



FARM TO INSTITUTION INITIATIVES

Nationwide, tens of millions of people each day eat their meals outside of home at schools, colleges, hospitals, corporate cafeterias and government agencies. Each one of these institutions represents an opportunity for U.S. farmers, ranchers and food businesses to gain market share, earn a livelihood, forge ties with local residents, and improve community health and well-being through farm to institution efforts, in which local producers sell to institutions nearby.

Connecting with local producers benefits the institutions, too. K-12 schools are finding that when children are taught about where food comes from, their attitudes toward and consumption of vegetables improve.⁸ Teachers are incorporating agriculture into their curricula to meet academic goals. The number of schools known to be participating in farm to school programs jumped from 400 in 2004 to over 2,300 in 2011.

Hospitals are finding that farm to institution programs can increase access to healthy, fresh food for patients and staff; some, like **this one in Maine**, are prescribing fruits and vegetables to patients and helping them utilize nearby



FAST FACTS

- The number of schools known to be participating in farm to school programs jumped from 400 in 2004 to over 2,300 in 2011.
- USDA's Risk Management Agency is funding the development of innovative, accessible food safety tools to help local producers meet institutional food safety requirements.

farmers' markets. And a slate of state and local governments are setting goals and developing strategies to use food purchasing policies to support their farmers and local economy.

As institutional buyers purchase more local food, they create business opportunities for farmers and ranchers and keep a greater share of food dollars in the local economy. (See **this 2010 report** from the Economic Research Service, which shows that farmers

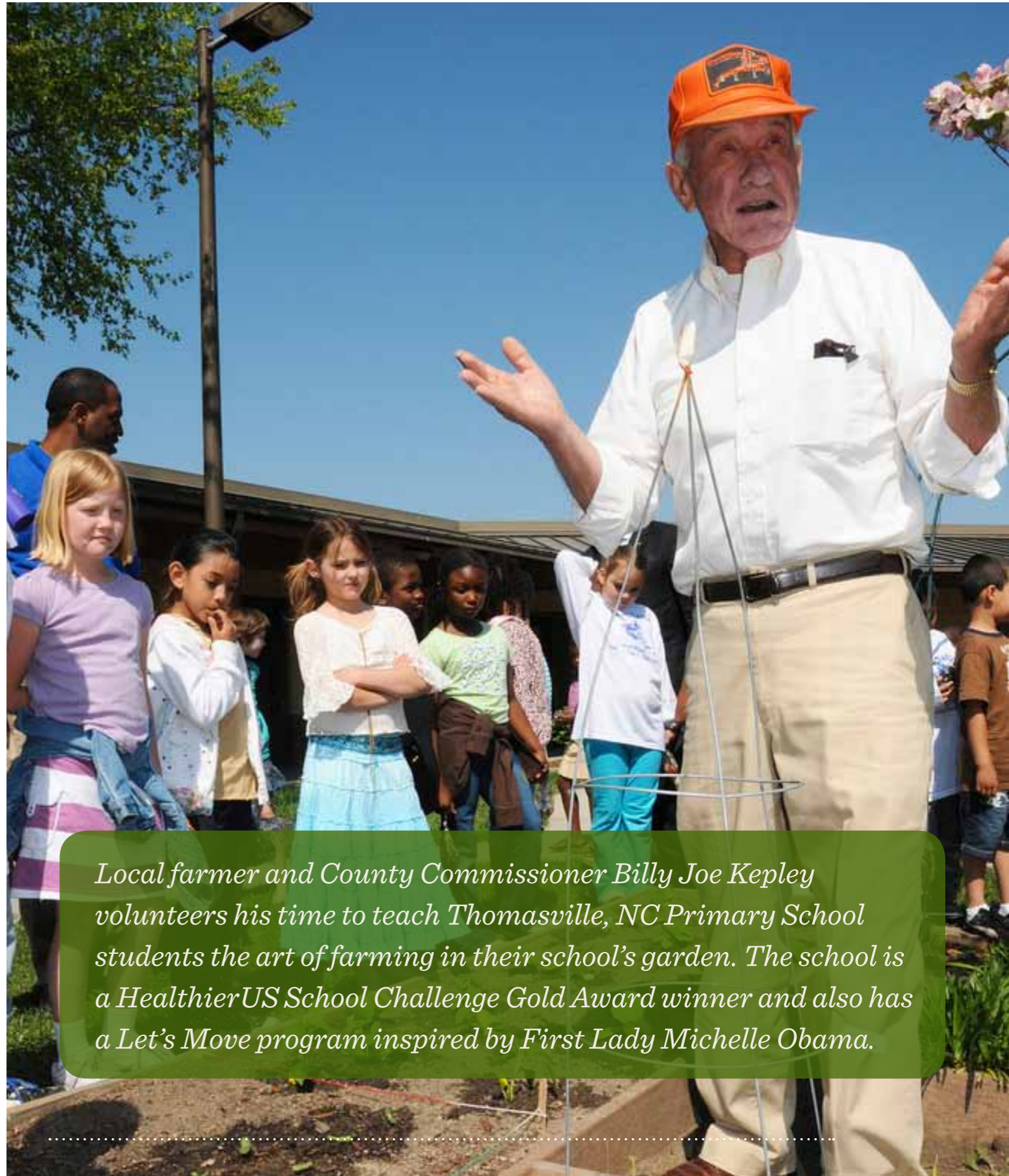
selling directly to consumers, local retail outlets, and/or institutions retain a greater share of the retail price than those selling to wholesalers.) Institutional markets are particularly good for mid-sized farms because they provide a better return than wholesale markets but take a larger volume of product than can be sold at farmers' markets or farm stands.

