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# Garden To Cafeteria Program

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## Objective

The purpose of the Garden To Cafeteria program is to make a connection between the fresh produce that the students grow in the school garden to the salad bars in the cafeteria at lunch. Using food safety protocols developed with the local Health Department, students and Garden Leaders harvest fruits and vegetables weekly from the school gardens, learn how to wash the large chunks of dirt off, weigh and record the amount of produce and then present the harvest to the cafeteria staff.

## Introduction

School garden programs have grown fresh produce to provide students the experience of growing their own food. Most of the time the fresh fruits and vegetables are used in cooking classes so that the students can taste new flavors and sample recipes from around the world. There are numerous accounts that show that students will eat unfamiliar produce items if they had a hand in growing, harvesting or preparing the fresh food.

Despite the success of the cooking classes with fresh produce from the school gardens, there has been limited progress in getting these fresh fruits and vegetables into school cafeterias to be part of the lunch program. The major hurdles that commonly exist to prevent the flow of garden produce to school cafeterias include the lack of safe food handling protocols, the lack of proper facilities to clean the produce, and the inability to serve the produce on the lunch line. It is also important to keep in mind that most school gardens will never grow enough produce to even supply a day's worth for a school kitchen. The goal of a Garden To Cafeteria program is not to make the school gardens a key source for the cafeteria, but instead to engage the students in the growing process and to make connections to how food is grown and eaten in the cafeteria. This manual will lead school garden leaders through a process to address these barriers so that the student-grown fresh produce can be used in the school cafeterias. Use the GTC Checklist at the end of this manual to guide the development of your GTC program.

## How to launch a Garden To Cafeteria Program

If the goal of your school garden program is to use some of the fresh produce in the school cafeteria, then your first important contact will be with the Food Service Director in your district. Most public school districts have a Food and Nutrition Department that is responsible for the school meals served to all students. The Food Service Director is the person that is responsible for how the District follows the rules and regulations detailed by the USDA for the National School Lunch Program and the National School Breakfast Program. The Food Service Director must approve any new program in the school cafeterias.

# School Contact Form

Identify the following people involved in the school meal service at your school:

Food Service Director \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

School Kitchen Manager \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Kitchen Supervisor \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Principal \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_



# Meeting with the Food Service Director

Your first meeting should be with the Food Service Director to discuss the possibility of fresh produce from the school gardens going into the cafeteria. Here is a list of questions that you should include in your meeting with the Director:

1. What are your goals for serving fresh fruits and vegetables in the cafeteria?
2. How does the fresh produce arrive to your school kitchens (whole or chopped and bagged)?
3. How are the fresh fruit and vegetables served to the students (cut-up in plastic cups, salad bar, whole in bowls)?
4. Do your kitchens have the infrastructure for cleaning whole produce (produce sinks, colanders, salad spinners, knives and cutting boards)?
5. Does your staff have the necessary training to clean whole produce?
6. What fresh products would your kitchens use that we can grow in a school garden?
7. Would you be interested in starting a Garden to Cafeteria program in your cafeterias?
8. Who in the County Health Department should we speak to about proper protocols for a Garden To Cafeteria program?

The wrong approach in this first meeting is to be confrontational and to demand that produce from the school garden is used in the cafeteria. Food Service departments too often bear the brunt of criticism for the issues around school food and obesity in our children. The departments receive many phone calls and letters from parents that feel the need to express their anger about school food. While some of the complaints may be justified, yelling at the Food Service people will only make them shut down further. Your goal is to become a partner in transforming the food that is available from the school cafeterias.

Your goal in this meeting is to determine the goals of the district in serving fresh fruit and vegetables to students and how the school gardens can support those goals. Perhaps it is simply using the garden produce in classes to support new purchases by the Food Service department. While this start does not have the result of getting the garden produce into the cafeteria, you are now a partner with the Food Service department in the effort to get students to consume more fruits and vegetables.



# School Lunch Observation

Visit your school cafeteria during lunch and observe what kinds of fresh fruits and vegetables are served to the students. If your school has a salad bar, pay particular attention to what kinds of fresh produce is served on the salad bar. Make a list of the fruits and vegetables. Then go back over this list and highlight the items that you can grow in the school garden with the students.

## Fruits

## Vegetables

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____



# Overcoming Barriers

Even the most progressive Food Service director is most likely to present hurdles in getting school garden produce into the cafeteria. Instead of viewing these obstacles as barriers, look at them as opportunities. For example, if the Food Service Director says that his staff does not have the skills to handle whole, fresh produce, you can look at this as an opportunity to bring in a chef from the community to conduct a training session on how to clean garden produce. Perhaps they have always wanted to train the staff but did not have the resources. By providing a chef as an instructor you are now part of the solution and have shown that you can be creative in coming up with solutions.

