



FARM *to* FORT

Final Report
June 2021



Farm to Fort Staff Needs Assessment

Background

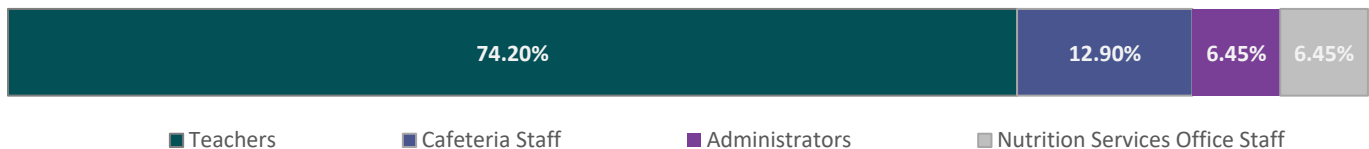
Florida Impact, Inc., a long-standing, not-for-profit advocacy organization dedicated to improving nutrition for children in Florida, has formed an alliance of the Fort Braden K-8 school, the Leon County School District, the Red Hills Small Farm Alliance (RHSFA) and Florida A&M University to develop a Farm to School program at the school.

The school has had limited farm to school experience. In preliminary discussions, Florida Impact and its school partners have looked at elements that have been successful in school programs elsewhere. They recognized that building relationships with local farmers is a vital component for integrating local food onto a school menu and have identified the ideal partner to facilitate this aspect of the program.

The Leon County Public Schools Food & Nutritional Services director and the Fort Braden principal want to use the planning period year to examine all farm to school procurement and education options and possibilities for their school. The school would like to incorporate fresh products in its menus and assist its school food services personnel with ways to incorporate them in their cooking. The school wants to teach its students about local food and agricultural production to build increased understanding of the importance of fruits and vegetables for nutrition.

One of the first tasks in this project was to conduct a needs assessment of the Ft. Braden school food services personnel and other stakeholders within the school. The purpose of the assessment was to provide an understanding of the current landscape for Fort Braden School and the Leon County School district, local food sources and current usage, and educational programs needed. The assessment included questions about the knowledge of what is currently served at the school, familiarity with the RHSFA, perceived barriers to purchasing and serving produce from the RHSFA, resources needed to participate in the Farm to Fort initiative and what types of produce should be served. The needs assessment was fielded in September-October 2020 and **33** staff at Ft. Braden K-8 School responded.

Who completed the assessment?





Farm to Fort Staff Needs Assessment

Key Takeaways

- Everyone wants to see more local, fresh food provided in the school's cafeteria for students and staff.
- Most Ft. Braden staff said that no from-scratch materials are served, or they were unsure. Knowledge of what is currently served was varied.
- Additional training is necessary to serve from scratch foods.
- There is low familiarity with Red Hills Small Farm Alliance (RHSFA).
- Cost is the main barrier to purchasing from RHSFA, followed by procurement, supply and equipment related barriers.
- The main resources needed are additional funding and proven recipes that use local ingredients.
- According to 28% of the staff, there is some nutritional education offered at Ft. Braden. Several people who said yes referenced education through UF-IFAS.
- Most of the staff said that nutrition education did not include components regarding local food and seasonal produce, or they were unsure. Lack of knowledge about local produce was the largest barrier to including it in nutrition education.

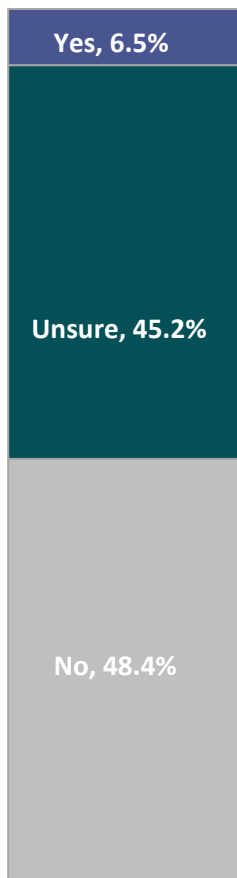


Farm to Fort Staff Needs Assessment

Current environment at Fort Braden School

Does Fort Braden currently serve any "from scratch" menu items?

