

**Waukeee Community School District  
FY2021 USDA Farm to School Implementation Grant Request**

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## **Farm to School Background and Readiness**

Waukee Community School District (WCSD) is a large suburban, public PreK-12 school district that is located in Dallas County, Iowa. WCSD is currently the seventh-largest school district in Iowa, serving students from Clive, Urbandale, Waukee and West Des Moines, and continues to rank as the fastest growing school district in the State. There are nine elementary schools, with a tenth scheduled to open in 2022, two grades 6-7 schools, two grades 8-9 schools and one grade 10-12 high school, with a second high school scheduled to open in 2021. While Waukee is often considered an affluent suburban community, there are neighborhoods that experience disparities in income, health, and access to resources. There is a growing number of English language learner (ELL) students with 67 different languages spoken in the district.

The proposed farm to school implementation project aims to serve the entire district, which totals 11,500 students in preschool through grade 12. The objective of the project is to improve access to local foods in eligible schools through comprehensive farm to school programming that includes local procurement and agricultural education efforts. Our farm to school efforts connect with the needs of our students, as most live in suburban communities with limited exposure to farming, gardening, and at-home food production. While many of the immigrant and refugee families do have previous experience with agriculture, oftentimes, the traditional Iowa-grown vegetable varieties and agricultural methods are unfamiliar. As such, our proposed implementation strategies will include diversifying local food procurement and agricultural education with equity and inclusion as a priority.

The vision for WCSD's farm to school program is to '*cultivate opportunities for students and the community to interact with the local food system*' through education, hands-on agricultural experiences, and local food procurement strategies. As a recipient of a 2018 USDA Farm to School Planning Grant, WCSD has developed infrastructure to support farm to school including:

- Establishing a farm to school committee comprised of school and community stakeholders.
- Developing a farm to school vision, logo, and marketing materials.
- Creating a school garden checklist; garden food safety procedure; and revising the district's wellness policy to include support for farm to school activities.
- Adding 5 new edible gardens
- Providing nutrition education, in addition to locally sourced food for taste testing and special events in the lunch room, at summer feeding sites, and in preK-12 classrooms.
- Developing an action plan for farm to school implementation.

## **Staffing, Partnerships, Management, and Quality Assurance**

Jeannie Allgood, Director of Nutrition Services will oversee the implementation grant project and ensure that it aligns with the district's policies and priorities. Jeannie has experience overseeing the district's 2018 USDA Farm to School Planning grant and local food procurement.

Kaitlyn Scheuermann, MPP-D, RDN, LD is the Registered Dietitian for WCSD. Kaitlyn provided leadership for the district's 2018 USDA Farm to School Planning Grant. Kaitlyn develops menus for all K-12 buildings including special diet accommodations, facilitates farm to school programming and local food procurement, and coordinates the district's wellness and farm to school committees. Kaitlyn will assume responsibility for the proposed project, ensuring that grant activities are completed on time and within budget. Kaitlyn will also serve as the liaison between District stakeholders, including edible gardens, the school wellness teams, FFA, and Aspiring Professional Experience (APEX) program.

Jennifer Walters, MPH is the contracted Farm to School Coordinator. Jennifer assisted in facilitating WCSD's 2018 USDA Planning Grant, and previously coordinated Des Moines Public Schools Farm to School planning grant. Jennifer has more than ten years of experience in the public health field, and is skilled at facilitating strategic planning, assessing school and community needs, convening stakeholders, establishing school gardens with integrated curriculum, and developing and implementing farm to school action plans. Jennifer will assist with facilitating farm to school committee meetings and provide technical assistance for: integrating agricultural education and experiences into the curriculum; convening partnerships; developing processes, procedures and tools to support local food procurement; conducting the evaluation; and sustainability planning.

The aforementioned project team will meet quarterly to ensure activities are on track for completion and to facilitate communication, data sharing and reporting among and key stakeholder groups.

