

INTERVENTION

Farm to Work

Texas Department of State Health Services and Sustainable Food Center
Austin, Texas



DISSEMINATION CATEGORY

Farm to Work is an emerging intervention based on its use of evidence-based strategies. Developed in practice, it shows promise but evidence in support of effectiveness is not yet available.

OVERVIEW

Intent of the intervention: Farm to Work increases access to fresh fruits and vegetables in the work environment by providing a weekly opportunity for purchase and delivery of fresh produce from local farmers. The program was developed collaboratively by The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) and the non-profit Sustainable Food Center (SFC). While addressing multiple levels of the socio-ecologic model, the program's primary focus is to promote individual and group behavior change by modifying the work environment to increase access, availability, purchases, and use of healthy fruits and vegetables from local farms.

Intended population: Farm to Work programs are intended for all employees of worksites offering the program.

Setting(s): Worksites

Background: Farm to Work programs change the worksite environment by making locally grown fruits and vegetables an easy choice for employees. In 2007, through an emailed survey, DSHS investigated Central Office employees' interest in a Farm to Work program. DSHS then identified Regional Nutritionists to champion internal and external coordination of the program, which was piloted at two sites, the DSHS Central Office and Austin State Hospital, both in Austin, Texas. SFC identified a local farmer with the capacity and desire to meet the demand of those two worksites. SFC contracted with a web developer to create an external, online ordering and payment system. DSHS staff promoted the program to all employees. Employees placed online orders for baskets of farm-fresh, local produce, which were delivered to the worksite each week.

Since 2007, the program has grown from one participating farmer and two worksites to seven participating farmers and 36 worksites. From November 2007 - September 2012, the program reached 8,707 unduplicated customers and generated \$823,875 in sales. SFC and DSHS intend to continue expanding the program by including more farmers and additional worksites.

Length of time in the field: This Farm to Work program began in 2007.

HEALTH EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS

The Farm to Work program intends to increase availability and consumption of fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables among worksite employees. It is implemented in 36 worksites in

Central Texas including DSHS offices, multiple other state office buildings, City of Austin sites, and private worksites. All employees are invited to participate. While the racial/ethnic representation of employees taking part in the Farm to Work program is not known, it is reasonable to estimate that most participants live in and around Austin, TX.

IMPLEMENTATION

Main Components

- **Determine program feasibility*** – The first step in establishing a Farm to Work program is determining its feasibility. Answers to the following questions will help with this task:
 - What are employees' interest level and demand for the program?
 - Is there someone who can serve as the primary coordinator during the planning and implementation phase? Does the worksite designate someone with worksite wellness as a primary function of his or her job description?
 - To implement the program, will it be possible to obtain documented approval from all the appropriate people at the worksite?
 - What funds does the worksite have available to start and sustain a program?
 - What farm(s) are available and interested in supplying a program?

** The Farm to Work Toolkit, in the Intervention Materials section, includes further details on how to assess feasibility.*

- **Determine interest level of employees** – To establish an accurate prediction of participation, DSHS conducted an online, interest survey with its employees during the initial planning phases. The survey is included in the Farm to Work Toolkit in the *Intervention Materials* section.
- **Identify an Internal Farm to Work Coordinator** – Identify someone to fulfill the role of a Farm to Work Coordinator, ideally someone whose current job functions align or relate to the coordinator duties. This coordination may take significant staff time during the initial planning and start-up phase, but once the program is in place, the time required is minimal. Farm to Work Coordinator duties include:
 - Being a point of contact for project partners
 - Becoming familiar with relevant agency policies
 - Obtaining all approvals
 - Identifying the drop-off location and coordinating distribution on delivery days
 - Communicating with employees and conducting ongoing outreach and promotions
 - Providing customer service by answering employee questions
 - Providing technical assistance for moving the program forward
- **Identify an External Farm to Work Coordinator** – Partnering with an external group may be necessary to coordinate initial tasks such as:

- Identifying and coordinating with farmers
 - Developing and hosting an external website for processing orders and payments
 - Working with farmers to prepare for production, equipment, and staffing changes that may be required to supply the worksite
 - Securing necessary legal documents, such as farmer waivers and worksite MOUs
 - Providing training to farmers in customer satisfaction and use of farmer-administrative section of the website
 - Providing training and technical assistance to Internal Farm to Work Coordinator in promotions, customer service, and use of administrative section of the website
- **Find the farmer or group of farmers to supply produce** – The External Farm to Work Coordinator will identify and build a relationship with a farmer or group of farmers who have the desire and capacity to meet the demand of the worksite. Farmers' market managers and local producer groups are good places to start this process.
 - **Identify a distribution site** – Determine where employees will pick up their produce. When selecting a location, ensure the pick up area is covered, easily accessible by both farmers and employees, and will not interfere with traffic flow or normal business operations. Examples include near a front entrance or break area.
 - **Get approvals both to implement the program and to address liability issues/concerns** – Permissions needed may include approval from a department or program director, facilities/building manager, legal counsel, etc..
 - **Establish an external ordering/payment system** – A secure external online ordering and payment system is needed to process, track, and handle all the orders and to process payments. At a minimum, the ordering system must:
 - Allow users to select a delivery site when placing an order (instead of asking users for a shipping address)
 - Update weekly the available produce listing and the date of the next delivery
 - Send a confirmation email, instruction and reminder emails, and other announcements (such as promotions, changes due to weather, etc.) to customers
 - Possess tracking capabilities for generating weekly lists of individual orders and for evaluating the program's success.
 - Sustainable Food Center, with supplemental funding from DSHS and other third-party funders, contracted with a web developer to create and maintain a highly functional website, which can be replicated and utilized by other entities. Costs to use this existing website are minimal, and include a set-up and training fee, plus covering ongoing maintenance costs.
 - A percentage of sales (10%) is retained by SFC and used to offset web maintenance, hosting, and payment processing fees with the remainder (90%) paid directly to the farmers.
 - **Determine a communication channel** – Identify a means of communicating information to employees to promote the program and respond to questions. For this purpose,

DSHS created a general “wellness” email account. The worksite coordinator, with approval from administration, worked with an IT or internal communications department.

- **Raise awareness and market the program** – Identify and work with someone at the worksite who can help craft messages and promote the program as needed. If possible, develop a communication plan and timeline for the messaging. DSHS used an internal website to provide basic information, including answers to FAQs, and to create a buzz about the program.
- **Launch the program!**

Keys to Success:

- **Designate roles of participating entities**
 - As the state health department, DSHS provides technical support, coordinates evaluation efforts, promotes the program to local and national partners, assists SFC in worksite recruitment, and trains worksite coordinators.
 - As a nonprofit organization with the goal of increasing access to locally grown food, SFC recruits and trains farmers, operates the ordering/payment website (with website management contractor), recruits and trains worksite coordinators, assesses employee interest, secures worksite administrative approval, supports outreach and promotions, and provides customer service and support. Website services, integral to the operation of the Farm to Work program, are provided by a contractor and include ongoing website maintenance and support.
 - Farmers provide high quality produce at ample volume and variety, provide information for promotions and marketing, update weekly “what’s in the box” information, deliver on time, and participate in promotional events.
 - Each worksite designates an employee to serve as an onsite coordinator who will facilitate administrative support, conduct ongoing outreach and promotions, assist with distribution of orders during delivery days, and provide some customer service.
- **Beta testing of ordering and payment website** – Have employees on hand who have agreed to test the site, and provide them with specific instructions for providing feedback.
- **Trial run** – Coordinate a mini-delivery to test the program and delivery system. One suggestion is to only promote the first delivery day among those employees who responded to the survey and to limit the number of orders that can be accepted during the first delivery.

Barriers to Implementation:

- **Staffing** –Identifying a staff member who has the time to be the internal coordinator can be a challenge, because this Staff member must have time to coordinate start-up of the program during regular working hours in addition to their existing job duties.

