

A MULTISTATE BEST PRACTICES ANALYSIS OF FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAMS IN THE SOUTHEAST

HOW DOES NORTH CAROLINA'S FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAM COMPARE TO ITS
COUNTERPARTS IN VIRGINIA, TENNESSEE, SOUTH CAROLINA AND GEORGIA?

Presented to

NC FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAM

Presented by

Mim Williams, MPP Candidate 2013

Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University

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Executive Summary¹

Farm to School (FtS) programs exist in almost all fifty states, differing in scope, structure, operating department and budget. In an effort to appraise NC Farm to Schools' operations, this report will compare NC Farm to School to other Farm to School programs in the Southeast, identifying lessons that can be learned from the successes and challenges of their counterparts.

Policy Question

Based on best practices analyses from four states' Farm to School programs, how does NC Farm to School *compare* to its multistate counterparts? Specifically, Virginia, Tennessee, South Carolina and Georgia Farm to School programs were chosen for comparison because of their geographic proximity and similar growing seasons.

Methodology

The policy question was answered using information garnered from extensive program research, state-specific studies and literature, and interviews with key stakeholders in each state. After the data gathering was complete, the programs were evaluated using quantitative and qualitative comparison metrics that I jointly decided upon with the North Carolina Farm to School program. Each state's Farm to School program was analyzed based upon the below key comparison metrics:

- Governmental Department
- Number of Participating Farms
- Number of Participating Schools/School Systems
- Students Served (K-12)
- Number of Crops
- Cost of Crops (relative to North Carolina)*
- Number of Grower Delivery Weeks
- GAP Certification and Farmer Participation Requirements
- Distribution Network

* The cost of crops metric was measured using a bundle of crops—strawberries, apples, and sweet potatoes—as a proxy for crop prices in the state.

A mixture of quantitative and qualitative analysis was used for program comparison in this report to provide a holistic understanding of program operations.

¹ *This student paper was prepared in 2013 in completion of the requirements for PPS 804, a course in the Masters of Public Policy Program at the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University. The research, analysis, and comparisons and recommendations contained in this paper are the work of the student who authored the document, and do not represent the official or unofficial views of the Sanford School of Public Policy or of Duke University. Without the specific permission of its author, this paper may not be used or cited for any purpose other than to inform the client organization about the subject matter. The author relied in many instances on data provided to her by the client and related organizations and makes no independent representations as to the accuracy of the data.*

State by State Comparison Tables

The following tables exhibit how North Carolina and the other states compare to one another across the comparison metrics. More detailed information on state by state comparisons and an in-depth inspection of program formation, logistics and initiatives are included in the body of this report.

Table 1: Comparison Metrics

Metrics	NC	Virginia	Tennessee	SC	Georgia
Program Creation	1997	2007	2005 / 2012	2010	2007
Governmental Department	NCDA&CS	VDACS, VADOE	TNDA, TNDOE	SCDA, SCDOE, SCHEC, Clemson	GA FtS Alliance
Participating Farms	85 farms	31 farms 9 distributors	~25 farms ~10 distributors	15 Farms 40+ farmers since 2010	No Data
Participating Schools / Systems	68 counties 14 cities 2 military districts 1,599 schools	39 counties 10 cities 11 private schools 3 colleges 1108 schools	No Data	10 counties 9 daycares 37 schools	26 counties 4 cities 6 addtl schools (Potential Range: 32-55)
Students Served²	1,003, 921	749, 527	No Data	20,274	712,186
% Served / Total	70%	59%	No Data	3%	42%
Crops Offerings	26	38 ³	65 ⁴	32	29
Crop Prices⁵ (Relative to NC)	---	Higher	Unclear	Higher	Higher
Delivery Weeks	24	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
GAP Certification Requirement	Yes	No, encouraged	No, encouraged	No, encouraged	No, encouraged
Distribution Network	Yes	No	No	No	No

² Number of students served was calculated using state Department of Education enrollment data, on the school level or county level, and represents the number of students in FtS-participating districts. Numbers were totaled for the 2012-2013 school year.

³ This number includes only fruit and vegetable offerings. Meat and Dairy items are also available for school procurement. See Appendix G for a full list of Virginia produce.

