

## Weakley County Plans for Farm to School Initiative Now Available

In 2019, the Northwest Tennessee Local Food Network (NWTNLFN) began a partnership with Weakley County Schools (WCS) to publish and implement the Weakley County Farm to School Action Plan.



Weakley County

By working with area farmers, students, parents, school administration, Coordinated School Health - Healthy School Teams at each school, and Local Food Network consultants, the Weakley County Farm to School Team assessed current assets and needs, promoted increased collaboration between multiple stakeholders, connected interested farmers to school cafeteria managers helping identify and develop supply chain and processing mechanisms, incorporated Farm to School education activities into curriculum planning, and created a marketing plan to educate the public on the benefits of a thriving Farm to School Program in Weakley County.

A small team of WCS and NWTNLFN representatives worked together to determine the vision statement that will be utilized in the years ahead: *"The Weakley County Farm to School Initiative plants the seeds for students to learn where their food comes from by growing, observing, and experiencing hands-on opportunities. The growth of the initiative occurs as educators, farmers, and local ag-based entities work together to create a nationally recognized sustainable model."*

Weakley County School Farm to School Planning Team defines "local" as within a 150-mile radius of the school district's main office in Dresden, Tennessee. The parameters touch several state borders including Kentucky, Illinois, Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Alabama.

"This is a big win for regional farmers and students who consume their locally grown & processed food," noted Samantha Goyret, the executive director of NWTNLFN and primary author of the more than 100-page overview of what is currently happening in Weakley County Schools and plans for increasing those activities.

"The planning team continues to seek partnerships with community stakeholders to determine the tools, training, and technical assistance needed to create an integrated farm to school program that will not only educate and benefit our students, but positively impact the community by increasing access to healthy, local food in the schools," she said.

The team seeks schools and their communities to take action by encouraging working on collective Farm to School goals over the next 3 years. The goals are developed around supporting initiatives in the Cafeteria, Classroom, Community, and coordinating an integrated approach for Staying Power. The Weakley County Farm to School Action Plan can be downloaded at [nwtlnfn.org/programs/farm-to-school](http://nwtlnfn.org/programs/farm-to-school).

Community involvement is valued and appreciated as the Weakley County Schools Farm to School Initiative continues to expand opportunities for students' hands-on learning, emphasized Goyret.

"This Farm to School Planning process could not have been possible without the support from the USDA's Farm to School Planning Grant awarded to the Northwest Tennessee Local Food Network in 2019," stated Goyret. "USDA's funding has been VITAL to support the Northwest Tennessee Local Food Network, Weakley County School District, farmers, and connection with local entities and businesses as we have initiated, expanded, and kicked-off our farm to school efforts in Northwest Tennessee."

The following is a brief summary of the initiatives goals for the next three years:

#### Section I: Cafeteria

CAFETERIA GOAL 1: By the end of the school year 2021-2022, the Weakley County School Nutrition Department will have an official Local Food Procurement Manual.

CAFETERIA GOAL 2: In the 2021-2022 school year, Weakley County Schools will embed the Harvest of the Month program into the cafeteria through an educational poster campaign, offering locally sourced options on the menu and as a taste-test (1 x month) to correspond with available locally grown and produced products.

#### Section II: Classroom

CLASSROOM GOAL 1: By the 2022-2023 school year, educators will have resources to fully integrate garden, food and agriculture education into curriculum to help engage students with hands-on learning about food, agriculture, nutrition integrated into science, math and ELA.

CLASSROOM GOAL 2: By 2023-2024, Weakley County Schools will increase hands-on learning, experiential learning opportunities in all schools.

#### Section III: Community

COMMUNITY GOAL 1: By fifth grade, all students will be aware of local farm to school efforts and have at least one hands-on experience of visiting an actual farm.

#### Section IV: Coordination, Integration and Staying Power

STAYING POWER GOAL 1: By the 2022-2023 school year, a farm to school committee will be recognized by the School Board and fully functioning with representation from school administration, school nutrition staff, faculty, and community members.

STAYING POWER GOAL 2: By 2021-2022, the Weakley County Livestock Farm will have diversified revenue resources to sustainably support the Farm, FFA program, and Farm to School Local Food Procurement requests.

STAYING POWER GOAL 3: Create a sustainable Farm to School initiative.

STAYING POWER GOAL 4: By 2021 have Farm to School initiative language included in the updated Weakley County School Wellness Policy ready for approval by the School Board.

The complete action plan can be downloaded here:

<https://nwtfn.org/programs/farm-to-school/>

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