



## **Farm to School in Ontario Exploring Solutions to Common Challenges**

**Thursday February 28, 2019**

**George Brown College Centre for Hospitality and Culinary Arts Culinary Bldg  
300 Adelaide St E, Toronto, ON M5A 1N1**

### **Summary of Takeaways**

The *Farm to School in Ontario* interactive workshop brought together individuals and groups engaged in Farm to School to connect with each other and to explore how to overcome common challenges to Farm to School activities.

**The event sought to enable participants to:**

- Learn about Farm to School models and best practices in Ontario, Canada and the U.S. and resources to support the work
- Trouble-shoot common challenges and barriers to Farm to School activities
- Initiate collaborative activities to support Farm to School efforts in Ontario

## Welcome and Introductions

Carolyn Webb, Coordinator of Sustain Ontario's Edible Education Network, welcomed participants to George Brown College and introduced the day. Carolyn gave a quick introduction to [Sustain Ontario](#) and the [Ontario Edible Education Network](#).

Carolyn thanked Gary Hoyer, professor at [George Brown College](#), and his *Generating Success for Farm to School* project for making the day possible. Carolyn also thanked the coordinating group and advisory group – made up of a wide range of Farm to School (F2S) stakeholders – for informing the day.



Carolyn noted that we're all part of a growing F2S movement and shared that it's critical to recognize that the reason we have a movement is because of all of the hard work of people like those in this room who are following their passions, charting new ground and creating change.

Carolyn introduced Soni Christie Craik and Stephanie Crocker, the day's facilitators.

Soni and Stephanie introduced the agenda and asked participants to discuss, in pairs, their reflections on the questions "What could you gain from being involved in Farm to School efforts in Ontario?" and "What challenge would you like to work through today?"

Participants shared key words in response to the question

## Why are you here today?



This wordcloud exercise used <https://www.mentimeter.com/>, an online tool. There are many other polling tools available that people can make use of in their own work.

## Grounding Ourselves: Perspectives in the Room

Carolyn shared responses to key themes that participants identified in the pre-event registration survey – see [Carolyn's Intro presentation](#).



## Grounding Ourselves: Perspectives from North America

Carolyn gave an overview of different Farm to School frameworks that have been developed by North American Networks.

But first, why are we even developing frameworks for Farm to School? They can:

- Help us see trends in how Farm to School programs get established
- Inform next steps and what programs could evolve into
- Help us see how to work together and learn from each other
- Enable new funding opportunities
- Lead to the development of tools and resources that we can use up to build our case such as briefings, tip sheets, evidence, and communications tools;
- Help us tap into policy or program conversations at provincial / national / international levels.
- Let us share stories in common and help others gain energy from such stories.

## Farm to Cafeteria Canada

[Farm to Cafeteria Canada](#) (F2CC) is a network that is working to support and inspire Farm to School efforts across Canada.

Carolyn introduced F2CC's [F2S framework](#), which has 3 main elements: Hands-on food literacy; Healthy, local food in schools; and School and community connectedness. Schools may choose to focus on one, two or all of these elements as they start or continue their Farm to School journey.

To complement the F2S framework, F2CC has initiated a wide range of projects and developed resources including:

- Developed a [National School Food Map](#) that shows us what's happening across the country (put yourself on the map!)
- Partnered on what has been called a Farm to School / Local Food in School Learning Lab / Learning Circle model
- Developed a [Benefits of F2S Tipsheet](#) to share Canadian data in support of F2S efforts
- Initiated the [Farm to School: Canada Digs In!](#) initiative, which has provided Farm to School Salad Bar grants of up to \$10,000 to 32 schools in Ontario and is undertaking a strong evaluation of these programs



## Farm to School BC (F2SBC)

[F2SBC](#) is a diverse and expanding provincial network administered by the [Public Health Association of BC](#) that promotes, supports, and links Farm to School activity, policy and programs across the province.

