



VERMONT FARM TO SCHOOL CASE STUDY
Invest in Your Meal Program
Putney Central School



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.

Putney Central School sits on 13 acres surrounded by 160 acres of rolling woods. It's nestled next to a historic village that supports maple sugar houses, apple orchards, vegetable and fruit farms, and artisans. Putney's eclectic culture permeates the elementary school and integrates community values into the curriculum and daily life of students. It has had an active parent and teacher group over the years that has built a garden and invested in providing local food for the students and school community.



SNAPSHOT

Supervisory union:

Windham Southeast, Town of Putney

Town population: 2,639

School population & grade levels:

175 students, grades K-6

Food program management structure:

Independently operated

Free & reduced rate: 42%

Meals served:

Breakfast, lunch, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP), summer meals

How local is “local”? Two tiers define local: Hyper-local describes food from within a 25-mile radius, and local describes food from within a 50-mile radius.

Sources of support:

- Vermont Farm to School grantee
- Northeast Farm to School Institute participant
- Works with regional partners Food Connects and Putney Food Shelf

How Putney Central Does Farm to School

Putney Central offers the “Breakfast After the Bell” program so more students are eating in their classrooms in the morning, eliminating the stigma that low-income students face when receiving a hot breakfast away from their peers.

30% of the school food budget is allocated for local food served in the cafeteria.

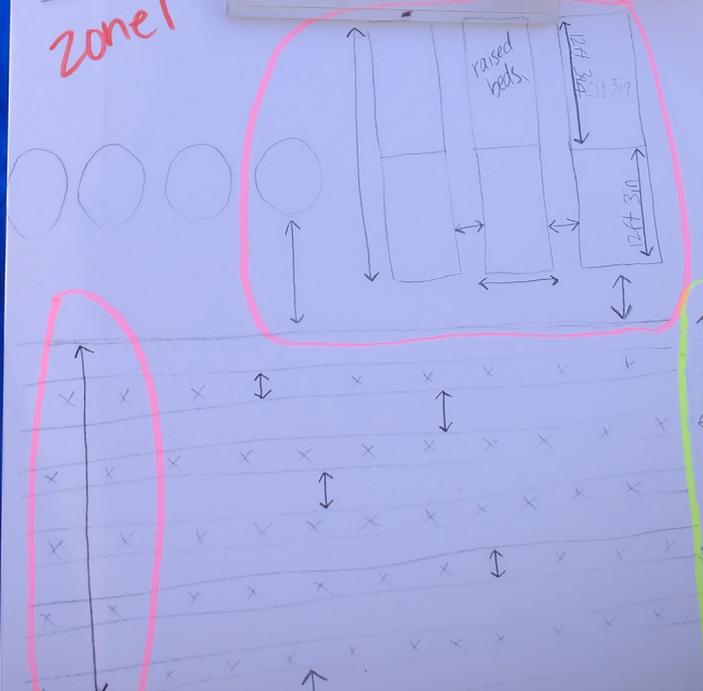
One staff position comprises sustainability coordinator, garden manager, and food service director responsibilities to ensure Farm to School is integrated across the cafeteria and into some curriculum.

Food, nutrition, and agricultural education are taught by the sustainability coordinator.

A core group of four staff members plan and operate the school garden and engage students.



zone 1



How Putney Makes It Work

Leaders coordinate Farm to School curriculum across grades patiently and systematically.

Putney teachers don't have a school-wide plan to fully integrate Farm to School across the curriculum yet. However, they do engage students in Farm to School activities when opportunities come up. Each teacher or staff member approaches Farm to School through wellness and sustainability with activities as he or she see fit, all aligning with the ultimate goals of growing healthy students, providing scratch-cooked meals, and creating an emotionally stable environment. For example, third grade teachers share regular taste test responsibilities to make that program available to all the students.

Creativity and collaboration are supported by the administration.

The principal holds the "30,000-foot view" and encourages staff to innovate and create change that aligns with the school's core values. Staff are attracted to the ultimate goal that unifies the school's culture. For instance, wellness lessons taught in the classroom, garden, and cafeteria are also replicated in physical education classes where the teacher works with students on mind and body wellness in lieu of a competitive sports curriculum.

