



## Step-by-Step Approach Fayetteville, AR

### STARTING SMALL

More than a decade ago, Fayetteville Public Schools began its farm to school journey. Serving 10,000 students, the district has used a small-step approach the entire way, always focusing on what could be done in the present. At the very beginning, this took the form of a few school gardens and a Child Nutrition Director (CND) reaching out to farmers at a local farmers' market. Having grown up on a farm herself, district CND Ally M. Rachek advises, "People should start grassroots small. It doesn't have to be big and fancy; start small so that there can be successes immediately."

In 2005, the district tried using some local produce at three elementary schools for just the first and last eight weeks of the school year. The next year,

they continued, and tried just a few easy products district-wide: fresh apples, peaches, and watermelons. In the spring of 2007, they coordinated with the local farmers' market: a school delivery truck



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picked up produce on Tuesday mornings and delivered to schools for serving on Wednesdays. "Small is okay," says M. Rachek: "Keep the long game in mind."

Starting at a small scale allows schools and districts to make changes before scaling up. >>



▲ Green tongs signify local produce on the serving line.  
▶ Fayetteville High School child nutrition staff prepare butternut squash grown by Dickey Farms in Tontitown. Another staple, 1,000 pounds of sweet potatoes are ordered every other month (pictured above right).





◀ An Arkansas FoodCorps member provides lemon roasted broccoli as part of a Harvest of the Month taste test. The recipe was created by the previous year's service member.

▶ Parents are periodically invited to join their students for Local Harvest Lunches. Faculty and staff are also encouraged to attend.



## GAINING MOMENTUM

>> Partnerships have also fed into the step-by-step approach. Over the next few years, local nonprofit AppleSeeds helped provide hands-on educational experiences and farm field trips starting at Leverett Elementary, while Feed Fayetteville helped with educational farm to school lunches starting with elementary schools. In 2012, Fayetteville was finally ready for, applied, and received a grant from the

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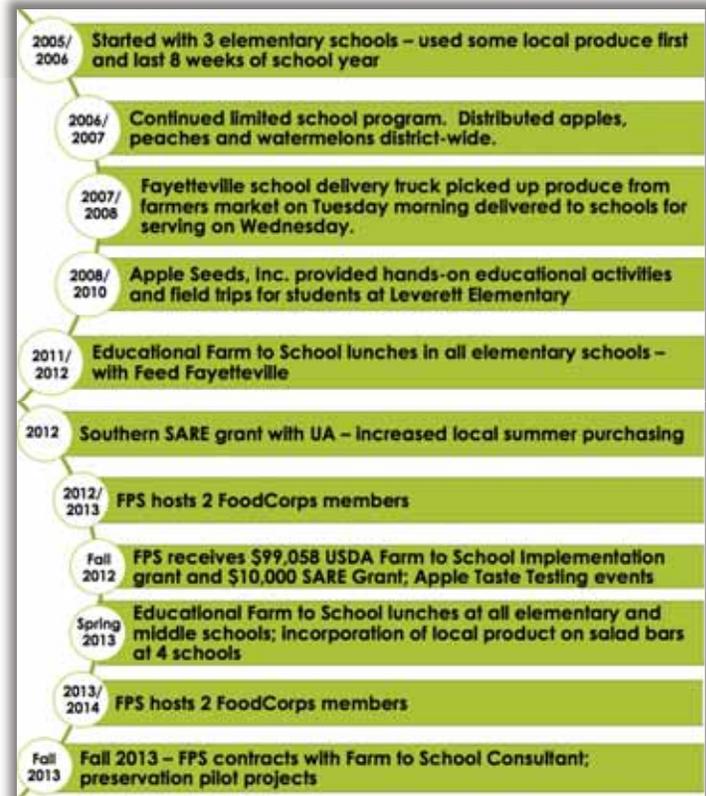
Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) group. Over the next years, the district hosted FoodCorps members who helped build capacity, and

dietetic students from the University of Arkansas who ran taste tests of local seasonal fruits and vegetables. Mrachek affirms, “people are the biggest resource.”

All this work over the last decade built into momentum that resulted in the district receiving a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) \$100,000 grant. In the months and years that followed, this grant provided significant seed money that helped Fayetteville continue to build sustainably upon its farm to school foundation.

The step-by-step approach applied in Fayetteville can work anywhere. Further, the values of community and self-sufficiency that Mrachek identifies in her district hold true in communities across the state. “Use strengths of the community you are in. You can focus on gardening in one community, and

procurement in another. The beauty of farm to school is it can look completely different,” says Mrachek. “It can be a really great two-for-one. You can serve people great food *and* support the local economy.”



▲ The Fayetteville Seed to Student education program implemented many small steps over the last decade.

Many thanks to Ally Mrachek, CND for Fayetteville Public Schools.

