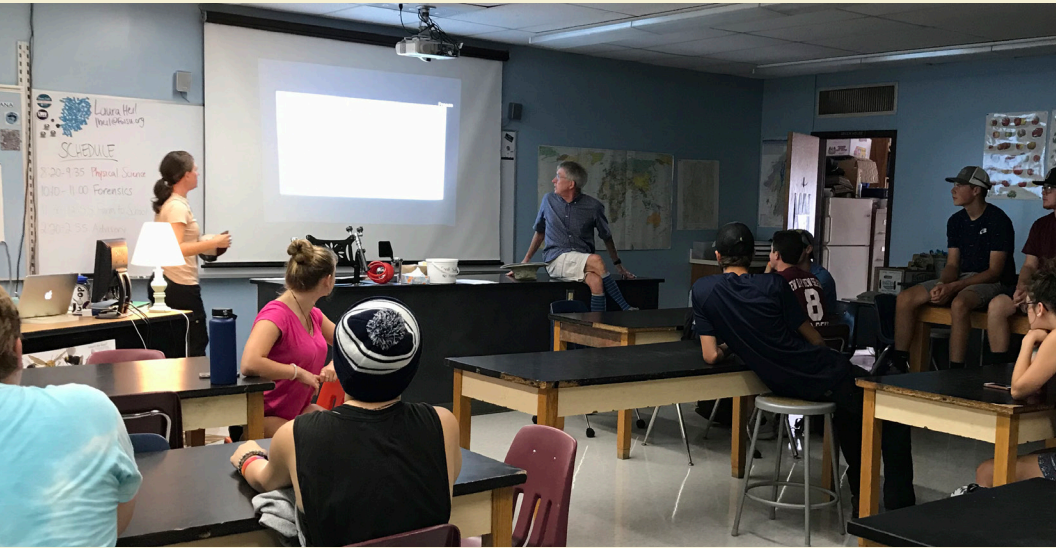




# VERMONT FARM TO SCHOOL CASE STUDY

## Integrating Farm to School Curriculum

# Bellows Free Academy Fairfax



This Farm to School case study was developed by the Vermont Farm to School Network. It is one of a series of five that demonstrate the range of Farm to School experiences, successes, and challenges across the state in K-12 schools and early care programs. Vermont defines Farm to School as engagement and connection among the classroom, cafeteria, and community—including farms. We hope that you'll learn and apply some valuable tips or considerations to your own Farm to School programming.



## **Bellows Free Academy (BFA) Fairfax** sits on



15 acres within the agricultural Franklin County. A vibrant school farm flourishes with two bountiful vegetable gardens, an apple orchard, berry bushes, a greenhouse, a pollinator garden, plus two newly added honeybee hives. Students move about the farm tilling, weeding, and planting with a strong sense of place. The creative integration of agriculture into the school's K-12 curriculum fosters deep connections with neighbors, with the local agricultural community, and among members of the school community itself.

The Abbey Group Food Service Management Company (FSMC) runs the school meal program and supports school-wide efforts by serving fresh foods harvested from the school garden and purchased through the Green Mountain Farm Direct food hub (when available). In addition to holding committee meetings, the principal meets with the food service manager daily and has open lines of communication with teachers so he can keep Farm to School team members up to date and information can be shared quickly.

# SNAPSHOT

## **Supervisory union:**

Franklin West, Town of Fairfax

## **School population & grade levels:**

985 students, grades K-12

## **Town population:** 4,285

## **Food program management structure:**

Abbey Group Food Service Management Company (FSMC)

## **Free & reduced rate:** 24%

## **Meals served:** Breakfast and lunch

## **How local is “local”?**

The school has not defined local beyond how the Abbey Group defines it: Vermont plus a 50-mile radius, thereby including New Hampshire and parts of New York. BFA’s chef purchases from Green Mountain Farm Direct when possible.

## **Sources of support:**

- [x] Vermont Farm to School grantee, Planning and Implementation
- [x] Northeast Farm to School Institute participant
- [x] Works with a regional partner, Healthy Roots Collaborative (Franklin and Grand Isle Counties)

# **How Bellows Free Academy Does Farm to School**

**The school built an on-site, fully functioning production garden run by students and a teacher who is paid a stipend in the summer.**

**English and science teachers co-teach the high school Farm to School class and spearhead activities.**

**Proficiency-based learning (PBL) standards are utilized for the Farm to School curriculum.**

**Strong community partnerships and the Farm to School team have been built over time.**

**An outdoor learning lab acts as a discovery space for K-8 students to explore food and sustainability.**

**Students initiate their own learning and Farm to School projects.**

# How BFA Makes It Work

## **BFA builds engagement through communication.**

The school board's support is ensured because it is kept well informed about how Farm to School is supporting the district's goals. Principal Tom Walsh remarked, "Having a champion who will communicate with the school board monthly is another piece that helps sustain our programing."