⁴ Considering the scale of the TN FtS program, this crop listing appears to be quite extensive. While these items may be "available" for local procurement, it is unclear whether they are all currently being procured by local schools.

⁵ Table 2 includes specific crop prices for local apples, strawberries and sweet potatoes. In some instances, these prices reflect regional prices or price ranges.

Table 2: Cost of Crops, Proxy by Bundle of Goods

Crops	NC	Virginia	Tennessee ⁶	SC ⁷	Georgia ⁸
Apples	\$30/Case (113-125)	\$33.50/ Case(125)	--	~\$26.20-\$39.52/ Case(125)	\$41-\$43/ Case(125)
Strawberries	\$14/Flat	\$22.50/Flat	~\$16/Flat ⁹	~\$16.20/Flat (~\$15.60-\$31.80)	\$15.75
Sweet Potatoes	\$15.50/40 lbs (#1s) \$10.50/40 lbs (Jumbo)	\$23/40 lbs (#1s) \$15/40 lbs (#2s)	\$14/40 lbs (#1s, #2s) ¹⁰	~\$12.65-\$19.20 /40lbs (#1s)	\$18-\$21.79 /40lbs (#1s)

Table 3: Distribution Systems for State Farm to School Programs¹¹

State	Mechanism(s) for Local Produce Distribution
North Carolina	<p>NCDA&CS has an extensive distribution network to connect local farmers to schools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – NC Distribution Network: NCDA&CS sends an order form to child nutrition directors. Nutrition directors submit their orders to NCDA&CS and the appropriate amount of produce is collected from grower delivery points. Produce is delivered to the distribution warehouses, where it is stored, orders are processed, and trucks are loaded for delivery. One delivery is made per school district to a location chosen by the child nutrition director. School districts/schools transport the produce from district-level drop-off locations to cafeterias.
Virginia	<p>VA Farm to School program has no formal distribution network for local produce.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Food Hubs: Food Hubs play a growing role in food distribution in Virginia. Example: The Local Food Hub in Charlottesville, VA works with over 70 farms, delivering produce to 5 public school systems, 5 private schools, UVA and Darden Business School (UVA). – Larger, Entrepreneurial Farms: A farmer becomes a food hub for other local farmers and then delivers all of the produce to school/s in that respective locality. In essence, localities develop their own distribution networks. Example: Paige County, VA. – Distributors: Farmers and schools use current distribution channels to transfer FtS produce.
Tennessee	<p>TN Farm to School program has no formal distribution network for local produce.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Farmers: Schools purchase produce directly from the farmer. – Locality-Level Distribution Networks: Localities create their own distribution networks, complete with tractor trailers, storage facilities and on-site delivery to schools. Example: Memphis City School System – Distributors: Schools purchase local produce through their traditional distribution channels.

⁶ T and T produce, a Tennessee Distributor that delivers produce to schools in the eastern part of the state, provided prices on additional produce items. They include: Cantaloupes, \$14/case (15 ct); Blueberries, \$14/12 pints; Green Peppers, \$16/25 lb box.

⁷ All South Carolina produce pricing information was provided by Betsy Cashen of the South Carolina Farm to School Evaluation Team. The data is derived only from the low country schools in South Carolina, but should be representative of the state at large as an estimate of crop prices across participating schools.

⁸ Prices vary across the state. These prices are from Grady County in Southwest Georgia and Chatham County in Southeast Georgia (\$21.79, sweet potatoes). Prices were provided by Melanie Harris of the GA Dept of Agriculture.

⁹ Prices from Market Fresh Produce, Distributor in Western Tennessee.

¹⁰ Prices from TandT Produce, Distributor in Eastern Tennessee.

¹¹The distribution channels detailed in Table 3 are not the only mechanisms through which schools can procure local produce for school meals. Rather, these are the most widely used mechanisms identified through interviews with stakeholders in each state.