**List any obstacles of bringing garden produce into the school cafeteria and some possible solutions.**

*Obstacle:* Staff is not trained to clean whole produce

*Solution:* Conduct a training session with a local chef as an instructor.

*Obstacle:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Solution:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Obstacle:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Solution:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Obstacle:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Solution:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



# Meeting with the County Health Department

A very likely obstacle presented by the Food Service Director will be perceived rules and regulations of the County Health Department concerning school garden produce. The County Health Department inspects the school kitchens for compliance of basic food safety rules and regulations once or twice a year. Often the relationship between the food service department and the County Health department is contentious at best, depending on how well the cafeterias are operated and the intentions of the Health department.

When Slow Food Denver was asked by Denver Public Schools to help write the protocols for the Garden To Cafeteria program, the first meeting we had was with the County Health Department. Somewhat to our surprise, our meeting with the director went very well. There was no inherent problem with school garden produce being used in the cafeteria. The Health department only asked that there be a set of protocols that would clearly define the safe food handling procedures that would be in place to ensure that the risks of any contamination was minimized.

Since there weren't any precedents in the school food service world for this program, we began with the only set of protocols we knew of that was concerned with fresh produce handling. The USDA has a set of protocols called Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Handling Practices (GHP) that guide farmers in the safe growing and handling of fresh produce:

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/ams.fetchTemplateData.do?template=TemplateN&leftNav=GradingCertificationandVerification&page=GAPGHPAuditVerificationProgram&acct=freshgrdcert>

At this USDA website, you can download a document called "USDA Audit Checklist," link located in the sidebar on the right (<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5050869>). This program is intended to assess a participant's efforts to minimize the risk of contamination of fresh fruits, vegetables, nuts and miscellaneous commodities by microbial pathogens based on the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's "Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables."

Since the GAP and GHP protocols are designed to guide farmers but not school gardens, not all the items on the checklist were relevant to a school garden setting.

For example, under "Water Quality Risks" on page 7, item 1-3 asks if "a water quality assessment has been performed to determine the quality of water used for irrigation purposes on the crop(s) being applied". Since most school gardens are water from municipal supply lines, there is no need for a quality assessment. On the other hand, the section "Field Harvesting and Transportation" on page 11 states in item 2-6 that "all harvesting containers and bulk hauling vehicles that come in direct contact with produce are cleaned and/or sanitized on a scheduled basis and kept as clean as practicable". This procedure is easy to implement as any baskets or containers that the students would use to harvest are first wither run through the dishwasher or through the 3-compartment sink to be clean and sanitized.

Fortunately, a number of school districts have started to implement protocols for a Garden To Cafeteria program. This manual contains several of these protocols that can be used by food service departments as models for the development of their own protocols. Be advised that every Health Department will have different priorities and may want to see different emphasis in your protocols. A good place to start is to share some of these protocols with your Health Department and ask them what they would want to see for your program. Be ready for several revisions of the protocols before the final set are approved.



# GAP and GHP Checklist

Download the GAP and GHP Checklist from the USDA website. List 5 items from the checklist that are relevant for a school garden and 5 items that are not relevant to a school garden.

These items from the Checklist relate to a school garden setting:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- d. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- e. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

These items from the Checklist DO NOT matter to a school garden setting:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- d.. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- e. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_





# Roles of Key Personnel in the GTC Program

Once your protocols have been approved by both the County Health Department and the Food Service Department, it is time to start planning how to run the program with the students and your school kitchen. As a Garden Leader, it will be your job to identify a group of students to be part of the program. You will want to communicate with the teacher(s) on how the program will work and how often you will need the students. If you develop a regular schedule that engages the students during less critical times of their academic day, you will get more support from the teacher. It is highly recommended that you work with a small group of students at one time rather than the whole class.

As Garden Leader, you will also want to discuss the program with your school kitchen staff. Ideally, the harvest with the students will happen at a time that the Kitchen Manager can accept the produce from the garden. It would be a good idea to include the Kitchen Manager in some of the harvests so that she is familiar with the protocols and sees the students in action. This will help develop relationships that will support the success of the program. The harvest needs to happen when the kitchen staff will be in the kitchens. School kitchens often shut down right after the lunch service and the clean up is finished. For this reason, an after school harvest may not be advisable as there may not be anyone in the kitchens to accept the produce.



# GTC Key Persons

Identify roles and responsibilities for key persons involved in the GTC program. For each person, describe how this person or group is involved in the GTC program.

