

# Why Farm to School?



## CHILD NUTRITION CRISIS

During the past 20 years there has been a dramatic increase in obesity in the United States. The percentage of school-age children 6-11 years that are overweight more than doubled between the late 1970s and 2000, from 6.5% to 15.3%. The percent of overweight adolescents ages 12-19 tripled from 5% to 15.5% in the same time period.<sup>1</sup> Research shows that obesity is particularly impacting young people of Mexican and African American descent. Family income also seems to impact dietary choices and therefore obesity in children. Children of families below 130% of the federal poverty threshold are twice as likely to be overweight than those above the threshold.<sup>1</sup>

The widespread availability of unhealthy food and drinks on school campuses has contributed to

children's poor eating habits. There is an urgent need to educate children about the connections between food choices and health, as well as to provide them with healthy food choices in school settings. A study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control in 2002 shows that only 23% of children in the country consumed more than five servings of fruits and vegetables a day.<sup>1</sup> Research has shown that a poor diet and lack of physical activity influence a child's ability to learn and decrease motivation and attentiveness.



<sup>1</sup>Center for Disease Control 2002, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/brfss/>



## STRUGGLING FAMILY FARMS

While our children are eating unhealthy foods, our farmers are losing out on potential markets due to globalization and corporate consolidation in agribusiness. The farmer share of the food dollar has dropped from 41 cents in 1950 to 20 cents in 1999.<sup>2</sup>

Farm to school programs are one solution to the crisis facing small farms. Farm to school offers a new market to family farmers, especially urban-edge farmers who bring the added benefit of preserving open space and slowing sprawl. And by showing children that fresh local produce is delicious, farm to school connections turn on the next generation of consumers to locally grown food.

## FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAMS ARE A GOOD MODEL FOR:

- Promoting healthy eating habits in children and reducing their risk for obesity and related health disorders.
- Providing children access to local, healthy and fresh foods.
- Facilitating education about nutrition, food and agriculture through curriculum and activity-based or experiential learning.
- Increasing school lunch participation and thereby revenues for the school.
- Opening up new markets and increasing revenues for farmers.
- Generating community support and awareness about local food systems and agriculture.
- Keeping agricultural land as open space.
- Influencing policymakers at local, state and federal level about a variety of issues such as school food and school environments, food assistance programs, support for local food systems and agriculture, and promoting healthy eating and lifestyle choices in our communities.

<sup>2</sup> Economic Research Service, US Department of Agriculture, <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/FoodPricespreads/bill/>