If "yes" or "unsure", please describe the menu items that are (or might be) "from scratch"



Spaghetti sauce mac-n-cheese, cheeseburger macaroni, BBQ rubbed chicken, egg bites, grilled cheese, cheese grits, veggie rice, seasonal vegetables: collard greens, green beans, potatoes, sweet/creamed corn, sweet potatoes



Cut up fruit/vegetables, black beans, corn, bananas, oranges, tomatoes, carrots, cucumbers, salad, broccoli and cheese casserole, sandwiches



It's all pre-packaged food

If "from scratch" items are served, where does Fort Braden buy the ingredients?

- Unknown
- Central Kitchen
- All of the food is delivered by Nutrition Services at the District level
- North Florida Co-op
- Chapman Produce
- US Foods
- USDA (commodities)



Farm to Fort Staff Needs Assessment

Almost half of the Ft. Braden team felt that **additional food preparation** training would be needed to serve “from scratch” menu item. Another one third were unsure.



The list of foods currently served varied, but largely consisted of

- Fruit
- Potatoes
- Carbs/Sugar
- Beans
- Cheese
- Chicken and
- Vegetables

Familiarity with Red Hills, Barriers to and resources for procurement and serving food

The Ft. Braden team was **not familiar** with the Red Hills Small Farm Alliance. Only 1 in 4 reported any familiarity.

