



Embracing Local Food Literacy: Shifting your School Food Culture

Tipsheet #5 in the 2017 Local Food Literacy in Ontario Schools Series

How can a school shift its food culture?

Key Tip #1: Start small, do it well, and market the idea. Your success story can create buy-in, encourage others to model the idea, and attract funding to scale up. E.g. start a worm bin, mushroom log, or seedlings in a classroom. Move from a successful window box to a raised outdoor garden. Calling it a “pilot” can be powerful - it’s a low-risk way to try something, see what happens, and learn for the next time.

Whole school approaches go beyond instructional or single intervention strategies within the school.

They engage the entire school community in a cooperative effort to create change.

Key Tip #2: Find and Engage Multiple Champions:

- **School Champions.** Changing a school’s food culture takes many people and you want to have champions from across the school: teachers from multiple subject areas, administrators, custodians, garden club, parent council, etc... Ideally, the whole school will be involved.
- **Community partners.** There are a lot of people who want to play a role in supporting schools. These include dietitians, nutritionists, child & youth workers, carpenters, agronomists, structural engineers, master gardeners, caterers, fundraisers... These external partners can leverage fundraising capacity, provide technical support (e.g. raised bed design, soil recommendations and general gardening expertise), host workshops and field trips, do advocacy work, provide PD opportunities for staff, and act as another type of caring adult in the school for students.



How did Eastdale Collegiate Institute (Downtown Toronto) go from this to this?



Opportunities to succeed with good food programs in schools:

- **Build on different access points:**
 - **Complement gardening with cooking** (and vice-versa). Cooking helps students care more about gardening and gardening helps students care more about cooking. Students are more likely to eat food if they've grown it themselves. They also care deeply about a plant if they have grown it, can eat it, know what it tastes like, and are taught how to cook it. Incorporate cooking into the school in different ways such as in class, with a club, in an after school program and/or in an employment program.
 - **Take a look at school lunch** - there's food in the school every day.
 - **Explore Student Nutrition Program connections** and how to make food exciting (e.g. build a bike blender to attract students). Visit <http://foodshare.net/program/blender/> for instructions on how to build your own with students.
 - **Curriculum connections.** Think outside of the box. E.g. Business classes can look at selling food. Language classes can do literacy activities. Arts classes can do signage and photography. Geography classes can map the garden or the local community in terms of food access.
 - **Field trips** – visit food co-ops, farms, markets, and other locations.
- **Make it relevant.** Ensure that the food reflects students' cultures and what they eat at home. Include different ways for students to engage (e.g. building irrigation systems as well as mural projects).



- **Recognize that youth are food experts.** By the time they're in high school, they have eaten a lot of food. Acknowledge what they know and incorporate that into your programming. E.g. students can write curriculum for an after school or growing program. Or bring students to speaking engagements to speak about their work.
- **Engage adults that are already at the school.** Could they be shoppers? Volunteers? How could they support the programming and be engaged?
- **Give students choice.** Engage them in decisions around what they're growing, cooking, and eating.
- **Bring food to school events** that may not be food-focused. E.g. share food at graduation.
- **Offer teacher training / professional development.**
- **Share your story.** E.g. speak at a school event, hold an open house for supporters, or help students get on the news.
- **Find fun ways to fundraise.** E.g. sell bike blender smoothies or student-made preserves at a pop-up market at the school.
- **Build in sustainability** to ensure that the program lives on after involved staff and students have moved on.