"Healthy kids come out of environments where they feel safe and secure, and they are taken care of by healthy adults who feed them good food."

—Herve Pelletier, Principal

Putney incorporates community values into the school framework.

The community values whole and fresh foods and expresses this by volunteering for Farm to School support tasks, such as gardening or cooking for the community harvest dinner. Additionally, school staff seek parent opinion when considering new policies, such as banning soda on the school campus. Building open lines of communication through community events is one way that the principal establishes familiarity and trust between the school and the community to encourage collaboration and participation.



The Economic Value of Engaging in Farm to School

Putney Central invested in its cafeteria by clearly articulating its values and goals, which prompted the school to take over the operations of its meal program after years with a food service management company. The goal was to ensure that the food program was managed through the lens of sustainability, that it intentionally incorporated garden produce, and that purchasing decisions aligned with the budget and values. Putney now has creative control over its food purchasing, allowing for its preference for local products to take greater priority, thereby dedicating 30% of its food budget toward local procurement. Furthermore, two staff positions are now full-time with benefits, which has resulted in improved workplace satisfaction and less staff turnover, ultimately saving money.



How Farm to School Benefits This Learning Community

Community values are at the heart of this school food program. Investment in the meal program emerged from a collective focus by the community, school board, and principal on increasing nutritious and accessible meals that nourish the whole student and engage local farmers. By creating a self-operated food program and merging the positions of the sustainability coordinator and the school nutrition manager, the school was able to align its vision with its actions. Though self-operation poses its own set of challenges, it has allowed the school more freedom to shape its program. The school has integrated sustainability and garden coordination roles into the daily cafeteria operations, and produce grown in the garden by students and served in the cafeteria further connects them to their food.

The wellness of the whole child is everyone's priority. Putney Central School believes in coaching kids to grow into healthy adults, which includes focusing on full access to healthy foods. The principal firmly believes “healthy kids come out of environments where they feel safe and secure, and they are taken care of by healthy adults who feed them good food.” Once this is achieved, he says, “The kids are available to us for other stuff, the book stuff.” Just like the classroom, the cafeteria and garden are integral learning centers of the school.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The Farm to School committee realizes that the school will benefit from a long-term, documented Farm to School plan that incorporates each of the three C's: classroom, cafeteria, and community. Members of the team sometimes act independently, so although efforts may result in Farm to School programming for students, they may not always translate to those outside the core group. Therefore, one cohesive plan of action is for them to articulate specific goals involving nutrition education in the classroom and local food purchasing in the cafeteria.

Recently, the four-year-old program lost core members who moved on from the school. The committee is looking for ways to revamp the program and engage new members who can bring fresh ideas to solve some of the challenges, such as how to coordinate sustainability activities across the classrooms while maintaining the cafeteria's efforts.

Putney has three staff members who have dedicated time to reach out to parents in order to become Direct Certified for Universal School Meals* (breakfast and lunch). The anticipated up-front cost to the school would be \$30,000 to \$40,000. The school is currently weighing its options and waiting to see what will happen if its district consolidates and what the payoff could be if a contribution is made from the school's budget to offset the cost.



*Direct Certification & Universal Meals: The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is one option offered by USDA to support schools, districts, and supervisory unions seeking to provide universal (free) school meals to all students. At least 40% of all enrolled students must be directly certified to receive free school meals in order for a school or group of schools to use Community Eligibility. Direct Certification means that the child in question is part of a household that has already been determined to be eligible for another federal program, specifically, SNAP (3 Squares), TANF (Reach Up), certified homeless, foster child, or child of a migrant worker.

MEMBERS OF THE INTERVIEW TEAM: Herve Pelletier, Principal; Jen O'Donald, Third Grade Teacher; Audry Sager, Fifth Grade Teacher; Steve Head, Sustainability Coordinator, Garden & Food Service Manager; Matt Bristol, Physical Education Teacher; Kate Venne, Food Connects staff; Ellen Strong, parent; Sherry Hawkins, community member; Hannah Pick, Bennington Food Shelf staff



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

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