

2011

# COLORADO Farm<sup>to</sup>School



Colorado Farm to School Task Force Executive Summary

*The Task Force is charged with increasing the use of local farm and ranch products in school food service programs to improve child nutrition and strengthen local and regional agricultural economies.*

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- The Task Force **received a major grant** from the Colorado Health Foundation to support its 2012 activities.
- The Task Force **provides outreach and technical assistance** upon request to schools, producers and communities interested in starting or expanding FTS efforts. In 2011, the Task Force conducted 13 outreach/meeting efforts with school districts and various other organizations, including the Colorado Farm Bureau, Central Peaks Council of the El Pomar Foundation, Valley Food Partnership, Mountain Roots Food Project, Western Dairy Association, and state public, health and education agencies.
- The Task Force supported the development of direct technical assistance to schools and producers. Members have organized and led the following projects:
  - **Durango Farm to School Conference** brought together five school districts and 22 local producers to jointly develop bid processes and safety protocols to meet the needs of both schools and producers.
  - **Connecting Local Farms to Schools Conference** brought together more than 200 attendees representing schools, community groups, parents, producers, public health and state agencies to engage in workshops ranging from “getting started” to “ramping up” farm to school efforts.
  - **Southwest Pre-bid Conference** resulted in four school districts releasing local produce and product bids (three for the first time) and 13 producers successfully landing contracts with the school districts.
- In 2011, the Task Force released **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)** on the new USDA “geographic preference” option, which has been a source of confusion in the field. This option allows school food purchasers to give preference to locally grown foods when comparing bids. Two FAQs were released in the fall of 2011:
  - *A Q&A for Colorado School Food Purchasing: School Food Sales & Geographic Preference*
  - *A Q&A for Colorado Farmers, Producers, & Vendors: School Food Sales & Geographic Preference*
- The Farm to School Task Force **supports pilot projects** by helping stakeholders define and refine projects, and helping locate funding sources and advocate for financial support.
  - The Task Force is working with existing and potential **food hubs** up and down the Front Range, learning from current food hubs and supporting the development of new food hubs in geographical areas where minimal processing, aggregation and distribution of local produce is needed. In 2011, these included:
    - Colorado Springs (School District 11) Food Hub (existing)
    - Greeley School District Central Kitchen (existing)
    - Northern Colorado Producer Hub (proposed)
    - Colorado Corrections Industry (CCI) at Cañon City Food Hub (proposed)
    - Fort Lyons Correctional Facility Food Hub (proposed)



- The **Task Force conducts quarterly meetings around the state** to learn about the needs of different regions. In 2011, the Task Force met in Pueblo, San Luis Valley, Longmont and Denver.
- A **50-state legislative scan** of farm to school and healthy school food legislation introduced in 2010-2011 was conducted and released in the fall of 2011.
- Schools need kitchen equipment to handle and process fresh foods. The Task Force developed a **Farm to School Grant Template** to provide assistance in finding funding and applying for grants to buy equipment and upgrade kitchen facilities.
- The Task Force provides **letters of support and Technical Assistance commitment** to farm to school projects such as the Specialty Crop Grant FY11, and Risk Management Agency Grant recipients such as the Yuma Conservation District and the Rocky Mountain Farmers Union.
- The Task Force designed and will soon launch the **Farm to School Information Hub Website**, which will be a centralized, sustainable information hub that purposefully connects the many different farm to school related resources in one easy to navigate website, including an active and supported peer networking component. The website will include information for producers, schools and communities.



## LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

In 2010, the Colorado General Assembly passed and the Governor signed Senate Bill 81, the “Farm-to-School Healthy Kids Act,” which created the Interagency Farm to School Coordination Task Force (“Task Force”), a 13-member body with representatives from schools, parents, producer organizations and state agencies. For a complete list of organizations, see Page No. 7 of this executive summary.