South Carolina	<p>SC Farm to School program has no formal distribution network for local produce.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Farmers: Schools purchase directly from the farmer and the farmer is responsible for delivering produce to the school. For direct purchase, it is <i>strongly recommended</i> that farmers be GAP certified. – Farmers & Distributors: Schools purchase directly from the farmer, but since the farmer does not have the proper infrastructure for produce delivery, the farmer pairs with a distributor for transportation to schools. Distributors take a cut of the farmer’s sales. – Distributors: Schools purchase produce from their distributor and the distributor then purchases the produce from the farmer. GAP certification is not as highly emphasized for these farmers by the state.
Georgia	<p>GA Farm to School program has no formal distribution network for local produce.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Farmers: Schools purchase produce directly from the farmer. – Cooperatives: Schools purchase produce from a farmer’s cooperative. – Farmer’s Markets: Schools procure items from farmer’s markets with prearranged orders. – Distributors: Schools order through a traditional wholesaler (distributor).

Table 4: Successes and Challenges for State Farm to School Programs

	Successes	Challenges
North Carolina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Distribution network – New product development strategy – Formation of the NC FtS Cooperative – NC Summer Food Service Program Participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Anticipated high costs of FtS produce – Lack of school infrastructure to prepare fresh produce – Lack of GAP certified farmers
Virginia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Situational Assessment Survey for Virginia FtS program, Virginia Tech – Coordination & collaboration with National FtS Network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Distribution difficulties – Unreliable and/or low market demand from schools – Lack of program funding
Tennessee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Local Foods for Local Schools Initiative – Active school systems: at-risk dinners, breakfast expansion, farmer contracts – Tennessee Agriculture Enhancement Program, grants for crop diversification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Distribution difficulties – Small-farm structure – New meal pattern guidelines, Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) – Lack of program funding
South Carolina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – SC FtS Evaluation Team – Economic Impact Analysis, Clemson University – School engagement opportunities and trainings for FtS stakeholders in schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Grant-funded model, not yet sustainable without funds – Anticipated high costs of FtS produce – Burden placed on school food service employees
Georgia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Creation of the GA FtS Alliance – Feed My School for a Week Initiative – University of Georgia’s FtS Survey – Five Million Meals Pledge, Golden Radish Award, & Legislative Ceremony 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Distribution difficulties – Lack of school infrastructure to prepare fresh produce – Lack of farmers to procure produce from (volume & variety)

Future Considerations for NC Farm to School

- 1. Coordinate farmer's growing season schedule with the academic calendar to increase the availability of local crops for the school year.**
 - This could be achieved by hosting an annual planning meeting with CNDs, food service employees, NCDA&CS Marketing and Food Distribution Division personnel, and farmers to address yearly schedules.
 - Beth Crocker, General Counsel for the South Carolina Department of Agriculture, crafted a "Grow An Extra Acre" message as a mechanism to ease farmers into Farm to School (or growing new crops) without a huge burden, risk or change for farmers.
- 2. Commission a state university to conduct an Economic Impact Analysis and Farm to School Survey.**
 - This would provide NC Farm to School evidence to bring to farmers for why participating in Farm to School is worth their effort (monetarily & time-wise).
 - A Farm to School survey from a third-party could provide additional insight into opportunities and barriers in the program.
- 3. Establish a North Carolina Farm to School Data Evaluation Team (or position) to track data on Farm to School participation, infrastructure, successes and challenges.**
 - This would allow NC Farm to School to make evidence-based decisions from data results.
 - Additionally, in the future, this information could be used with DPI data to track long-term outcomes of Farm to School participation (improved health, increased participation in school lunch program, increased likelihood of eating/purchasing local produce outside of school, etc).
- 4. Advocate for legislation that requires state agencies, schools and/or government subsidized institutions to procure a percentage of their produce from local sources.**
 - Virginia state legislature introduced a bill to require state agencies to procure produce locally. Although it has not yet passed, this demonstrates that legislative action of this nature is being considered and pursued in NC's neighboring states.
- 5. Propose that school's procurement of local produce (when possible) should be an opt out decision rather than an opt in decision.**
 - This would drastically increase school participation, thus increasing producer interest in and economic gain from FtS (Suggestion from South Carolina's FtS coordinator, Dr. Holly Haring).
- 6. Facilitate better communication between NC Farm to School and the National Farm to School Network's NC Chapter.**
 - This would act as a mechanism to increase Farm to School participation, encourage efficient use of resources and streamline operations across the state.