But selling to local institutions is not always easy. Small-scale farms may find it challenging to meet large orders or product and packing specifications. Some institutions require food safety audits, certifications and liability insurance, which may be costly for farms. Infrastructure gaps are also a challenge: small and mid-sized farms are not always equipped to transport food directly to institutions, while institutions may lack refrigeration capacity or the ability to prepare the food they receive. (For more information on infrastructure gaps, see the [Infrastructure section](#) of the KYF Compass.)

ON THE GROUND: KYF AND FARM TO INSTITUTION

Producers and institutions are more interested than ever in finding ways to connect. Congress has responded to the increased demand, charging USDA with breaking down some of the barriers associated with farm to institution. KYF has helped identify opportunities to meet these goals. Since 2009, the agencies involved in KYF's farm to institution efforts have:

Joined forces to better serve farmers and institutions. In 2009, KYF launched the [Farm to School Team](#) to coordinate USDA support across agencies and help K-12 schools link with local producers. The team developed an online [Farm to School toolkit](#) with guidance, resources, [archived](#)



Local farmer and County Commissioner Billy Joe Kepley volunteers his time to teach Thomasville, NC Primary School students the art of farming in their school's garden. The school is a HealthierUS School Challenge Gold Award winner and also has a Let's Move program inspired by First Lady Michelle Obama.



Onekama, Michigan is using a 2010 Rural Business Enterprise Grant from USDA Rural Development to the county's economic development corporation to develop an innovative farm to school initiative serving produce, milk, beef and pork from local producers. The results are already impressive: lunch participation is up over 40 percent among students, 80 percent of school administrators and teachers are now eating the school lunch, and 40 local farmers and food processors are participating in the initiative. The list of producers is growing as the program expands to more schools.

webinars, and evaluation tools for schools and producers alike. In 2010, the team visited 15 schools and developed a **summary report** documenting aspects of farm to school in K-12 schools.

In 2011, the Agricultural Marketing Service and Food and Nutrition Service joined together to launch **Produce Safety University**, a week-long training for foodservice professionals addressing food safety practices for handling fresh produce received from any supplier, including local producers. Five courses were scheduled for 2011 and 2012.