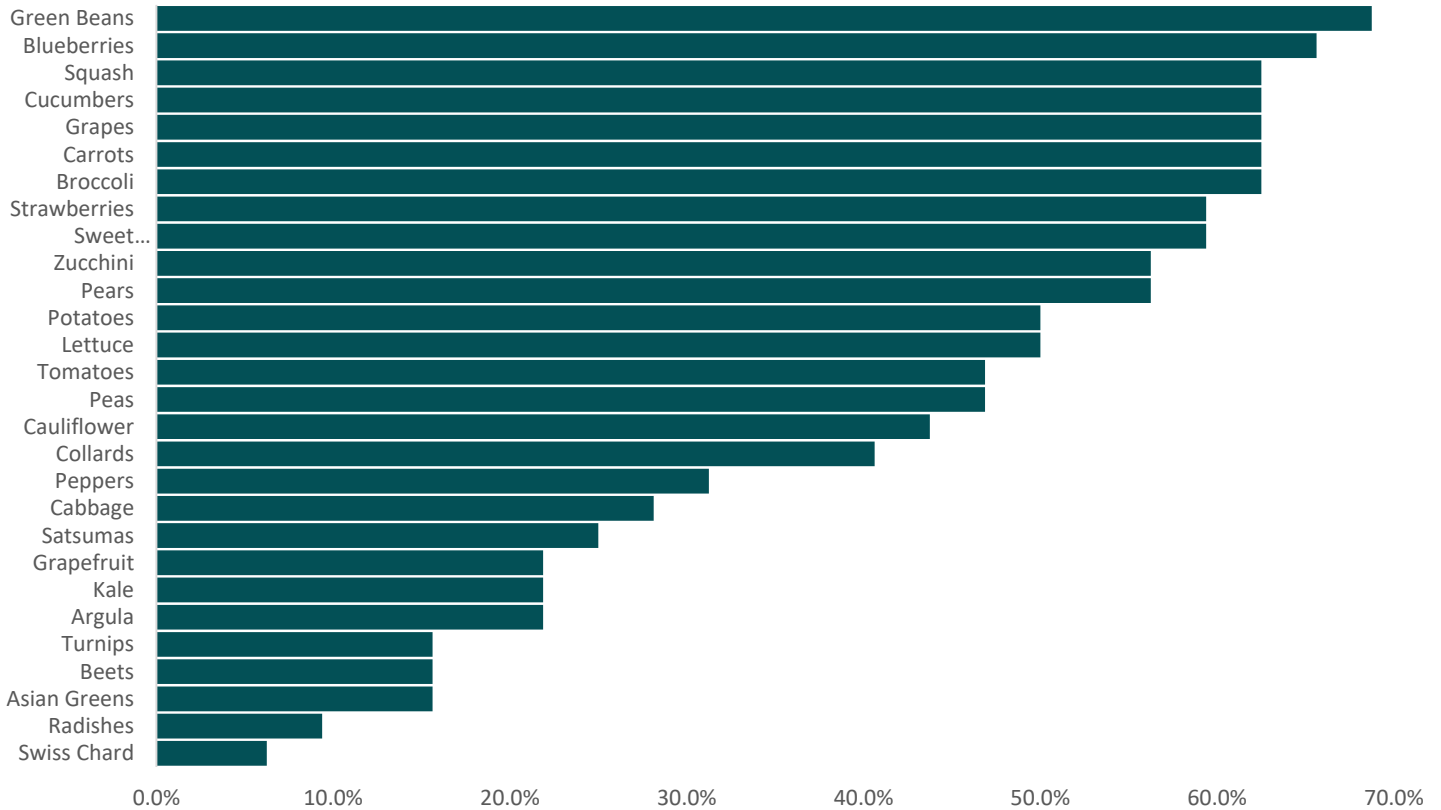


■ Not Familiar ■ Slightly or Moderately ■ Somewhat or Extremely

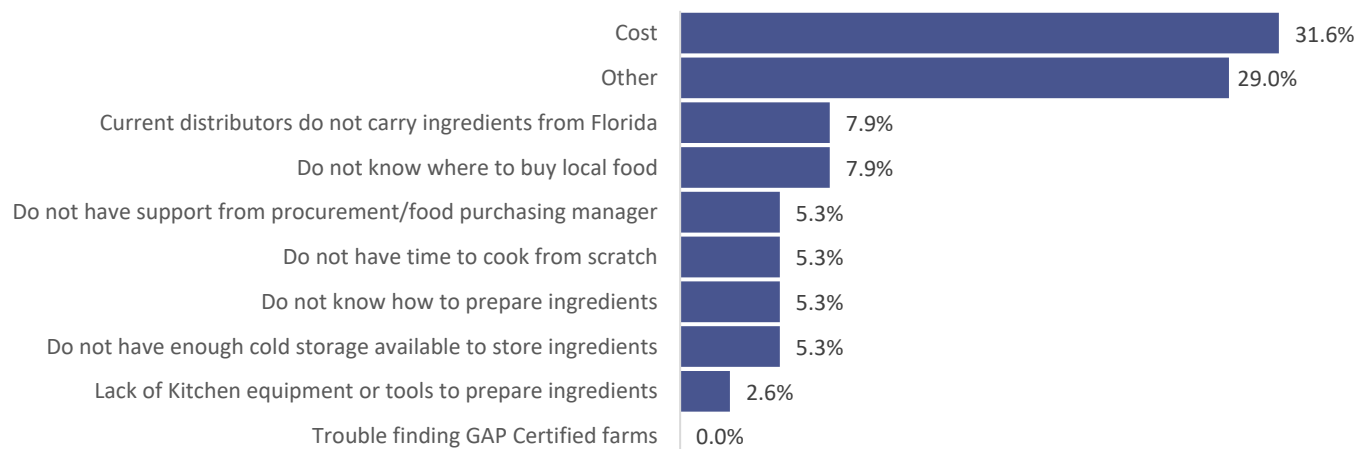


Farm to Fort Staff Needs Assessment

What would you like to see on the menu?



Barriers to purchasing ingredients from RHSFA



Almost one third of the Ft. Braden team felt that **cost was the main barrier** to purchasing ingredients from the RHSFA. Procurement, supply and equipment related barriers were cited by another third of the team. Time and knowledge were also considered as barriers.