## **School administration invests in the staff.**

The school administration designates time and professional development opportunities for Farm to School. For example, BFA's principal incorporates Farm to School professional development opportunities during teacher in-service days on a yearly basis. This increased knowledge contributes to a culture open to changing and embracing Farm to School.

## **The school accesses funding and local and regional resources.**

With grants from Healthy Roots Collaborative, a regional Farm to School technical assistance provider, and other community members, the Farm to School team was able to integrate separate educator, community, and cafeteria initiatives. Thanks to coaching provided through the Vermont Farm to School Grants and the Northeast Farm to School Institute, the team created opportunities for staff to develop Farm to School curriculum. Enthusiasm brought the support of the principal, who then spread the initiative school-wide.



### **BFA formed a Farm to School committee.**

Instead of relying on a single, designated coordinator, committee members share planning of, coordination of, and responsibility for the Farm to School program.

### **BFA hosts regular Farm to School committee meetings.**

These meetings allow for a diverse array of stakeholders to coordinate with each other, check in, plan, and discuss their progress toward the goals outlined in their Action Plan, which the team developed collectively during attendance at the Northeast Farm to School Institute training. The plan includes cafeteria, classroom, community, and sustainability components.

# The Economic Value of Engaging in Farm to School

Economically, Farm to School makes sense for BFA's food service management partner, Abbey Group, and it has a goal to purchase 10% locally each year. Because of a change in vendors, Abbey Group is counting on BFA's vibrant production garden for fresh fruit and vegetables for the yearly Community Harvest Dinner and for surpluses to use for meals. The garden manager has begun to provide fresh vegetables from the garden for use in monthly taste tests to promote the "if students grow it, they will eat it" philosophy. Thus, when the Abbey Group buys the taste-tested produce, it knows the students are already familiar with it and will be more likely to eat it. Over the summer, when school is not in session, the garden produce is donated to the local food shelf.

"Communication, communication, communication! You need a champion who will communicate with the school board monthly. It's another piece that helps sustain our program."

—Tom Walsh  
Elementary School Principal



# How Farm to School Benefits This Learning Community

## **Students develop a sense of agency and**

**connectedness.** The vision of the school farm and many Farm to School activities are driven by the students, with the help and support of staff and community members. The student-led Farm to School Club started when the school received its first Vermont Farm to School planning grant, which allowed students to tour local farms and other Farm to School programs and then plan their own approach.

## **A Farm to School focus weaves the BFA school community together.**

This focus provides a structure for administration, teaching staff, and the cafeteria to openly communicate and engage as a team and to develop common goals that will benefit students and families. Not only has it provided easy integration of classroom standards, but students enjoy the hands-on engagement in learning.

## **The school faculty use the Farm to School platform to develop expertise in proficiency-based learning while supporting their students' active learning.**

Farm to School provides learning across multiple modalities within different pedagogies and can appeal to students with widely varying aptitudes and interests—all while providing a rich opportunity for students to develop proficiency within an applied framework. For instance, high school students spend the winter researching self-selected topics related to the school garden. The project was the impetus for bringing bees into the farm and school curriculum. Learning is tracked and students evaluate their own work.



# WHAT'S NEXT?

Teachers in the elementary school are developing a K-8 outdoor garden curriculum to use in conjunction with their newly created outdoor classroom. These teachers formed a Farm to School task team to identify useful resources, share with their teaching counterparts, and implement programming.

The seventh and eighth grade classrooms are piloting the *Nourish* curriculum sponsored by Heifer International. It's centered on providing "resources to open a meaningful conversation about food and sustainability."

School food and nutrition staff plan to integrate a sustainable taste test schedule in the cafeteria that features produce from the school farm.

Abbey Group and Healthy Roots Collaborative are working to find farms that can provide local food to replace what was provided by the Green Mountain Direct Food Hub, which stopped operating in BFA's county in the fall of 2017.

**MEMBERS OF THE INTERVIEW TEAM:** Tom Walsh, Elementary School Principal; Fred Griffin, English and Farm to School Teacher, Garden Coordinator; Nina Hansen, Abbey Group Vice President of Operations; Megan LaValley, Abbey Group Food Service Director; Amanda Brunelle, Abbey Group Food Service Manager; Chelsea Clark and Terry Briant, parents; Jane Sorensen, farmer and community member; and Healthy Roots Collaborative, local nonprofit food systems organization



# VERMONT FARM TO SCHOOL NETWORK

## Ready to work on your Farm to School plan?

Check out the Farm to  
School Planning Toolkit at

**[vtfeed.org/toolkit](http://vtfeed.org/toolkit)**

to see how you can begin  
integrating the cafeteria,  
classroom, and community  
in your school! Find  
additional resources at

**[vermontfarmtoschool.org](http://vermontfarmtoschool.org)**

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The Vermont Farm to School Network is a statewide network engaging students and school communities in a local food and farm culture that nurtures children's health, cultivates viable farms, and builds vibrant communities. **[vermontfarmtoschool.org](http://vermontfarmtoschool.org)**