Farm to School Spotlight

Smyrna School District Serves Up Local Success
Smyrna, Delaware



The Delaware Farm to School Spotlights were created by the Delaware Farm to School Committee to highlight the wide range of Farm to School activities occurring throughout the state in K-12 schools. We hope that through the spotlights, you will be able to learn, adapt and apply some of the information into your own Farm to School Program.

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Background

Smyrna School District continues to lead by example when it comes to integrating local agriculture into school meals. Through creative procurement strategies, strong community partnerships, and a deep-rooted commitment to student wellness, Smyrna shows how a thoughtful Farm to School approach can transform the cafeteria and the community.

How Smyrna Brings Farm to School to Life

- **Local Procurement**: Fresh fruits and vegetables from Delaware farms are served directly in Child Nutrition Program meals.
- **Marketing Local Farms**: Students see and hear about local products through cafeteria signage and school announcements.
- **Innovative Growing**: Through a partnership with the district Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapter and Fork Farms hydroponic systems, fresh produce is grown right in the cafeteria.



Making the Local Connection

Kristen Kahl, Nutrition Services Supervisor, had a simple but powerful idea while driving past farms on her way into work: *Why aren't we serving more of the food growing all around us?* That question led to her taking pictures of farm signs, picking up the phone, and building direct relationships with nearby farms.

Smyrna School District holds a local produce contract with Fifer Orchards and also makes micro-purchases from other farms with short growing seasons. One successful partnership is with Broad Acres Farm in Dover. After chatting with Brent, who turned out to be a Smyrna School District alumni, Kristen visited the farm, saw their potato operation, and placed an order for 700 pounds of potatoes. Due to seasonality, these types of purchases happen a few times a year, but are impactful. Since the total purchase with this farmer does not exceed $10,000 per year, it is fully compliant with federal procurement regulations.

How Smyrna Makes It Work

Flexibility is key to working with small and mid-sized farmers:

- **They'll pick up produce** when farms can't deliver.
- **They stagger local menu items by grade level** to ease the burden of large-volume harvesting.
- **They prioritize fairness**, understanding the tight margins farmers face and pay fair prices proudly.

Kristen shares, "The goal isn't the cheapest product - it's the best for our students and a strong local food economy. That's something worth investing in."



Smart Menu Planning

Local items are often featured in versatile, simple ways such as salads, baked potato bars, or add-on sides, helping the team stay nimble if bad weather delays a harvest. One favorite is *Roasted Parsley Potatoes*, which is a hit with students every time.

Keys to Success

- Flexibility with producers
- Clear promotion of local items
- Staff buy-in and enthusiasm.
- Willingness to do the extra prep (yes, even shucking corn!)
- Leadership support from the top down

What is Fork Farms?



Fork Farms is a Wisconsin-based company that provides indoor hydroponic systems. These portable growing towers allow students to grow greens right in the cafeteria, blending science, nutrition, and sustainability in one.

Smyrna's Child Nutrition Program purchased two flex farms that provide a sustainable source to year-round lettuce, spinach, herbs and many other items.

FFA students utilize the flex farms to grow produce in the cafeteria that is served during lunch by the Child Nutrition Program.

For information about Fork Farms, click on this link**.**

Smyrna's story shows that Farm to School doesn't require a perfect plan, just passion, persistence, and people willing to pick up the phone.

For more information about the Delaware Farm to School Program, contact: Delaware Farm to School Coordinator **Scott Schuster** RD, LDN, SNS; or visit Delaware's Farm to School Website.