Increased knowledge and understanding of challenges and opportunities in farm to institution. In the last Farm Bill, Congress included a provision to allow schools to apply a geographic preference for locally-grown or raised unprocessed



Deputy Under Secretary Janey Thornton (center right) and American Culinary Federation Chef David S. Bearl (center left) pose with first graders from RB Hunt Elementary School in St. Augustine, FL. The squash were harvested from the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural farm, Hastings, Fla., and were also used in the school's lunch for the day.

agricultural products. In 2011, USDA developed several resources to help schools exercise this authority, including policy memoranda, procurement and geographic preference guidance, frequently asked questions, a free online procurement training, and in-person trainings from USDA staff. These resources are all available in the [policy section](#) of the Farm to School website.

By reaching out to communities and utilizing expert researchers, the KYF task force has compiled

information on promising practices related to farm to institution and is making the findings available to the public. For example, the National Agricultural Library has published an extensive [farm to institution annotated bibliography](#) for researchers and others interested in learning from the literature. USDA Rural Development is helping share knowledge as well; for example, [this two-day conference](#) in South Dakota brought together producers, school food professionals, grocers, USDA staff and other experts to discuss farm to institution and other marketing opportunities on the



Richard Schartner of Schartner Farms sells local product to Jamestown Public School District (RI)



Joe Flieschman, Executive Chef for the Washington County, MD Health System, taking a delivery of local tomatoes. The farmer pictured now sells 4,000-5,000 pounds of vegetables a month to Washington County Hospital. Farm-to-hospital programs in Maryland are supported by a FSMIP grant through USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service.

first day and offered a food safety training for producers on day two.

Targeted support to meet demand. In December 2010, President Obama signed the **Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act**, which helps communities establish farm to school networks with technical assistance and grants. These funds will become available to USDA in October 2012.

In the meantime, there are programs across several USDA agencies to support farm to institution efforts. For example, USDA's **Risk Management Agency** funded the development of food safety tools for local producers, including the **On-Farm Food Safety Project** and **Food Safety Plan 4U (FSP4U)**, to help farms meet institutional food safety requirements. USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service oversees **Specialty Crop Block Grants**, which are administered by the states; many of these grants support farm to institution efforts. For example, **Oklahoma** is funding the development of a guide for local farmers to grow salad bar crops for local schools; **Ohio** is funding a detailed survey of institutional foodservice providers in colleges and universities to develop new opportunities for Ohio specialty crop growers; and **Rhode Island** is funding the development of a statewide Farm to Hospital initiative to increase local, healthy fruits and vegetables in healthcare settings.

School districts and others are applying for loans and grants from Rural Development's **Community Facilities** program to develop infrastructure to store, process and serve local food. For example, in South Carolina, the



HEAR FROM PRODUCERS IN SOUTH DAKOTA WHO ARE SELLING INTO LOCAL AND REGIONAL MARKETS. THEY CAME TOGETHER AT A LOCAL FOODS CONFERENCE SPONSORED BY USDA'S RURAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY.

[Click here to watch the video](#)





The Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project is developing farm to school initiatives in North and South Carolina and Georgia using funds from the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program from USDA.

CASE STUDY



In Southern Appalachia, Farm to School Training Builds Connections, Economies and Health

With the great excitement over farm to institution efforts comes questions about how to make these efforts successful and a desire to share best practices far and wide. In 2009, North Carolina's Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) secured funding from the **Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program** for a two-year regional project to build the capacity of agricultural professionals, communities and Cooperative Extension agents engaged in farm to school activities. (Extension agents staff land-grant universities throughout the country and provide technical assistance, education and financial planning resources to the public.)

The first step for the *Building Capacity: Farm to School* project was a "train the trainers" conference in 2011. State teams from North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia designed and implemented a farm to school training. More than 100 Extension professionals gathered to learn how to integrate farm to school into their work. This training can also be taken on the road, reaching far more schools and producers than could be reached by one conference. ASAP estimates that local food sales contributed \$62 million to the local economy in 2010.