## WHAT IS FARM TO SCHOOL?

- Schools buying produce and products from local farmers and ranchers (As of December 2012, 41 Colorado school districts and 10 other individual Colorado schools were sourcing locally.)
- Local producers selling their products to local schools – either directly or through a food hub or food vendor (As of December 2012, at least 34 Colorado producers had contracts with schools and/or districts.)
- School gardens that provide hands-on educational experiences for children
- School gardens that supply school cafeterias with produce
- Cafeterias with signage identifying local products and producers
- Farmers/ranchers visiting classrooms
- Children visiting farms
- Farm to school/food systems curriculum
- Nutrition education
- Chef participation
- Schools developing menus that feature local products



## WHY DOES FARM TO SCHOOL MATTER?

- Children in schools with extensive FTS programs eat more fruits and vegetables at school than children without FTS programs in their schools.
- Children's diets improve at school and at home.
- Local fresh produce is more nutritious than produce shipped thousands of miles or canned food.
- Robust local and regional food systems create stable jobs and tax bases for communities.



## Our Goal

*Colorado will have a collaborative, sustainable implementation of farm to school statewide*

### THE TASK FORCE ROADMAP – BRIDGING THE GAPS

The Task Force laid out a comprehensive vision to create farm to school opportunities statewide. The FTS-TF Roadmap (see last page of this executive summary) identifies the infrastructure, skills, training and policies needed to support farm to school statewide and key activities already occurring. **Five major gaps emerged from this mapping, and filling these gaps is the work of the Task Force.**

## The Work of the Task Force

1. Policy and regulatory analysis
2. Pilot projects & evaluation
3. Centralized information hub
4. Outreach and technical assistance
5. School facility improvement grants

### THE WORKING GROUPS

Despite the passionate commitment of many individuals and organizations to farm to school efforts, distinct gaps remain. These gaps, and the opportunities to fill them, are the strategic focus of the Task Force. They include:

#### Policy & Regulatory Analysis (Working Group 1)

Policy guidance for producers, schools and state agencies is needed to overcome barriers to implementing farm to school that arise from federal, state and local policies related to competitive bidding, local preference, food safety, etc. Products from 2011 include:

- A **legal analysis** of the new USDA “geographic preference” option, rolled out as easy to understand “Frequently Asked Questions:”

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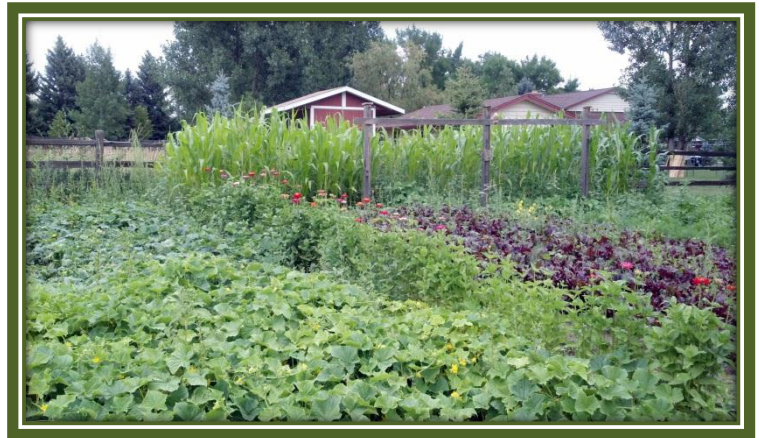
- *A Q&A for Colorado School Food Purchasing: School Food Sales & Geographic Preference*
- *A Q&A for Colorado Farmers, Producers, & Vendors: School Food Sales & Geographic Preference*
- A **50-state legislative scan** of farm to school and healthy school food legislation introduced in 2010-11.