- **Farmers** – Depending on the size of the worksite and demand for local produce, having enough farmers able and willing to meet the demand could be challenging.
- **Weather** – Weather can play a big role in the farming community with drought, flooding, heat, and freezing conditions. During adverse weather conditions, the program can go on break for an indefinite amount of time.

RESOURCES REQUIRED

Costs: The costs outlined below are specific to this Farm to Work program. Depending on the worksite and program specifics, costs will vary

- DSHS program costs included:
 - Website development - \$2,600 (plus \$1500 for annual maintenance)
 - Plastic bags for produce (4 boxes of 200, 13 gallon bags) - \$120
 - Trade box bin (4, 12.5 gallon recycle bins) - \$82
 - Signage - \$150
- Advertising and incentive items:
 - Posters (220, 11x17) - \$235
 - Canvas bags with screen printed logo (580) - \$4,965
 - T-shirts (50), aprons (50), and table skirts (24) with logo - \$2,194
 - Promotional items such as recipe books (20) - \$360

Staff: Internal and external coordinators are needed for the responsibilities outlined in the Main Components section.

Training: External coordinator provides training to farmers in customer satisfaction and to worksite coordinator in start-up, promotions, and customer service. External website coordinator provides training to farmers in use of the farmer-administrative section of the website where the farmer can update the basket contents and access the list of orders to fulfill, and also trains the external coordinator in use of administrative section of website to access the list of orders which includes customer order and contact information.

Materials: Clipboards, plastic bags, trade box bin at each site, posters, canvas bags, T-shirts, aprons, and table skirts, signage

Funding: Initial funding for the development of materials and the website was provided by DSHS. Additional funding has been secured through private foundations, Texas Department of Agriculture (through Specialty Crop Block Grants), and City of Austin. Some ongoing costs (staff time, promotional materials, web hosting and maintenance, payment processing charges) are offset by applying a 10% retainer to all sales.

UNDERLYING THEORY/EVIDENCE

Farm to Work is an emerging intervention and evidence in support of effectiveness is not yet available.

Strategies Used¹: Farm to Work programs are based on the following evidence-based strategies related to healthy eating:

- **Changing access and availability to favor healthy foods and beverages.** Farm to Work programs are designed to improve access and availability of fresh, local, fruits and vegetables through worksite deliveries. By utilizing a simple online order system and by delivering baskets of produce on a regular basis to a convenient location, Farm to Work programs are making it easier for employees to get a variety and amount of produce that they might not otherwise have in their neighborhoods.
- **Food and beverage marketing to favor healthy foods and beverages.** One key part of Farm to Work programs is marketing local, fresh produce. The Farm to Work Toolkit includes designs and suggestions for posters, bags, T-shirts, and PowerPoint presentations to promote the program. While much of this marketing is designed to specifically encourage participation in the program, exposure to the images and messages is likely to also increase positive attitudes toward these products. Other aspects of the program, such as including ways to learn more about the farmers and learning recipes to use with the produce, will also serve as positive marketing for fresh produce.
- **Increasing purchasing and use of foods from local farms.** Another key component of Farm to Work programs is the support of local farmers. This Farm to Work program demonstrated that farmers were able to financially benefit from participation and welcomed the opportunity to develop stronger relationships with local customers.
- **Social support for healthy eating.** Farm to Work programs incorporate social support for healthy eating through two mechanisms. First, the workplace (which is arguably one of the most important social networks for most people because it's where we spend much of our time) is supporting healthy eating by offering this program. Second, when multiple people from the same worksite purchase the baskets, they will see each other at pick up and be able to discuss what they are getting and what they plan to do with it. Casual discussions of recipes or how people's children reacted to new vegetables are encouraged by this program and can gradually shift the culture of the worksite to one that is more supportive of healthy eating. From a larger perspective, knowing that the produce was grown by local farmers and learning more about the individual farmers creates larger community social support for healthier eating. Lastly, worksites making the Farm to Work program available for employees conveys support for the employee's health and well-being and raises employee morale.