### **Evaluation Plan**

As a previous USDA Planning grantee, the Director of Nutrition Services, Registered Dietitian, and Contracted Farm to School Coordinator have experience monitoring farm to school activities, meeting objectives, conducting evaluation, and reporting on progress. For the proposed implementation project, Jennifer Walters, MPH, Contracted Farm to School Coordinator will oversee the evaluation.

The overall objective of the project is to improve access to local foods through comprehensive farm to school programming that includes local procurement and agricultural education efforts. As outlined in the project workplan table, the following activities and indicators will be monitored:

- Attend grantee gathering (# attended)
- Convene Farm to School Committee meetings (# of participants & meetings)
- Convene a committee to identify & implement strategies to enhance cultural diversity within farm to school (# of committee members, # of meetings, # of strategies)
- Conduct taste testings of local foods (# of taste tests & new recipes)
- Collaborate with school gardens to grow produce for meal programs (# of gardens, lbs. of produce)
- Implement a Harvest of the Month program (# and lbs. of local, \$ spent on local, # of lessons)
- Visit two schools to learn best practices for sourcing from farmers; adapt policies/procedures (# policies created)
- Issue request for information to assess availability of ultra-local products (# of responses, # of products identified).
- Support & expand school gardens (# of gardens, # of students reached)
- Establish/convene a curriculum planning team (# of meetings, # of teachers trained, # of lessons).
- Convene student-led greenhouse planning team (# of students, plan developed)
- Feature local products in summer meals (# and lbs. of local, # of students reached).
- Develop marketing and promotional materials (# of materials created)
- Attend conferences to showcase efforts and learn from others (# presentations given/attended)
- Convene Districts to align goals (# of joint goals developed)

## **Sustainability**

The district wellness policy was recently revised to include support for farm to school programming. Specifically, the policy states *“The Farm to School Program will enhance students nutritional and educational experience by providing opportunities for nutrition education and hands-on agricultural experiences. Farm to School experiences should be integrated into the academic curriculum at all grade levels whenever possible. The district will promote local and/or regionally sourced food as part of the school food program whenever practicable, including district-wide celebrations or events (such as Local Food Day, Taste Testing, or Harvest of the Month).”* This policy affirms the district’s long-term commitment to farm to school, regardless of grant funding.

Beyond the grant period, the Farm to School committee which is led by the district’s Dietitian, Kaitlyn Scheuermann, will continue to meet to plan and implement farm to school activities. Key partners, including Dallas County Ag in the Classroom, Eat Greater Des Moines, and Iowa State University Extension and Outreach will continue to provide in-kind support for nutrition and agricultural education in the classroom and at summer feeding sites. Additionally, APEX students will be engaged in meaningful opportunities to support school gardens, deliver education, and assist the committee in garnering student input. The proposed project will increase the organizational capacity of the Nutrition Services Department to support local food procurement by developing relationships, tools and protocols to support regular purchases from edible gardens, food hubs, directly from farmers or producers, and in collaboration with the district’s produce distributor. Long term, we recognize the additional staff time it takes to oversee the Farm to School program and will use the implementation grant period to assess the time and effort required, and develop a proposal and job description for a Farm to School/Wellness Coordinator position that will be integrated into the District’s long-term budget.

## **Project Work Plan Narrative**

Our proposed project builds on the success of the 2018 planning grant, and seeks to improve access to local food across all schools in the District through activities that address agricultural education and local food procurement, with an emphasis on engaging English Language Learner students and their families in farm to school. We are proposing a two-year project that will begin on July 1, 2021 and conclude by June 30, 2023. All of the activities below are included in the ‘Project Workplan Table’ and have evaluation metrics, timeline, target audience, and person responsible.

The Farm to School Committee will serve as the advisory group for the implementation grant. This committee meets monthly and is comprised of principals, teachers, parents, nutrition staff, public health, local food organizations, and community partners. The Nutrition Director and Registered Dietitian will attend the mandatory grantee gathering and share lessons learned with the committee.