### **Pilot Projects & Evaluation (Working Group 2)**

The Task Force identifies and supports key pilot projects in Colorado to build an array of effective, innovative models. In 2011, the Task Force organized and led:

- Conferences and convenings that provided hands-on technical assistance to schools and producers:
  - **Durango Farm to School Conference:** This conference brought together five school districts and 22 local producers to jointly develop bid processes and safety protocols to meet the needs of schools and producers.
  - **Connecting Local Farms to Schools conference:** The second annual Farm to School Conference in Colorado brought together more than 200 attendees representing schools, community groups, parents, producers, public health and other state agencies to engage in workshops ranging from “getting started” to “ramping up” farm to school efforts.
- **Pre-Bid Conference**
  - Southwest Colorado school districts held a pre-bid conference with local producers. Thirteen producers submitted bids to four districts. All bids were successful.
- **School and Producer Food hubs** were established along the Front Range and in the Central Peaks area.
  - Colorado Springs - D11 School District (Phase I underway)
  - Greeley School District Central Kitchen (opened October 2011)
  - Northern Colorado Producer Hub (proposed)
  - Colorado Corrections Industry at Cañon City Food Hub (proposed)
  - Fort Lyons Correctional Institute Food Hub (proposed)



### **Centralized Information Hub (Working Group 3)**

This group established a centralized, sustainable online information hub that connects farm to school resources in one easy to navigate website. It includes an active and supported peer networking



component critical for producers and schools in overcoming the significant start-up costs associated with learning how to move forward. This hub will provide information for producers, schools and communities and includes:

- Well-organized links to other websites with tools/information, some original information/tools
- A forum for peer networking, including contact information for farm to school efforts statewide, places to post issues/problem solve together, and listings of upcoming grant opportunities, particularly those appropriate for capital construction and equipment
- Profiles of Farm to School Champions in Colorado to celebrate, inspire and serve as role model and resource center

### Outreach and Technical Assistance (Working Group 4)

Outreach and technical assistance to help schools, producers and communities start and expand FTS efforts. The Task Force presented information and/or technical assistance in 2011 to the following groups:

❖ Colorado Farm Bureau	❖ Western Dairy Association
❖ Central Peaks Council of the El Pomar Foundation	❖ Colorado Correctional Industries, Cañon City facility
❖ <i>Public Health in the Rockies</i> annual conference	❖ State Agency Directors meeting of the Colorado School Nutrition Association
❖ Valley Food Partnership	❖ Montrose/Olathe School District
❖ Mountain Roots Food Project	❖ Gunnison School District
❖ Colorado Food System Advisory Council, <i>Economic Development subcommittee</i>	❖ <i>Communities Putting Prevention to Work</i> , School District Grant Coordinators meeting
❖ <i>Connecting Local Farms &amp; Schools</i> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> annual conference	

### School Facility Improvement Grants (Working Group 5)

The Task Force recognized that school facilities and infrastructure improvements are necessary for fresh foods to be used in school kitchens. The Task Force developed a **Facility Improvement Grant template** that:

- Identifies grant opportunities
- Provides boiler-plate narratives that describes and justifies the need for kitchen equipment to process fresh food
- Provides optional customizable narratives to reflect the history, readiness and activities of a district



## 2011 TASK FORCE MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

Role Represented	Organization
<b>School Food Services Directors</b>	Durango School District 9-R
	North Conejos School District RE-1J
	Denver Public Schools
	Weld County School District 6
<b>Parent</b>	Slow Food Denver
<b>State Agencies</b>	Colorado Department of Education
	Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment
	Colorado Department of Agriculture
	Colorado Commission on Higher Education
<b>Industry</b>	Colorado Onion Association
	Colorado Beef Council
	U.S. Food Service
	Western Dairy Association



The *Colorado Farm to School Task Force 2011 Report* and information about past and upcoming Task Force meetings can be found at [www.coloradoagriculture.com](http://www.coloradoagriculture.com).