Other ideas to shift your school food culture:

- **Develop a Locally Developed Course.** Eastdale Collegiate Institute pulled from the media studies and environmental sciences curriculum to create a Seed to Market course focused on urban agriculture and community food security. They do crop trials, market garden harvests and media projects around their local food system.
- **Bring the garden into the school.** Display pictures of students engaging with food (e.g. in the garden) as a winter reminder about the great things happening during the growing season.
- **Recognize and celebrate student leadership** around food programming. Have a “Food Champ” or “Garden” Award at your graduation or year end assembly.
- **Create food system volunteer roles** for students who need volunteer hours. E.g. managing compost system, salad bar ambassador (to encourage students to eat fresh salad), prepping for snack program.
- **Map out what you’re “up against”** and want to change (tip – use a word cloud). Ask students what words they associate with their current school food culture. This can give an indication of what students are eating and where their food literacy is at.
- **Ask: “How do we solve problems without creating new work?”** This involves working with (not against) what’s being served in the cafeteria or what’s being taught in the school. A school food champion can then start to introduce ideas that might support more student well-being.
- **Celebrate your success.** Share your school food stories on school social media accounts, school newsletters, at school-wide events. Invite your local school board trustees and city councillors out to a garden launch or harvest party.



Engage students all year round, even in the winter!

- Engage students in cooking, preserving, and tasting.
- Integrate Foodland Ontario’s availability guide into lessons year-round.
- Explore indoor growing opportunities such as sprouting or hydroponic gardens.
- Work with school lunch and student nutrition programs (students eat meals all year).
- Connect clubs and class lessons to food systems, e.g. food miles, racism, social justice, food access.
- Explore seeds and seed-saving; bridge this to talk about food sovereignty.
- Plan the garden in advance of the growing season.

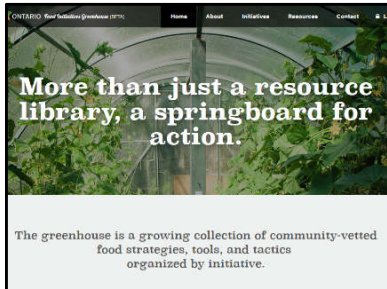
Idea to get started and bring the garden indoors:

Build a sub-irrigated planter and bring the garden indoors. People can stop by and say “ooh, what’s that?”

(Plans can be found by doing a search online)



Spotlight: A Selection of Resources to help your school Embrace Local Food Literacy



Sustain Ontario's Food Initiatives Greenhouse:

<http://sustainontario.com/greenhouse/>

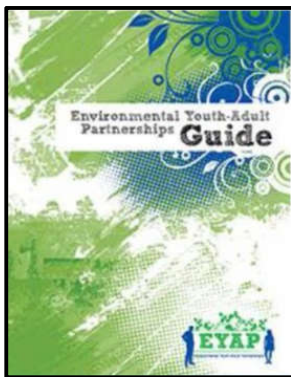
- Houses food lesson plans and resources for teachers as well as a wide range of other resources to enable good food in schools.
- Click on the "Food Literacy" initiative to search for hands-on teaching resources by subject, grade, and other search fields.



Farm to Cafeteria Canada's Farm to School (F2S) Resources

<http://www.farmtocafeteriacanada.ca/>

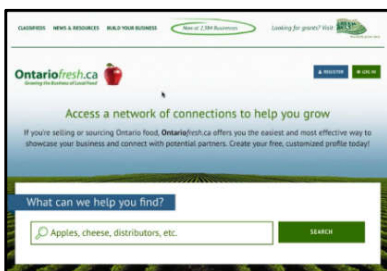
- The F2S movement supports a broad school food culture shift and highlights 3 complementary pillars: Healthy Local Food in Schools, Hands-On Learning, and School & Community Connectedness.
- This website provides a wide range of Farm to School resources including Fact Sheets, Stories from the Field, Videos, and Toolkits.



Environmental Youth-Adult Partnerships Guide

<http://ecosource.ca/about-us/publications/>

- The guidebook offers best practices for inter-generational learning.
- Provides a Shared Expectations Activity (page 47) to establish group values and guidelines for working together on a shared project.
- Many other Ecosource publications can offer support with shifting the school food culture: A Narrative of Change; Classroom Connects; Jardin de L'Education, Rerooted in Play, Alternative Avenues.



Ontariofresh.ca

<https://ontariofresh.ca/>

- A platform that can help schools across Ontario connect with local farmers and local food.

This Local Food Literacy Tipsheet has been prepared thanks to:



Possibility grows here.