, Isle of Wight Agriculture Land Lab
Roni LaPelle, Marketing Specialist, Food and Nutrition Services, Chesterfield County Public
Schools
Libby Lyon, Owner, Roots and Rows LLC
Tammy Maxey, Program Director, Virginia AITC
Maureen McNamara-Best, Executive Director, Local Environmental Agriculture Program
LaVeta Nutter, Specialist, Agriculture and Related Clusters, VDOE
French Price, Value Chain Coordinator, VT/VCE
Hannah Quigley, Food System Advisory, COVID-19 Long-Term Care Team, Richmond City
Health District
Kathleen Reed, Extension Master Gardener Program State Coordinator, VT/VCE
Hannah Robbins, Marketing Specialist, VFHY
Denise Rowell, Member, Loudoun County Rural Economic Development Council
Heather Steide, Operations Specialist, Norfolk Public Schools
Bee Thorp, Farm to School Specialist, Office of School Nutrition Programs, VDOE
Emily Tucker, Director of Wholesale, 4P Foods
Amber Vallotton, Co-Lead, VCE Farm to School Program Team, Fresh Produce Safety Team
Coordinator, Extension Specialist, Produce Safety Alliance Certified Lead Trainer,
VT/VCE
Stuart Vermaak, Co-Lead, VCE Farm to School Program Team, Associate Extension Specialist,
Food Safety, VT/VCE
Tracy Webster, School Nutrition Coordinator, Wythe County Public Schools

LaWanda (Pegi) Wright, Extension Agent, Unit Coordinator, Family and Consumer Sciences,
VT/VCE

Former Members

Andrea Early, Executive Director of School Nutrition, Harrisonburg City Schools
Trista Grigsby, former Farm to School Specialist, Office of School Nutrition Programs, VDOE
Heidi Hertz, former Assistant Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry, VDACS
Julia Hoffman, Local Food Sales Advocate, 4P Foods
Rachel Meyers, Chief Operating Officer, Produce Source Partners
Robin Moore, Director of Food Services, Mecklenburg County Public Schools
Courtney Umbarger, Owner, Laurel Springs Farm

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