Local farmer Gary Pahl of Pahl's Market in Apple Valley, MN explains to elementary students how the corn on their lunch plate is grown on a farm and harvested for consumption.

Dorchester School District received a grant in 2010 to purchase a high-efficiency steamer to prepare locally-grown produce. (Learn more about how schools can utilize Community Facilities loans and grants [here](#).) These efforts align with broader Obama Administration efforts—most notably First Lady Michelle Obama’s *Let’s Move!* initiative—to increase healthy food options in schools.

USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service administers **Team Nutrition** training grants to help K–12 schools promote children’s health. Schools have identified farm to school as a way to increase fruit and vegetable consumption; institutions in a number of states, including **Idaho, Montana, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Wisconsin**, received Team Nutrition grants to implement farm to school activities in 2011.

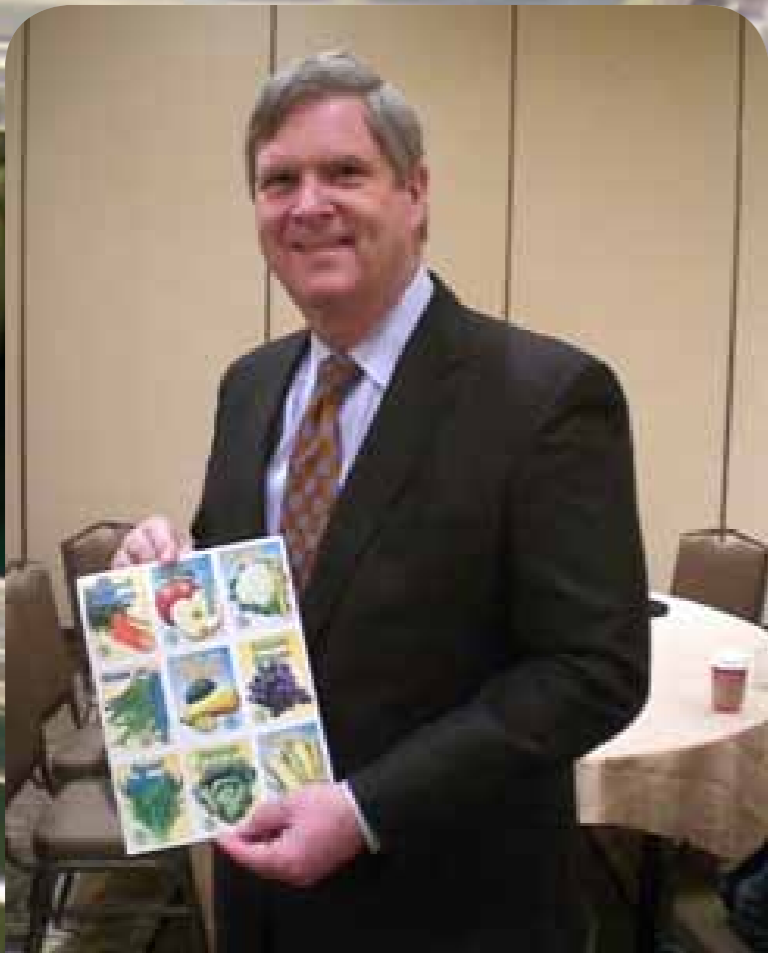
Expanded educational opportunities for students through garden initiatives. K–12 schools report that gardening projects help students learn about agriculture first-hand and begin to appreciate the work that goes into producing food. USDA is helping confirm these anecdotal findings with the help of 4,000 youth in 57 schools in Iowa, Arkansas, New York, and Washington through **Healthy Gardens, Healthy Youth**, a project of the **People’s Garden School Pilot** developed by USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service. Master gardeners help participating students learn gardening skills; experts provide nutrition, food safety and food preparation classes; and the program facilitates farm to school connections with producers to stimulate the local economy. University researchers will study how fruit and vegetable consumption changes for the youth participating in the program.