Since 2007, Farm to School BC has managed a series of Farm to School expansion projects in partnership with the BC Ministry of Health. Projects have included an initial salad bar program grant in Northern BC followed by grant opportunities. F2SBC's current program allows it to provide grants of between \$1,000-\$3,000 for schools to initiate or continue F2S programs – often these programs involve gardens. The work is supported by regional hubs, each of which has an animator and an advisory committee made up of a wide range of stakeholders.



## National Farm to School Network (USA)

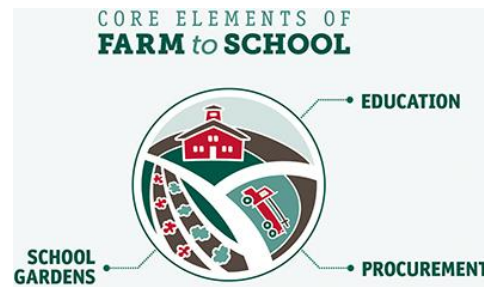
The [US National F2S Network](#) has been establishing itself and growing over the past 2 decades. There are now provincial F2S networks in every state in the US.



NATIONAL  
FARM to SCHOOL  
NETWORK

The national network provides a framework and supports such as the national map, a [benefits sheet](#) that shares a summary of evidence-based research on F2S, and many other supports and tools.

The US Farm to School model has 3 elements – Education, School Gardens and Procurement.



### Applications of the Farm to School Model

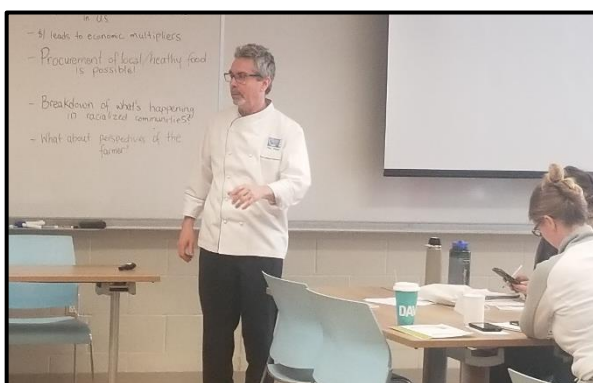
The F2S model can help translate food programs into a language that resonates with proponents of student wellbeing, healthy schools, and other school initiatives. As an example, F2S can greatly complement the Ontario Ministry of Education's [Foundations for a Healthy School](#) framework. Oakwood Public School in Ontario [shared a webinar presentation](#) that communicates their F2S programming within the Foundations for a Healthy School Framework.

### Farm to School Frameworks – A summary

Networks are building at the local and national levels in Canada and the US. They are developing F2S frameworks that can help us to collaboratively:

- Think about the bigger picture of how to foster and support common efforts relating to good food in schools
- Fill gaps in funding, communications, resources and tools
- Share stories
- Document Farm to School benefits, enabling us to make the case for funding and other resources
- Celebrate and raise awareness of Farm to School efforts

## Research and Analysis - Farm to School Challenges and Opportunities



### Gary Hoyer, George Brown College

Gary Hoyer has been working on the *Generating Success for Farm to School* project for 3 years. Gary's full presentation is [available online](#).

### Lynn Roblin, OPHA Nutrition Resource Centre

Lynn presented the results of the Greenbelt Fund funded project *Local Food Use and Food Literacy in Child Care and Student Nutrition Programs*. Lynn's full presentation is [available online](#).

## Panel Discussion – Stories from the Field

### Lyndsay Davidson, Chatham Public Health

Lyndsay's full presentation is [available online](#).



**Merissa Nudelman and Rav Singh, [Ecosource](#)**

**Jennifer Payne, Primrose Elementary School**

Jennifer's full presentation is [available online](#)

**Soni Craik Christie, SCC Consulting, and Eli Browne, Compass-Chartwells**

Soni and Eli's full presentation is available online

## Lunch

Participants enjoyed an outstanding lunch prepared and served by George Brown College students!



