



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

With Free School Meal Participation Up Statewide, California Schools Celebrate Serving More Local Fruits and Vegetables During Farm to School Month

** Center for Ecoliteracy Marks 10 Years of California Food for California Kids® **

Berkeley, Calif., (October 1, 2024) – Just in time for Farm to School Month this October, campuses across the state celebrate their impact on child nutrition as they serve more school meals featuring California-grown fruits and vegetables. [New data](#) shows student participation in California’s free “School Meals for All” program increased by 42 million meals in the 2023–2024 school year.

“All students deserve nourishing meals at school,” said Alexa Norstad, executive director of the Center for Ecoliteracy, a nonprofit that advances change in TK–12 education and school food systems. “California produces nearly half of our nation’s fruits and vegetables, yet students’ access to this abundance is limited in our school food systems. We’re proud to celebrate reaching more students with fresh produce from local farmers.”

California was the first state in the nation to provide all transitional kindergarten to 12th-grade public school students with [universal school meals](#), guaranteeing free school breakfast and lunch for all students, regardless of socioeconomic status. With this progress, it is more important than ever that school districts prioritize relationships with California farmers, source local fruits and vegetables, and prepare delicious meals that students love.

“Partnership has been key to the success of California Farm to School and universal school meals. By connecting local farmers, school districts, and nonprofits, we’re moving away from over-processed school food to fresh, nutritious, and delicious school meals sourced from local ingredients; we’re also inspiring the next generation of climate stewards,” said First Partner Jennifer Siebel Newsom. “The Center for Ecoliteracy has been a steadfast partner in ensuring more and more California students have access to nutritious meals as well as education about the origins of their food and food systems.”

The Center for Ecoliteracy’s [California Food for California Kids Network](#) supports schools to serve more fresh and local school meals and provide food education for students. This month marks the 10th year of the Network, which has grown to over 140 school districts serving 2.3 million students throughout California. With a decade of experience in transforming school meals, the California Food for California Kids Network shows that while change takes time, sourcing local fruits and vegetables is a proven strategy to accelerate district-wide farm to school programs.

“We’re at a pivotal moment in California’s food system,” said Karen Ross, secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture. “The Center for Ecoliteracy’s California Food for California Kids Network demonstrates what’s possible when schools commit to purchasing more fresh and local foods from area small farmers for their cafeterias and classrooms. Children are

nourished, the local economy benefits, and lifelong relationships with local farmers and their healthy food can be established.”

In honor of the 10th year of the California Food for California Kids Network, campuses throughout the state will host events within their school community to celebrate the beauty and bounty of California with local fruits and vegetables, food education, and nutritious school meals. They include:

Turlock Unified School District

Turlock Unified School District Child Nutrition Education Center
Wednesday, October 2, 2024, 4:00 – 6:00 p.m.

Turlock Unified School District invites the community to kick off Farm to School Month with a Farm to School Expo featuring local farms, fresh produce, and student activities. Tour the central kitchen, take home fruits and vegetables from the Farmers’ Market, and learn how the district promotes local produce, healthy eating, and community connections.

Alvord Unified School District

Twinhill Elementary School
Friday, October 18, 2024, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Alvord Unified School District will host a farmers’ market featuring local citrus growers. Elementary students will meet their local farmers, learn about the ‘superpowers’ of local fruits and veggies, and taste test various food items. Students will take home their favorite fruits and vegetables to enjoy.

Napa Valley Unified School District

Donaldson Way Elementary School
Friday, October 18, 2024, 8:20 – 11 a.m.

Napa Valley Unified School District invites kindergarten and first-grade students to gather in the garden to study plant life cycles, take turns grinding wheat, and guess how many seeds are in a tomato. Students will experience the bounty of their school garden as they make and enjoy pizza together using garden-grown tomato sauce.

Elk Grove Unified School District

Florin High School
Thursday, October 24, 2024, 12 – 1 p.m.

Elk Grove Unified School District will host a Collective Action Day to engage Florin High School students in learning about farm to school as well as local, sustainable, and environmentally friendly practices. The event will feature local partners in celebration of Farm to School Month. Students will have the opportunity to learn about and enjoy local California-grown fruits and vegetables, taste test new menu items, discover how California farms are making an impact with sustainability and environmental efforts, and learn how they can make small adjustments to advocate for change.

Santa Ana Unified School District

Lathrop Intermediate School

Saturday, October 26, 2024, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Santa Ana Unified School District invites students, parents, and community members to Growing Together, the Inaugural Farm-to-School Festival! Discuss environmental literacy and stewardship, share stories about our connection to nature, and celebrate Santa Ana's thriving foodways. Experience hands-on education, storytelling, taste tests of seasonal California fruit, a seed exchange, farmers' market, and more.

About The Center for Ecoliteracy

The Center for Ecoliteracy advances change in TK–12 education and school food systems to support students and the people who nourish them. We create original resources, collaborate on advocacy, and cultivate a growing network of leaders in our California Food for California Kids initiative. Our 30-year history of successful systems change has resulted in millions of public-school students receiving more fresh, local food and education about sustainability and food systems. Learn more at ecoliteracy.org.

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