



Arkansas House Newsletter

September 27, 2024

Farm to School Month



As we enter the month of October, Arkansas gears up to celebrate Arkansas Farm to School Month – a time dedicated to connecting schools, early childhood education sites, and various organizations with local farms to provide children with access to fresh, healthy food.

This initiative is part of a nationwide effort to foster a deeper connection between communities and local food producers, enriching the lives of students and families alike. By changing food purchasing and education practices within schools and alternative learning environments, Arkansas Farm to School Month aims to empower children to make informed food choices while contributing to the local economy and creating vibrant communities.

One of the key components of Farm to School is the implementation of school gardens, which serve as invaluable educational tools. These gardens not only provide students with the opportunity to consume healthy foods but also enable them to engage in hands-on learning through gardening and farming. Studies have shown that when children are involved in growing their own food, they are more likely to eat fruits and

vegetables and are more willing to try new varieties.

Currently, Arkansas boasts an impressive 350 school gardens across the state, each varying in type and design, including greenhouses, raised beds, and containers inside classrooms. These gardens not only promote healthy eating habits but also foster a deeper connection to nature and provide valuable lessons in nutrition.

The Arkansas General Assembly passed The Local Food, Farms, and Jobs Act in 2017 and amended the act in 2019. The act requires institutions to set a goal of spending at least 20% of their purchase of food products on local food. It also requires institutions to complete a reporting form, created by the Arkansas Department of Agriculture, on their local food procurement budget on a yearly basis.

In the most recent reporting cycle, 284 institutions serving children aged 18 and younger reported spending over \$194 million on food, with nearly 20% of their food budget allocated to local foods.

As we celebrate Arkansas Farm to School Month, let us recognize the importance of promoting healthy eating habits, supporting local farmers, and providing educational opportunities for our youth. By fostering a connection between students, communities, and local food producers, we can create a healthier, more sustainable future for all.