# Solution Sessions: Overcoming Farm to School Challenges

## Food Production / Gardens / Growing

Facilitated by Sunday Harrison, Founder and ED of Green Thumbs Growing Kids

Challenges that the group identified:

- **The summer season.**
- **Getting admin on board** – red tape and liability.
- **Infrastructure** (e.g. water)

Opportunities / Solutions:

Summer season - there's no one answer – every school garden is different:

- **Crop planning for summer** (spring and fall crops, not trying to do summer harvests).
- **Using community programs and partnerships** that can engage in the summer (daycare on site, student employment projects that could be managed by non-profit, Public Health, food bank, churches, universities).
- **Sign-up sheet for families** to care for the garden during the summer.
- **Moveable gardens** (milk crate gardens; sub-irrigated planters; wheely gardens). Check out a story about milk crate gardens at the [Bowery Project](#).

## Evaluation/Metrics:

Facilitated by Rav Singh, Merissa Nudelman, Ecosource

Challenges that the group identified:

- **Evaluation can be off-putting** to participants. How do we embed evaluation into delivery so it doesn't feel like evaluation?
- It's often **tough to measure** long-term impact; behaviour change
- Many communities have a lot of **languages** to accommodate
- Tricky to find the **balance between storytelling and numbers** – how do you get the numbers you need? How do you quantify the unquantifiable?
- **Finding the time** to evaluate, record testimonials, etc... when you're trying to do the programming; it often makes heavy use of volunteers
- **When dynamics change...** how can you foresee what you didn't collect data on?
- **Reporting to funders** based on what metrics they want to see

### Opportunities / Solutions:

- **Have a variety of evaluation tools in hand** that are appropriate for a range of purposes – a 1-off session vs. a longer-term session vs. accessible tools etc...
- If using a rating scale or other tools you can **include visuals** (e.g. smiley face, neutral face etc..) to reinforce the words and help them be more accessible
- Check more into [Photovoice](#)
- Use **artistic activities** to gather feedback – magazines, visual journaling
- Pose **open-ended questions**; try to be 'sneaky' about it (e.g. when they're in the garden or in the kitchen among their peers they share more, listen to what they share and write it down; you can carry a clipboard if you like)
- **Ask teachers to write down what they hear**; have volunteers or staff listen for key words or phrases – “\_\_\_ was heard 15 times....”
- Ask participants to **share 'words' to complement surveys** (e.g. like wordclouds); pull out what they are interested in (questions/sticky notes on board)
- **Use incentive!** Offer students an hour of volunteer time if they take the time to fill out a survey – whether in the garden or emailed through survey monkey
- **Share impact stories and numbers** anywhere you can: social media, websites, annual reports – keep it current and visually exciting
- **Incorporate data gathering naturally into the program** and extrapolate what you need from it (e.g. salad judges asking “what local foods did you choose and why?”; asking questions as a part of the programming)
- **Engage universities**, who are looking for projects for students
- **Write evaluation consultants into your grants**
- Could have two **jars** on the way out of the garden as a poll -- “did you have fun?”
- **Have an 'exit card' like in school** - write down something you learned on the way out;

### Engaging School Boards:

Facilitated by Soni Craik, SCC Consulting

#### Challenges that the group identified:

- **Procurement staff have not been educated about food**, where different rules apply
- It's challenging to get **sign-off** on things from the board
- Difficult for **small vendors** to be board-certified preferred vendors
- It's **tough to get the board to engage**
- **Language may not resonate** – everyone has different priorities (e.g. poverty lens vs. nutrition lens)



- **\$ that cafeterias provide to the school board** creates disincentives for change

Entry points / opportunities:

- **Find a champion in the board** or support an existing champion. E.g. a previous hospitality teacher started working at a board and **created a buyer's group**. This involved creating RFPs with very specific ingredients available. Can other boards establish buyers groups to enable greater buying power among schools?
- **Get students campaigning**. Use the student voice as a way to advocate for programs and infrastructure (students can Tweet about the need for local, fresh food; gardens; sharing stories about what they're doing, etc...) – these can be directed to their board and trustees. Use Photo Voice to document the stories and then share them online. To get there you can **build student excitement for healthy food systems**. Get students out on Farm trips, bring in guest visitors, etc.. This can all feed into enthusiasm back in the classroom. Students will then show leadership. If they ask for school boards to change their practices, parents can get behind them, then trustees get behind them etc...
- **Know the language / system** of the school boards and communicate within that (instead of having them think about a whole different system). This can be different depending on who you're talking to in the board. **Often it's best not to talk about food** (food is not something that the school board is responsible for). Instead, make a link to the curriculum (math, science, etc...) or student health and wellbeing (within the context of Foundations for a Healthy School).
- **Know the language of procurement officers** – e.g. "Check Rec"; is it on the list? If you can prove that you can't procure what you're listing for from an existing vendor list you can sometimes get around the restrictions.
- **Learn about the Broader Public Sector Directive** – take the [Mohawk College course on local food procurement](#) in the broader public sector to know the language and be able to talk with procurement officers and work around the barriers. The course is approximately 3 hours long.
- **Work with foodservice providers to approach the board** if appropriate
- **Take procurement officers / board folks on a field trip.**
- **Talk to your School Board Trustee** to help you navigate the system
- **Ask your Superintendent** to help you get a meeting with a School Board Director
- **Ask your principal** to champion the issue
- **Public Health** also has the ear of the board – they can be a great entry point to get the attention of the board
- Figure out and communicate **how your work / proposal can help advance the board's multi-year strategic plan.**
- Schools and boards are keen to become **Ecoschools certified** – can your food work enable that?

- Think about your efforts with the board as **long-term and strategic** – like a chess game.
- Ask to “**Delegate to the Board**” – boards have a policy about how to officially ask them to take action. If you work within that policy you can be invited to make an official presentation (often 5 minutes) to the board trustees and staff and ask for action.
- If you want to change up your cafeteria service, **ask the administration when the RFP for the cafeteria service is up.**

## Food procurement, distribution, seasonality

Facilitated by Lindsay Davidson, Chatham-Kent Public Health

The following elements would be valuable to enable greater local, healthy food in schools:

- **Food Literacy.** This includes knowing the farm literacy (what are the needs of the farmers; why might they be involved)? As well as place literacy (why something can be grown in x community but not in another location; how this affects seasonality).
- **Agri-food ventures.**
  - It would be valuable to have a food hub that would allow people to turn their food into another product that can be sold to schools year-round (preservation). There could be an option to be use the space or the space and staff.
  - Could go to local economic development to propose things like summer jobs or future jobs; create ability to do it in your own community.
  - Creating ordering systems that can share bulk purchasing capacity. Gives bulk power and also distribution power.
- **Flexible mindsets.** Many programs are purchasing directly from grocery stores. BUT if programs are willing to be flexible they can go straight to the farmers. They need to understand farmers’ crop cycles and that farmers may not have all products that they want when they want it (schools need to be willing to adapt their menus). Greenhouses are a great opportunity to buy things year-round but it’s good to know how they work – you still have a cycle of when product is available; doesn’t always align with what you’d think.
- **Shared ordering systems.** Greenbelt Fund has supported food hubs that act as aggregators to bring food together. Can then develop share orders between organizations to get bulk buying and distribution.

Other considerations:

- **Scalability.** Instead of using 1 farm to service the whole school / program consider using many farms. This can let you easily scale up. Hyper local is great but it’s also good to reach out. Suggest starting with 1 partner that’s supportive; build up a relationship with them. This can be used as a successful experience that the first partner can speak to when you’re looking for other partners.
- Check out the [Open Food Network](#)