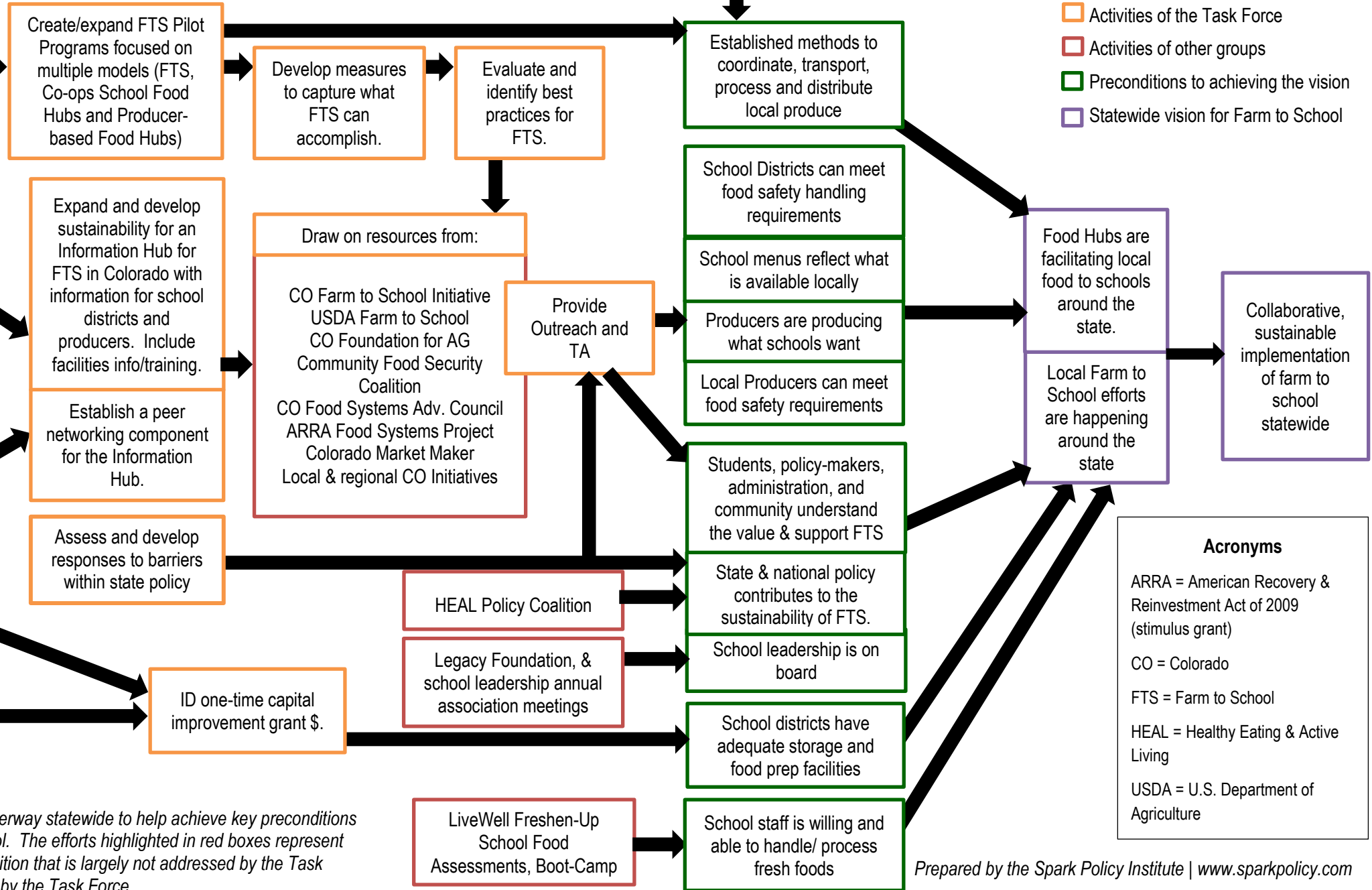


# Colorado Farm to School Task Force: Roadmap, January 2012

Updated on 01/17/2012

## Mandate:

- **Pilots:** Create/expand farm to school pilots
- **Producers:** Develop, design, make available training for producers on marketing, crop production, post-harvest handling of crops, food safety, business management, liability and risk management, contracting, and processing.
- **Food Services:** Assist school food services to establish procedures, recipes, menu rotation, proper handling, preparing, storing, and other internal processes.
- **Facilities:** Inform school districts on methods for improving facilities.
- **Funding:** Identify funding sources/grants for SDs



**Note:** Many other activities are underway statewide to help achieve key preconditions to implementation of Farm to School. The efforts highlighted in red boxes represent those groups addressing a precondition that is largely not addressed by the Task Force, but recognized as important by the Task Force.