

Letter of intent to apply for the
USDA Farm to School Conference Grant
Submitted by The Ohio State University (on behalf of Ohio State University Extension)

March 31, 2014

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“Local Foods across the Meal Tray and School Day”
Statewide Ohio Farm to School Conference

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April 1, 2014

Dear Review Committee,

The following information describes the proposed conference for which we are requesting USDA Farm to School funding:

Conference Description

Ohio State University Extension (OSUE) proposes to host a statewide conference, “Local Foods across the Meal Tray and School Day” in March 2015. It will take place in the Nationwide & Ohio Farm Bureau 4-H Center in Columbus, Ohio. Focusing on procurement methods, the conference will increase food service professionals’ knowledge and efficacy for obtaining local foods, and producers’ knowledge and efficacy for marketing products to schools. The conference will be planned to promote and encourage networking between buyers and sellers.

The conference will feature speakers from the USDA Farm to School program, producer associations, state agencies, and OSUE. Name Removed, MS, RD, a regional consultant at the Ohio Department of Health and a member of the OSUE Farm to School Advisory group will present a general session on procurement. NAME REMOVED, attended the USDA Procurement Training in March 2014. Attendees will be seated by county or region to foster information sharing and networking.

Breakout sessions will feature state specialists and school professionals from throughout Ohio, focusing on types of foods “across the meal tray” and best practices (procurement methods, salad bars, food safety, classroom activities, etc.) “across the school day”. New to the 2015 event, product category sessions will highlight what can be done to make foods more marketable to schools, new ways to serve traditional products, and ways to incorporate foods from various categories across the meal tray and school day. Instruction and demonstrations on how to use online marketing tools to develop connections between producers/distributors and school buyers will also be provided.

Additionally, we will offer to host a Farm to School leaders meeting the day after the conference to give USDA representatives, National Farm to School Network staff and Midwest state leads, and other an opportunity to meet. A similar meeting was held following our 2013 conference.

Planning Committee and Other Partners

OSUE’s Farm to School program reaches key audiences through essential partnerships—both internal and external to Extension. The Ohio Farm to School advisory group and conference planning committee includes professionals from the Ohio Department of Agriculture, Ohio Department of Health, Ohio Department of Education, Ohio Action for Healthy Kids, Ohio Farm Bureau, the American Dairy Association, and other agencies and trade groups. The USDA FNS Farm to School Midwest Regional Lead will be included in the conference planning process. We will also draw on the resources of the National Farm to School Network.

Extension specialists in Agriculture and Natural Resources, Community Development, Family and Consumer Sciences, and 4-H Youth Development from throughout Ohio who work with programs that directly support Farm to School objectives, including ServSafe trainings, MarketReady, and Market Maker, will be invited to give input in conference planning. A Graduate Administrative Associate will manage the day-to-day conference planning activities, including promotion, communications, materials preparation, and registration.

Previous Farm to School Conferences

In partnership with the Ohio Farm to School advisory group, OSU Extension offered a statewide Farm to School Conference titled, “Let’s Grow” in March 2013. The conference featured three keynote presentations by national leaders, 10 panel presentations, a Curriculum Showcase, Salad Bar Showcase and opportunities for networking. Panel presentations focused on partnerships, procurement methods, cafeteria menus, food safety, classroom activities, communications, and school gardens. The 294 conference attendees included food producers and distributors, food service personnel, school administrators and educators, representatives from state and county agencies, non-profit organizations, parents, and other community leaders. Using a scale of 1=dissatisfied to 5=very satisfied, participants who completed conference evaluations (n=179) expressed overall high levels of satisfaction (average 4.25) for keynote and breakout sessions, exhibits, resources, facility and food. Additionally, 171 attendees expressed that the conference provided them with the knowledge or skills they could use toward advancing Farm to School. An AmeriCorps VISTA member provided fulltime assistance with conference preparation.

Throughout 2014, OSU Extension will provide overall leadership to 5-6 regional Farm to School Workshops, in partnership with our advisory group and local planning committees. State- and local-level speakers will provide information and resources on state and national trends, procurement methods, food safety issues, direct marketing and networking opportunities, and educational activities. The centralized state-level preparations for these workshops are being done by the Farm to School director and an AmeriCorps VISTA member. Workshop expenses are being covered by local groups, registration fees, and small amounts of grant monies received by OSU Extension. AmeriCorps VISTA assistance to the program will end after June 2014.

Needs Addressed by this Conference

Interest in offering more locally sourced foods is growing among school professionals, parents, and students themselves, however, many school food service directors and educators lack the knowledge and resources needed to get started or to expand their current efforts. Although over 95% of 2013 Ohio Farm to School Conference attendees who completed evaluations expressed that the conference provided them with the knowledge or skills they could use toward advancing Farm to School, many also expressed interest in more in-depth and targeted networking opportunities. The 2015 conference is intended to increase knowledge and efficacy for procurement of types of foods “across the meal tray”. This may be the only statewide event that creates opportunities for school food service personnel to network with producers and producer/commodity groups, and to receive expert guidance from USDA Farm to School leaders.

Conference Goals and Objectives

The primary goal of this conference is to increase such knowledge and skills participants can use to advance their participation in Farm to School.

Through discussion and written materials provided in conference sessions, participants will:

- A. develop an awareness of current practices, benefits and opportunities for Farm to School activities and the processes and procedures of implementing a Farm to School program.
- B. identify purchasing and marketing processes and procurement methods that apply directly to Farm to School and to specific foods that would be appropriate for their local school districts.
- C. apply direct marketing tools to developing networks for procuring and supplying local foods.
- D. identify food safety practices and guidelines that apply to using local foods in school food service and minimal standards producers need to meet regarding food safety.
- E. gain contacts, resources and strategies for connecting local producers with local school food service and for procuring local foods.

Participants will be able to complete a hard copy or online evaluation survey following the conference. These instruments will include standardized USDA evaluation questions to monitor the effectiveness of the event. Evaluation results will be submitted to USDA.

Note: The objectives and agenda for the Farm to School leaders meeting (day 2) will be developed with input from the expected attendees in advance of the meeting date.

Projected Attendance

In 2013, 294 individuals attended the statewide Farm to School conference presented by OSU Extension. We expect to register 300 individuals in 2015 (maximum capacity of our environmentally “green” conference venue is 300). This will include approximately 275 participants and up to 25 invited speakers, including producers and marketing representatives. Based on attendance at the 2013 statewide conference, we expect participants to include producers and distributors, food service personnel, school administrators, educators, students, and parents, representatives from state and county agencies, Extension professionals, non-profit organization staff members and volunteers, and other community leaders.

Procurement Trainer Qualifications

NAME REMOVED, a dietitian who works in the Office of Child Nutrition at the Ohio Department of Education, will present an in-depth general session on procurement for school food service personnel and other interested in procurement. NAME REMOVED is a member of the Ohio Farm to School Advisory Group and will be on the conference planning committee. In March 2014, she attended the USDA train-the-trainer program on local procurement in federal school meal programs.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

NAME REMOVED, MS, MPH, Ohio Farm to School Program Director
Assistant Professor and Extension Field Specialist in Youth Nutrition and Wellness
The Ohio State University
CONTACT INFORMATION REMOVED