## Building a Strong F2S Team

Facilitated by Jennifer Payne, Primrose Elementary School

### Opportunities / Solutions:

- When you're building a team, **speak the language of the key stakeholders**. Some respond to stats; some focus on individual stories; some talk about academic ideas or curriculum ties.
- **Start small and be flexible**. Working in groups of 3 people is very powerful; hopefully they're from different stakeholder groups. Tailor your goals to meet the needs and capacity of your school and community. Consider informal goals (e.g. promotion of/participation in food event days) as well as formal/policy-level approaches (e.g. school food policy or F2S goals in the school improvement plan.)
- **Need different roles; be inclusive**. Visionary, process master, knowledge keeper (e.g. farmer), facilitator, gatherer/connector.
- **A specific ask** is often more effective than a general call for help. What do you need/expect of the principal, teacher/parent champions, growers, distributors, students, community members?
- **Establish / support peer-to-peer leadership**, including students. Students teaching students is a great way to continue the momentum year to year.
- Money attracts - **MoE Community Connected Experiential Learning** initiative was suggested, has lots of funding attached. **Grant Connect** database to access all available grants - free access from some TO libraries.
- **Spin a vision in a way that people want to be a part of it**. Tell stories of student impacts, share lessons, keep the vision communicated. Connect with community organizations. Ministry support for long term transition. Create documentation as a "how to" for the next group to ease transition.
- [Environmentum TO](#) was recommended as a good model for getting stakeholders on board. [Kairos Canada](#) was recommended for their blanket exercise workshop.

## Communicating the Benefits of the F2S Program / Sharing the Story

Facilitated by Karen Hutchinson - Land Food People Foundation / Albion Hills Community Farm / Headwaters Food and Farming Alliance

### Challenges:

Broad Perspective (e.g. Food Council, Health Unit, Region)

- **Policy**: not a lot of F2S programs are driving policy.
- **Language**: we all need to learn new language for board/schools, stakeholders.
- **Relationships**: strengthening work with schools, getting into schools.
- **Evidence**: need strong evidence, how to communicate benefits, links to curriculum.
- **Partnerships**: regions are large and people work in isolation, people don't know all the projects or government connections.
- **Funding**: keeping the process going, getting funding, quantifying benefits

**Program Perspective:** time, logistics, resources

Communication Strategies to Share:

- Need have **something concrete that we can all say about F2S** – a collective message including what we are all doing together across Ontario so we can quantify our impact. If we can all tap into the same message it will have greater power. Could include number of communities that are part of F2S. It would then be valuable to have something for individual program to emphasize.
- Let's **link to community**, benefits of kids eating more fruits and vegetables, ecology/environment, social (food security) and economy and pilots happening.
- Examples that would be valuable to communicate: economic benefits to the area by purchasing local; kids who eat well do better in school; start young.
- **Emphasize relationship building**, community building and partnerships.
- Link communications to Food Charters, [Canadian Index of Wellbeing](#), and [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#).
- **Use statistics and frameworks** from [F2CC](#), [US F2S](#), Charters, Case Studies, [Canadian Index of Wellbeing](#), information/results from pilots.
- Schools can share messages via: **Fun events** - challenges, contests, power up salad with spinach instead of lettuce; make egg mice; use colours (e.g. taste rainbow vegetable shish kabobs); **newsletters** (send slides to school); **networks or groups**; **sample salad bar at parent-teacher events**; **presentations**; **social media** (twitter, Instagram, short 30-second videos).

Gaps to fill:

- **Collective messaging** (see above).
- **Evidence:** We need more scientific research to support F2S (quantitative and qualitative).
- **Relationships.** These can be strengthened.
- **To do:** create School Garden Network ; check out [Edible Education Network](#) to see if we can post Provincial evidence; keep at it and build enthusiasm.

## **Student Participation / Curriculum links**

Facilitated by Derek Brez, Sir Guy Carleton Secondary School

- Gardens can and should be used as a focus in all primary and secondary schools – can be jump-off points for all sorts of issues
- Involve students in social media campaigns; media components to many courses. These give kids a chance to engage in quality programs in their chosen platforms.

- Food and gardens can be fun opportunities for engagement – you’re somewhere different.
- Could make an ‘expert bin’ from the community – people can come in to engage the students in what career options are available.

## Reporting Back and Taking Action on Farm to School

Participants shared next steps that they would like to take on.