SECRETARY TOM VILSACK PLANTS A GARDEN AT A LOCAL SCHOOL TO ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO LEARN MORE ABOUT AGRICULTURE AND EAT MORE HEALTHY FOOD.

[Click here to watch the video](#)





USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack holds trading cards from the New York State farm to school program. The trading cards are one of the several tools offered to schools and cafeterias to encourage healthy eating habits by linking students with farm fresh foods.



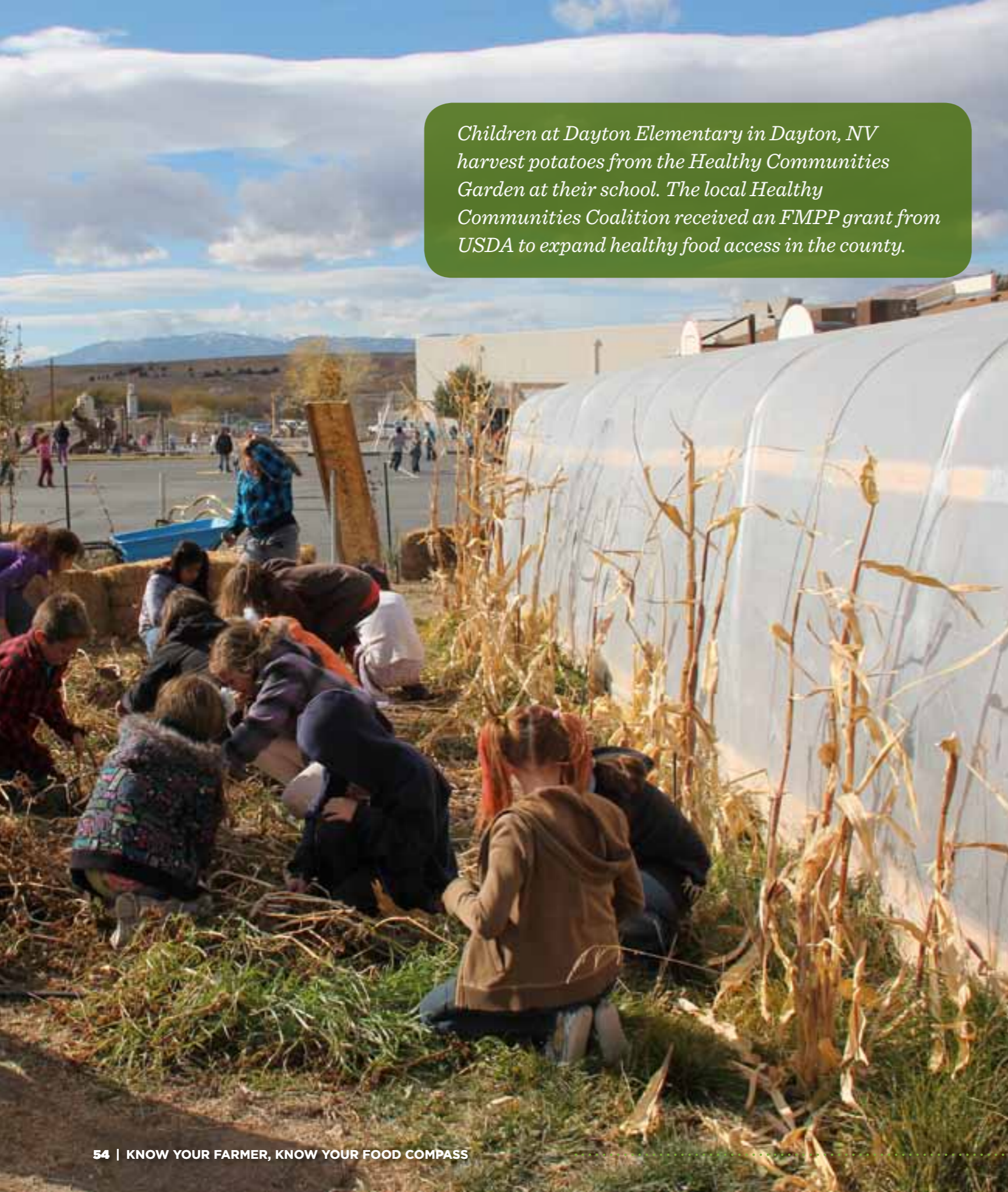
Farmer Doug Powell of T&D Farms talks to elementary students at Riverside Unified School District (CA)