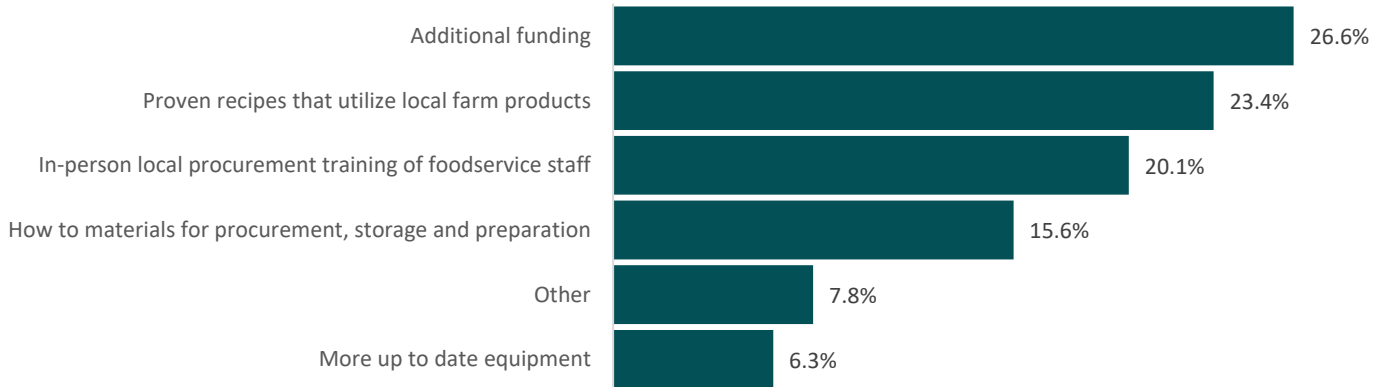
Other reasons:

- Food service provided by central kitchen
- COVID/ Pandemic
- Enough volume for cafeteria
- Resistance from staff
- Students not receptive of new foods



Farm to Fort Staff Needs Assessment

Resources to introduce or increase participation in the Farm to Fort program

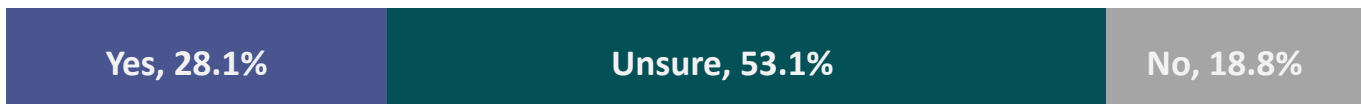


Half of people who responded felt either **additional funding** or **proven recipes** that use local products are necessary for participation in the Farm to Fort program. The need for either training or how-to materials was a necessary resource for another one third of the team.

Other resources needed:

- Increased community awareness
- More input from the central kitchen

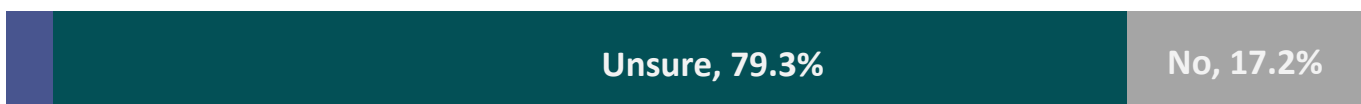
Does Fort Braden currently offer any nutritional education to its students?



These examples of nutrition education were offered by the team members who said yes:

- 5th grade coordinates with FSU - once a week lesson for 6 weeks on nutrition.
- The UF-IFAS Extension office has provided Nutrition Education classes to grades K-6th
- Culinary class to middle school
- Nutrition expert come and teaches classes to K-2.
- Posters and leaflets throughout the school

