



## About JoAnne Berkenkamp

Local Foods Program Director JoAnne Berkenkamp joined IATP in 2007. For the prior eleven years, Berkenkamp led an independent consulting practice working with nonprofits, food businesses and foundations across the United States.

## About IATP

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy works locally and globally at the intersection of policy and practice to ensure fair and sustainable food, farm and trade systems. IATP is headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota with offices in Washington D.C. and Geneva.

# Farm to School:

## Growing healthy eating habits in the fields of Minnesota

**MINNEAPOLIS, MAY 14, 2010** — Of the many strategies aimed at fighting rising rates of obesity and associated health impacts like diabetes, Minnesota's Farm to School initiatives are a no-brainer. These initiatives show that we can provide healthier, fresh food for kids, teach children where and how their food is grown, and support local farmers. The win-win-win nature of Farm to School is why it is rapidly catching on around the state.

Farm to School provides healthier alternatives to children still in the process of developing their eating habits. In addition to the family dinner table, one of the natural places to instill those skills is in school.

Under Farm to School, area farmers provide schools with fresh, minimally processed foods. School children are introduced to local farmers and farm products, including fruits and vegetables, meat, grains and other items. At the same time, Farm to School provides new markets for small and mid-size farmers whose farm-fresh products have been missing from America's lunch trays for decades.

If the findings of a recent survey of Minnesota's school nutrition leaders are any indication, the idea is spreading like wildfire. The survey, conducted by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) and Minnesota School Nutrition Association (MSNA), found that the number of Minnesota school districts purchasing fresh food from local farms has more than doubled in the last 18 months.

Sixty-nine school districts reported purchasing Minnesota-grown products in 2009. Looking forward, 77 percent of the districts now involved with Farm to School expect to expand their activities in the upcoming school year, a sure sign that these programs are taking root and growing.

The survey also found that nearly 43 percent of school districts purchasing Minnesota-grown food in 2009 did so by purchasing directly from a farmer or farmer coop. The most commonly purchased local foods were apples, potatoes, peppers, winter squash, sweet corn and tomatoes. A growing number of schools are also purchasing Minnesota-grown bison, wild rice, dried beans and grains.

One of the school districts leading this effort is St. Paul. During the first six weeks of the 2009-2010 school year, St. Paul Public Schools purchased 110,000 pounds of locally grown produce. Fifty-six percent of the district's total fresh produce purchases were local products during that period. Those numbers are expected to rise next school year.

In addition to providing healthy, locally grown food to Minnesota students, Farm to School can help children learn where and how good food is grown. In an era where many children think food comes from the microwave, that in itself is a significant accomplishment.

Equally impressive, Farm to School programs are working within schools' existing budgetary constraints. This is truly remarkable when schools have only a little over a dollar to spend on the food in a school lunch.

A few important upfront investments in Farm to School could greatly expand the program. This year, Congress is re-authorizing the Child Nutrition Act, which funds school lunch and breakfast programs. Several bills in Congress propose \$50 million over five years for Farm to School programs around the country. Additional support can boost Farm to School by helping schools connect with small and mid-size farmers, purchase new kitchen equipment and educate students about local food and farming issues.

Such investments will not only allow Farm to School programs to expand but play a key role in keeping our kids healthy.

Our goal for great programs like Farm to School should be to make them a self-sustaining, everyday part of the lives of all school children. When that happens, all Minnesotans will share in the bounty.

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