

Top Priorities for School Nutrition Programs

Submitted by: Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Adam H. Putnam



Research has shown that students who eat well-balanced meals earn higher scores on tests and report better attendance and fewer behavioral problems. As Florida's Commissioner of Agriculture, improving the nutritional value of school meals by adding more locally grown fruits and vegetables to school trays is one of my top priorities.

Since 2011, when the state's school nutrition programs were transferred to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, schools have enhanced breakfast and lunch menus to provide healthier options throughout school campuses and established Healthy School Teams to oversee these efforts. This year, we are focusing on two major initiatives within school nutrition programs: the HealthierUS School Challenge and Farm to School.

The HealthierUS School Challenge, a joint effort with the department and the USDA, is a voluntary certification initiative that recognizes schools' efforts to improve food and beverage options, offer nutrition education and promote physical activity. Schools must meet specific criteria, such as providing smarter snacks and opportunities for physical activity.

While we have made significant strides in promoting healthier environments in schools, our goal is to have every Florida school certified as part of the HUSCC initiative. We offer many resources to assist school districts in earning HUSCC certification, including specialists throughout the state to provide personal, hands-on support to help meet the requirements for HUSCC recognition. Click [here](#) to learn more about the HUSCC initiative in Florida.

Through the Florida Farm to School program, we connect local farmers and ranchers with school districts to increase the amount of locally grown produce served to students, while offering agricultural education. In addition to better connecting growers and schools, we have helped coordinate statewide lunch menus to coincide with Florida's harvest seasons.

We have dedicated numerous resources to assist with all three facets of the Farm to School movement: procurement of local produce, school gardens and nutrition education. Click [here](#) to learn more about how to implement a Farm to School program in your school and increase Florida products served in your districts.

A successful Farm to School program can help schools achieve HUSCC requirements by providing a wider variety of seasonal fruits and vegetables that give students the nutrition they need to succeed in the classroom. We are committed to working with Florida's school districts to help parents raise a healthier generation of Floridians who are ready and able to learn. We look forward to partnering with you to give students the fuel they need to excel in the classroom. For more information about these initiatives, please contact InfoFNW@freshfromflorida.com or call (800) 504-6609.