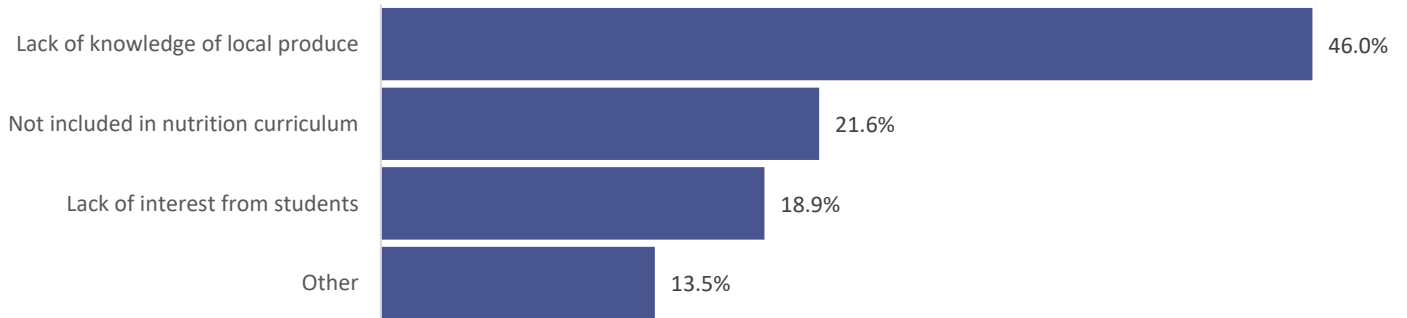
Most of the team (96.5%) said that nutrition education **does not include** any components on local or seasonal produce





Farm to Fort Staff Needs Assessment

Barriers to providing local food and seasonal produce education



The main barrier to providing education on local food and seasonal produce is **lack of knowledge of local produce**. It was also pointed out that it isn't included in the nutrition curriculum (21.6%) and there is a lack of interest from students (18.9%).

Other resources needed:

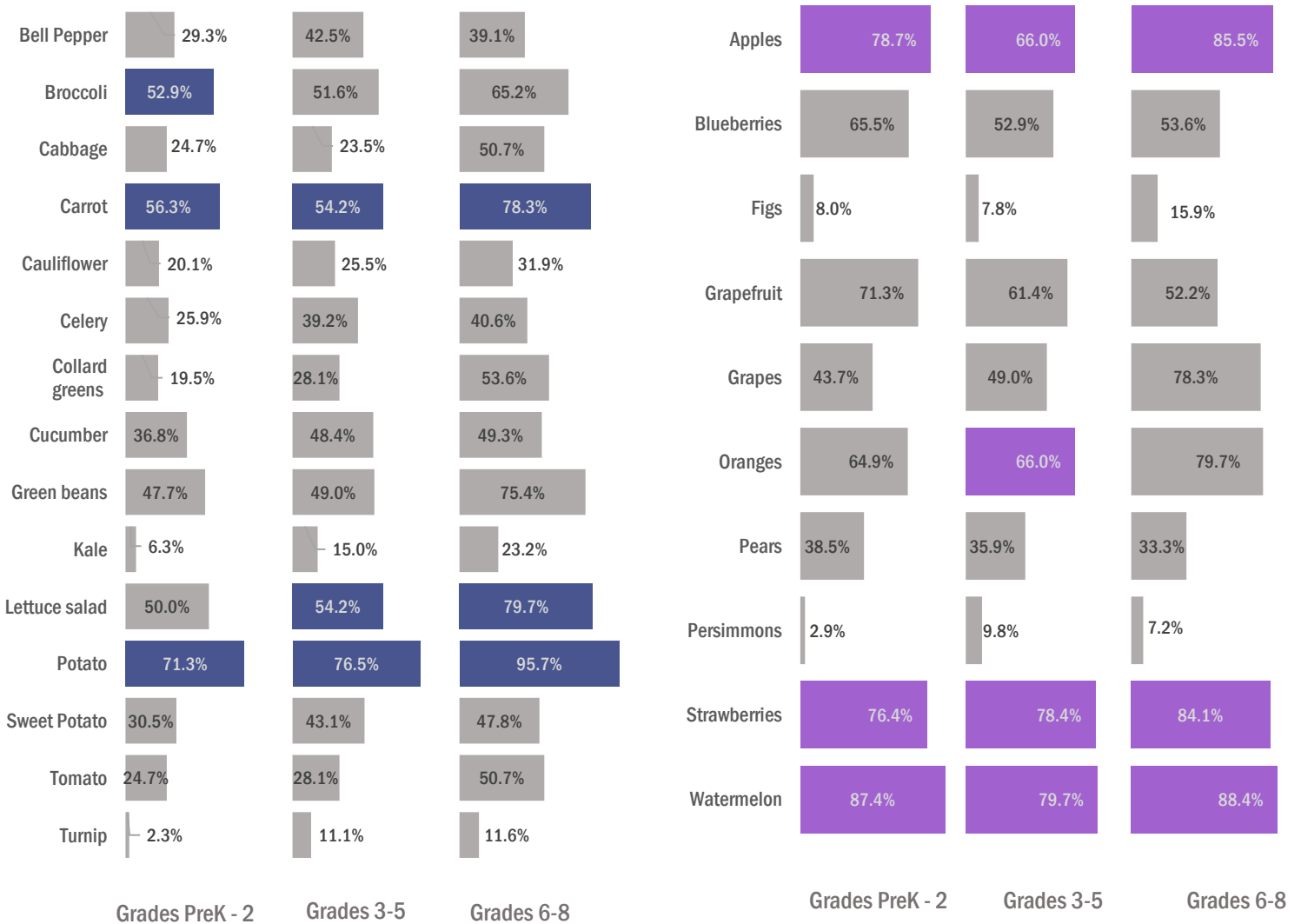
- Lack of school district support
- District permission
- School money can only be spent at approved vendors