### What next steps could you take to advance your Farm to School vision?

- Mobile milk crate garden to travel home with students in the summer \*\* Check out the [Bowery Project](#)
- Sign the [Coalition for Healthy School Food petition](#).
- Connecting with other groups in the community
- Continue to build on our initiative of bringing healthy, local, sustainable food into our school
- Curriculum-linked food / garden lessons
- Better understand how farms (small scale market gardens) can be used to support F2S and vice-versa.
- Develop a Steering Committee to plan a small-scale vision and action plan to present to our school team.
- Revisit curriculum & PPM150 & other school board / ministry policy to strengthen those connections from my programs.
- Engage students and teachers more. Ensure F2S is an expectation among new council & admin coming up at our school.
- Develop a “pitch” in 3 versions, to advocate for local food in SNPs – one for parents; one for teachers and principals; one for community members/donors.
- Put together all the resources to create a document to convince my Board of Directors that this is the direction we need to move in.
- Putting more time and resources into evaluation
- Work with funders / individuals to start garden towers and salad bars in schools
- To continue to support and encourage program sustainability via volunteers sharing positive experiences, student engagement to support the continued need for Farm to School.
- Promoting benefits using resources from F2CC & F2S
- Re-look at how social media needs to be used
- Create a Learning Circle. Enhance our School Garden (more sustainable)
- Further collaborate with retirement home beside school so we can continue to grow our veggies throughout the summer; food literacy



- Apply for salad bar grant; Encourage the board to pay for “food handlers” at each school that is participating with us in our school area.
- Creating a strong outreach initiative to reach teachers and other professionals to take advantage of our programming or seek support from us.

**Are there any further information / resources you need, or collaborations that could help you take your next step?**

**Stats / Evaluation:** \*\* Check out the US evaluation framework – [Evaluation for Transformation](#)

- Program benefits – consolidate or specifically research F2S statistics like F2CC and F2S USA for [Ontario](#)
- Getting school boards on board with creating these gardens – stats
- Evaluation tools & resources – simple sample surveys, questions, etc...
- Doc with a summary of evidence
- Gather pledges & testimonies

**Funding:**

- More specific info about possible funding
- How to put formal proposals together

**Communications / Advocacy:**

- Develop a “pitch” in 3 versions, to advocate for local food in SNPs – one for parents; one for teachers and principals; one for community members/donors
- Discussion with the Ministry of Health re: getting the food to the kids in an environmentally healthy way
- Petitioning the need for broader Farm to School support – changing legislation and policies

**More Opportunities for Discussion, Collaboration:**

- Network check-ins or online forum for discussion
- Would like to stay connected with folks from today
- Would be nice to see more policy people &/or hear from students & funding agencies
- Would be nice to have a Facebook page for like-minded people who attended this event to share information \*\* Access the [Ontario Edible Education Network FB Group](#)
- Activate communities; bring people together to change legislation / policies
- More engagement from the farming community (can we connect with agricultural organizations when we organize our events and activities?)

- How to engage with agricultural related agencies, staff (i.e. local farmers)
- More Ontario network events
- I would like to hear more about connecting with Indigenous and racialized people in the development of a vision that's more inclusive
- Knowing all the potential Local Food Distributors in Ontario
- More comprehensive map for programs / orgs in Ontario that support F2S \*\* Many initiatives from Ontario are on [F2CC's School Food Map](#) and the [Imagine a Garden in Every School](#) website - put yourself on these maps!
- Reaching the childcare sector as well as after school programs.

#### **Stories, resources:**

- Would love to hear of more F2S programs and their successes; gives more ideas to springboard off of
- Document with links to curriculum \*\* access the [Sustain Ontario Greenhouse](#) for a list of curriculum-linked food literacy resources
- Full articulation of the farm to school program – clarify the components

#### **Infrastructure:**

- A community farm, garden, kitchen in every community
- A garden in every school!
- An SNP in every school in my area

Carolyn shared resources and funding sources that participants may be interested in. These are available in [Carolyn's Powerpoint](#) presentation of the day.

Participants were asked

**What is a key learning you are taking away today?**



Check out all of the Ontario Farm to School conversations happening at [#OntF2S](#) and share your own!

Thanks to everyone for a great day!