District Nutrition will establish and convene a committee of English Language Learner students and their families, nutrition staff, and school improvement teams to identify opportunities and implement strategies to enhance cultural diversity within farm to school initiatives. This effort will include: conducting least four taste testings of local foods to get feedback on new and diverse local foods and recipes that could be featured on the menu; partnering with school-based edible gardens to grow culturally diverse vegetables and fruits; and working with local food organizations to procure culturally familiar, locally grown products for inclusion in meal programs.

WCSD will dramatically increase the amount of locally grown foods served in meal programs (including pre-K, breakfast, lunch, and summer meal programs) by implementing a Harvest of the Month (HOM) program. We have already done much of the planning for this by working with FarmTable (a local food hub) to identify local products that could be featured each month, and piloting a HOM feature in grab and go lunches that are being served during school closures due to Covid-19. Working through these challenges now means that we will be prepared for District-wide HOM implementation at the start of the 2021 school year.

In year two of the grant (2022), we will continue the HOM program, while also building capacity to source more local products on a regular basis. To learn best practices for working directly with local farmers, project staff will conduct a site visit with leaders of the Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative and Minneapolis Public Schools. The goal of these visits is to learn about processes and procedures for sourcing directly from farmers (including bids, informational meetings with farmers, product specifications, collaboration with distributor, processing, recipe development, menu planning, etc.) and adapt these best practices at WCSD. Following these visits, WCSD will design and implement a request for information to assess the availability of ultra-local products (within 60 miles of Waukee) to explore the potential for featuring more local products, and develop policies and procedures for this type of procurement.

We have a variety of edible school gardens in the District, including traditional raised beds/in ground plantings, tower gardens, aquaponics and hydroponics – many of these were created through the previous planning grant. We will support the expansion of these gardens by providing supplies, curriculum, dedicated personnel (teacher and/or student stipends for summer garden care, maintenance, and harvesting), and foster collaboration with District Nutrition to grow produce that can be featured in meal programs and/or taste tests in accordance with established food safety protocols.

The need for Farm to School curriculum connected to state standards that can be delivered in person or virtually was identified as a top priority through the planning grant. As such, WCSD will establish and convene a curriculum planning team to identify, integrate, and train teachers on comprehensive Farm to School curriculum for pre-K–12. The Dallas County Ag in the Classroom Coordinator recently joined the Farm to School Committee and will assist in developing the curriculum and designing grade-specific curriculum kits for farm to school that can be shared across buildings and implemented by teachers or by high school APEX students. To further support curriculum integration, a student-led greenhouse planning team will be established to create a vision, goals & design for a potential future greenhouse within District.

Integrating Farm to School into the District’s summer feeding program known as “Picnic and Play” is another priority for this project. WCSD operates this program at four low-income housing complexes, providing meals to children 18 years and younger. These locations have an average free and reduced lunch rate of 87.8% and an average of 500 meals served per week. In 2019, the District partnered with a school garden to provide peas for samples at Picnic and Play sites in conjunction with nutrition and agricultural programming. With the Covid-19 pandemic, in 2020 the district began operating a drive-thru curbside feeding program, and provided local cucumbers and seed growing kits to take home. The proposed project will build upon previous success by partnering with edible school gardens, the food hub, and/or local growers to feature locally sourced produce regularly in the meal program, while also expanding partnerships to provide education in person or through take home activities.

To raise awareness and promote farm to school, WCSD will develop marketing materials and implement promotional campaigns to showcase farm to school. This will include salad bar clings, HOM posters, newsletters, social media posts, and videos.

WCSD has emerged as a leader in Farm to School initiatives within the State of Iowa, presenting our work at Iowa's Farm to School Conference and Governor's Conference on Public Health. We will continue to attend and share our experiences in these venues. Because many schools in the Des Moines area have reached out to Waukee for information on farm to school, we see an opportunity to foster collaboration with Districts across the metro to increase local food procurement and share best practices for education. As such, WCSD will establish a regular meeting for metro schools to align goals and leverage partnerships to support farm to school in the region.