Even with the perceived barriers and the resources needed to participate in the program, **everyone** who responded wanted to see more local, fresh food provided in the school's cafeteria.



Farm to Fort Student Survey

The purpose of the student survey assessment was to provide an understanding of student preferences for fruits and vegetables that are currently available from the Red Hills Small Farm Alliance. Students were also asked their interest in visiting local farms, planting gardens and their knowledge of free/reduced price lunch. The student survey was fielded in December 2020 and **396** students at Ft. Braden K-8 School participated. Of those, **174** were PreK-2, **153** were grades 3-5 and **69** were grades 6-8.

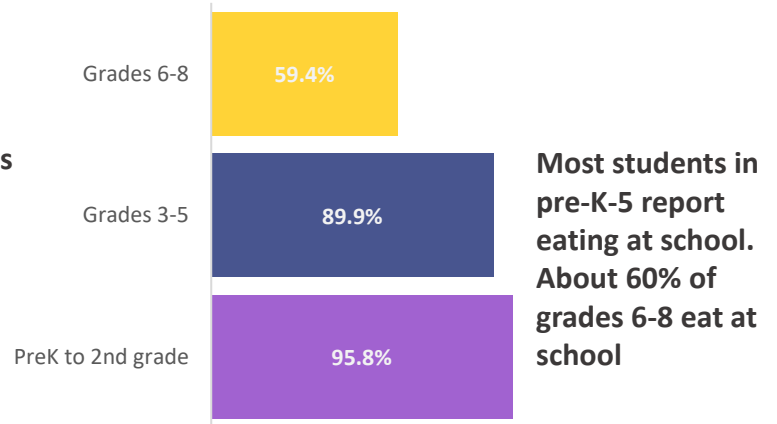
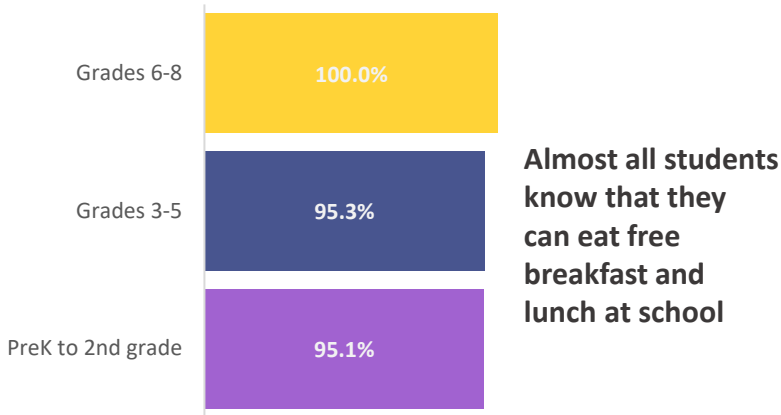