KYF IN ACTION

How can USDA help schools source more fresh produce from local farms? As part of the Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food initiative, USDA's Food and Nutrition Service and Agricultural Marketing Service **announced a pilot** to test ways for schools to use federal dollars to source fresh fruits and vegetables, including from local farmers (see FAQs [here](#)). A number of other agencies within USDA are involved in supporting pilot as well. It's an example of why initiatives like KYF, which facilitates inter-agency collaboration, are so important. Collaborators will include:

- The Agricultural Marketing Service, which provides food safety guidance and certain certification for producers selling to institutions. This agency also purchases a portion of the food that school cafeterias use through the National School Lunch Program.
- The Food and Nutrition Service, which administers the school meal programs, including the National School Lunch Program, and provides guidance to schools interested in expressing a geographic preference when they purchase certain foods.
- The Risk Management Agency, which funds the development of tools to help producers meet food safety, liability and other requirements so they can sell directly to institutions.
- The Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization, which helps small businesses and those run by members of socially-disadvantaged groups participate in and benefit from USDA programs. In the case of this pilot, the Office is working with the Agricultural Marketing Service to provide workshops for small producers and distributors in an effort to increase their participation.

Children at Dayton Elementary in Dayton, NV harvest potatoes from the Healthy Communities Garden at their school. The local Healthy Communities Coalition received an FMPP grant from USDA to expand healthy food access in the county.



USDA staff also work directly with students in the community. USDA's Farm Service Agency is supporting an agricultural curriculum in a **Texas high school**. In addition, through its **Ag in the Classroom** program, USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture is connecting kids from kindergarten through high school to agriculture. (Read about how Ag in the Classroom and a vibrant farm to school program are helping **Tulsa, OK** students get to know their farmers and their food.)

KYF has helped bring the many agencies with a hand in these activities together to better track and coordinate efforts. To see farm to institution projects in your community supported by USDA, visit the **KYF Map**.


CASE STUDY

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The New England Governors' Association Sees Regional Farm to Institution Opportunities

Interest in local agricultural products is strong in the six New England states, but regional pressure for commercial and residential development can place farmland at risk. The New England Governors' Association sees regional farm to institution opportunities as a critical component of efforts to protect farmland. Major regional institutions like hospitals, prisons, and schools that source food products from local farmers can help develop a sustainable regional food system. In 2010, the Association entered into a cooperative agreement with

USDA Rural Development to advance farm to institution programs and strengthen this regional food system. Rural Development provided a \$250,000 challenge grant, asking regional partners to contribute additional funds to the effort. At this writing, the challenge grant has leveraged more than \$450,000 in funding, including \$73,000 from the Kendall Foundation. In late 2011, the John Merck Fund announced its plans to invest tens of millions of additional dollars in the New England region's food system infrastructure over the next decade.



Farm to School Coordinator, Kim Szeto, is proud of the local strawberries that are part of the school meal programs at Boston Public Schools (MA)



Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan helps cut peppers at the Franklin County Community Development Corporation's Western Mass Food Processing Center. The fresh peppers will be frozen and provided to local schools. The New England Governors' Association is partnering with USDA and private funders to develop stronger regional food systems.