POTENTIAL PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT

Reach: This intervention reached 8,707 employees across 36 sites from November 2007 – September 2012. Of the total eligible population to participate in the program, the proportion reached is unknown. Findings suggest that most of those reached were white, female, and in the upper income level. However, it is unknown whether participants were representative of the total population of DSHS employees. If Farm to Work programs could be incorporated into worksites nationwide, they could have significant reach to the population.

Effectiveness: At this time, there is not enough research evidence to conclude that this program succeeded in significantly improving access to fresh produce. That would require an

¹ A full description of the intervention strategies used can be found [here](#) with references to the sources of evidence to support the strategies

assessment of how many people who participated would not have been able to get similar products through their stores or farmer's markets. However, it makes logical sense that adding one more opportunity for people to obtain produce over the course of their daily activities is likely to make it easier for them overall in their efforts to obtain healthy food. The intervention provided access to locally grown produce in worksites at a price that was slightly less than what produce would have cost to purchase in area supermarkets. The effects that the intervention had on consumption of fruits and vegetables are unknown.

Adoption: Participating worksites increased from 2 to 36 between 2007 and 2012, providing support for the intervention's adoptability.

Implementation: The intervention appears to be well implemented. Customers are generally satisfied although some wanted more variety and more choice. The intervention materials provide considerable detail on how the program was implemented, which may be of value to others wanting to replicate a farm to worksite program.

Maintenance: The intervention has been maintained since 2007. Considerable staffing and some material resources are required to administer the program.

INTERVENTION MATERIALS

The following intervention materials can be found at:

<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/obesity/nutritionfarmtowork.shtm>

Farm to Work Toolkit – A guide for implementing a local produce delivery program at a worksite.

Farm to Work Toolkit Supplement – Included are samples of memos, internal communications, and marketing artwork used to implement this Farm to Work program.

How It Works – A brief overview of how the program works.

FAQ – Frequently asked questions and responses about this Farm to Work program.

EVALUATION MATERIALS

Evaluation Materials Developed by Center TRT:

Center TRT developed an evaluation logic model and evaluation plan for a program similar to the Farm to Work program reviewed by the Center TRT. The logic model is intended to guide the evaluation process (as opposed to the planning process); the evaluation plan focuses on the implementation and effectiveness of a Farm to Work program at increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables in the work environment. The evaluation addresses the reach, adoption, extent of implementation and effectiveness of a Farm to Work program in changing environments and behaviors related to healthy eating. The evaluation is a pre-post design with no comparison group. This evaluation plan provides guidance on evaluation questions and types and sources of data for both process and outcome evaluation. If you are interested in answering evaluation questions not listed in the evaluation plan, please refer to the list of additional evaluation questions [here](#). We suggest a variety of data collection tools throughout the evaluation plan. Evaluation materials for Farm to Work can be found on the [Center TRT website](#).

Evaluation Materials Developed by Texas Farm to Work:

The Texas Department of State Health Services created several materials for its evaluation that are also available for your use. Some of these tools have been incorporated into the evaluation plan that Center TRT developed. Please note that Center TRT has not reviewed these tools.

The following tools may be downloaded from the Texas Department of State Health Services [website](#):

- Farmer Survey: Farm to Work Toolkit (p. 32)
- Employee Satisfaction & Use Surveys: Farm Work Toolkit (p. 35)
- Feasibility Checklist: Farm to Work Toolkit (p. 19)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Web links:

DSHS and the Sustainable Food Center's Farm to Work website: <http://www.farmtowork.org/>

Sustainable Food Center's Farm to Work webpage:
<http://www.sustainablefoodcenter.org/farm-direct/work>

Sustainable Food Center - <http://www.sustainablefoodcenter.org/>

Program Contact:

Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity Prevention Program
Texas Department of State Health Services MC 1944
P.O. Box 149347
Austin, TX 78714-9347
Email: BringingHealthyBack@dshs.state.tx.us

Farm Direct Program
Sustainable Food Center
1106 Clayton Lane, Suite 480W, Austin, TX 78723
Email: Andrew@sustainablefoodcenter.org
Phone: (512) 236-0074