The top veggies are **potatoes, carrots, lettuce, broccoli and green beans**. The least favorite are **turnips and kale**. Grades 6-8 liked a larger selection of vegetables than the younger students.

The favorite fruits are **watermelon, strawberries, and apples/oranges**. The least favorite are **persimmons and figs**. This was consistent across grade levels.

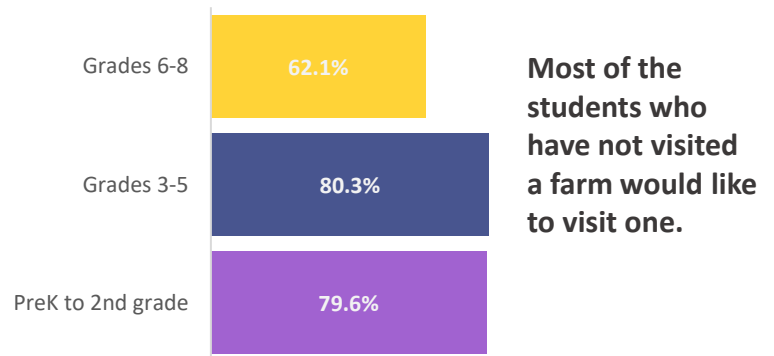
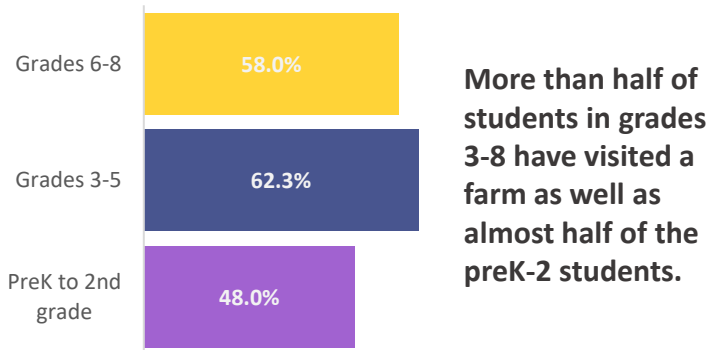


Farm to Fort Student Survey



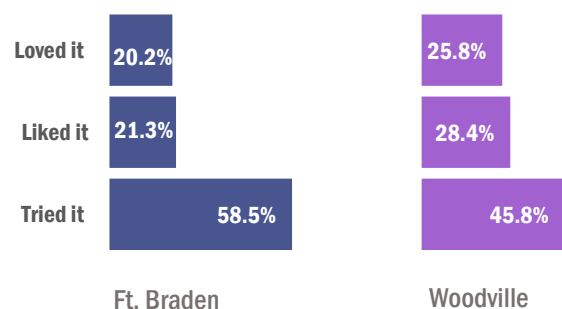
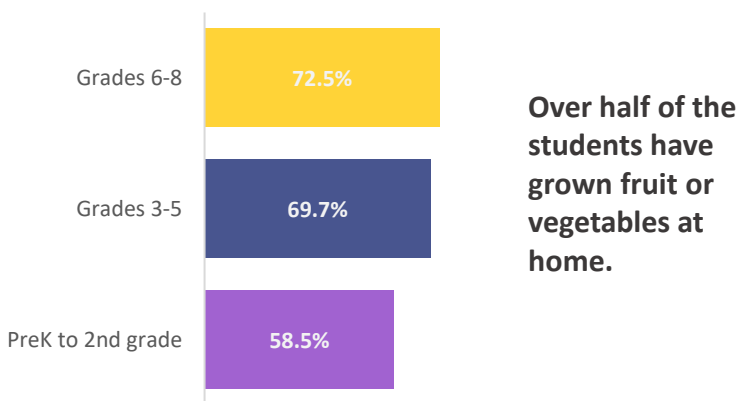
	PreK-2	3-5	6-8
Didn't know I could	0	0	0
My parents didn't know	1	0	0
I don't like the food	23	6	7
Don't arrive in time for breakfast	20	0	1
I am virtual student	3	4	15
Other	3	4	5

Not liking the food was the main reason students don't eat the free meals at school. They may not eat breakfast because they don't arrive in time.



Taste Test Results

After the survey was completed, students at two schools were given the chance to taste and to vote on kale salad if they "tried it", "liked it", or "loved it" using a ballot box located at the front office.





Farm to Fort Student Staff and Student Interviews

At the end of the 20-21 school year, staff and students who had participated in the Farm to Fort answered several questions about the program. These questions included overall thoughts about the program components and areas for improvement. The staff and students agreed with each other about most aspects of the program and the response to the program was positive.

Faculty and Staff Responses

Thoughts about the Kale taste test?

Overall, the Ft. Braden staff thought the taste test went well. They felt that it was a good experience for the students.

'I thought it was a wonderful experience to expose the children to something new.'

Were students positively impacted by the Farm to Fort school engagement?

Faculty felt that the students had a chance to try something new and experience foods they may not try at home.

'Yes! I heard conversations throughout the school about the taste and the experience'

'I always think giving kids a chance to try something new is a big win!'

Was the virtual farm tour educational and informative?

The faculty found the video to be interesting and taught the students about locally grown foods.

'Yes. It was exciting to see local farms and learn about different items.'

Is there room for more farm to school engagement?

Faculty wanted more farm to school engagement.

'Yes please, we would like to see food tasting once a month!'

'I'm sure students would love to visit local farms to learn more and get hands on engagement/experiences.'

'Yes, continued education on where the food comes from and how it gets from the farm to the table.'

Areas for improvement?

The main area for improvement was the selection of food for the students. The faculty suggested offering a variety of foods and have several other ideas:

'Integrated learning about food and nutrition. Maybe consider guest speakers or presentations during lunch periods occasionally.'

'Accessibility of products to our population, we could possibly implement these products in our food bags some students receive.'



Farm to Fort Student Staff and Student Interviews

Student Responses

Thoughts about the Kale taste test?

The student response to kale was mixed but many of the students liked it or thought it was ok.

'I tried a little bit. It was a little bit of fun to try something new.'

'I did not like the kale'

'I tried it and the kale tasted decent.'

'It was delish'

Did you enjoy the farm to school programs?

The students liked the program because they got to try something new.

'Yeah, it was something new with my teacher.'

'Yes, we felt like we were on a trip to a farm.'

'Yes, but not the kale. We like the goody bags.'

'Yes, because there is good and healthy food.'

What did you learn from the virtual farm tour video?

'They grow plants. Lots of plants.'

'You made farming sound like something I would do.'

'Vegetables are good for you.'

Should there be more Farm to School activities?

The students had a variety of suggestions for activities. They wanted to taste different foods, have their own garden and go on field trips.

'Yes, we can have our own garden and sell some if we have extra and give some to people who need.'

'Yes, I would like to try new foods.'

'Yes, learn about how plants grow/ fruits and veggies.'

Ideas on how to improve the Farm to School program?

The students has suggestions for improvement that included growing their own food, trying out something other than kale and going to farms or having farmers come speak to the school.

'it would be cool if the whole school could go to a farm and work there for a day.'

'Kids planting healthy foods at schools. Hands on experiments would make them better.'

'Having more of it. Having different things added to it, not just kale alone.'

'Person who owns farms coming to talk about different fruits or veggies.'