Food Service Director \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Garden To Cafeteria Leader \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

School Garden Leader (if different than GTC Leader) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

School Kitchen Manager \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Principal \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Student Harvesters \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Classroom Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

PTA/PTO \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

County Health Department \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Other (i.e. parent or community volunteers, etc) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



# A Typical Harvest Day for Garden To Cafeteria

## Material List

3-4 Harvest Baskets (ask for donated shopping baskets from a local grocery store)  
20-lb scale (often found in the school kitchens)  
Recording Sheet (see example in Appendix)  
Pens

Most school cafeterias will be able to support a once a week harvest schedule. Be sure to have a conversation with the Kitchen Manager to determine which day of the week would be best for the kitchen to handle your garden produce. In most cases, the school garden harvest should occur on either Monday or Tuesday. According to the food safety protocols, the produce needs to be cooled for one day in the school's refrigerator (Wednesday). In this case, the produce can be used on the salad bars on Thursday and Friday.

So on a scheduled Harvest day, the GTC Leader should follow a schedule similar to this:

1. The GTC Leader surveys the school garden and identifies what produce is ready to harvest with students.
2. The GTC Leader takes harvest baskets to school kitchen to either run through the dishwasher or 3-compartment sink.
3. The GTC gathers the Recording sheet and scale.
4. The student harvesters are collected from the classroom. Ask the students and classroom teacher if anyone has been ill in the past two weeks.
5. The students and GTC leader go wash their hands with warm soapy water.
6. In the garden, the GTC Leader show the students what is ready to harvest and shows examples of what a ripe or ready to pick produce item looks like.
7. Students harvest the produce into the Harvest Baskets.
8. The produce is rinsed with the garden hose to get rid of the large chunks of dirt.
9. The produce is weighed by the students and weights listed on the Recording Sheet.
10. Students list their names on the Recording Sheet.
11. The produce is presented to the Kitchen Manager.
12. Students are returned to the classroom.
13. GTC Leader puts away Harvest Baskets, scale and Recording Sheets.



# Collecting data for the GTC Program

It is important to keep track of several measures during the Garden To Cafeteria program. The most obvious statistics to record are the total poundage of the different fruits and vegetables that are harvested from the garden. The GTC leader can work with the students to construct a spreadsheet that will track the weights of each produce item. If the students have advanced math skills, a good exercise is to make bar or line graphs that track the amount of produce that is harvested each week. Even within an 8-week harvest season, it is possible to observe different fruits and vegetables coming in and out of season.

A number of Food Service Directors have even offered to pay for the fresh produce that is harvested from the school gardens and served in the cafeterias. Generally, the payment is the same as the district pays for wholesale purchases of the produce. Sometime during the harvest season, contact the purchaser for the district to get the current price sheet from the wholesale distributor of fresh produce. Often the prices are shown “price by pound” or “price by case” or even “per item”. If all possible, calculate a price per pound for each produce item so that the weights that the students have recorded can be multiplied by the price per pound. If the Garden Leader has made a spreadsheet with the students, it is fairly easy to add a column showing the price for each produce item. The students can then follow their total profits after each harvest.

## Marketing the Garden To Cafeteria program in Your School

A very important component of the Garden To Cafeteria program is getting the word out to the school community that the school garden is providing fresh produce to the lunch program. There are many ways to market this program depending on the targeted audience. To inform students, post a sign at the salad bar that lists the garden produce items that are appearing on the salad bar that day. A white board used for the sign allows for different lists each day. An important targeted audience is the parents. Newsletters, announcements and pictures of students in the garden are good ways to inform the parents. Finally, this exciting program should be shared with the larger community. Invite local newspapers, school board members and other principals to school to see the garden harvest and the items on the salad bar. Remember, the more positive messaging around the Garden To Cafeteria will help to highlight the positive efforts of the Food Service Department that will drive other possible programs.



# Marketing Plans

List a marketing plan to highlight the Garden To Cafeteria program for each targeted audience.

Students \_\_\_\_\_

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Parents \_\_\_\_\_

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Staff \_\_\_\_\_

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District \_\_\_\_\_

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Local Community \_\_\_\_\_

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# Appendix A: Garden to Cafeteria Checklist

Use this checklist to guide the development of your Garden To Cafeteria program. Further explanations of each item are included in the body of the chapter.

- Identify the key people involved in the school meal service at your school.
- Meet with the Food Service Director to learn about the District's plan to increase fruit and vegetable consumption.
- Identify the fruits and vegetables that are served in your school cafeteria.
- List the obstacles for the GTC program that come up during your conversation with the Food Service Director.
- Examine the USDA's GAP/GHP protocols for farmers and make a list of relevant items for a school garden harvest program.
- Develop the safe food handling protocols with your local Health Department.
- Identify the people in the district and school that will support your GTC program and what will their roles be.
- Develop a set of procedures that a GTC leader will follow with a group of students.
- Develop a Recording Sheet to track your harvests and a spreadsheet to record your weekly harvests.
- Design a marketing plan to announce the GTC program to the school community.



# Appendix B: Garden to Cafeteria Log

Date	Time	Produce Item	Weight	Garden Leader	Students	Cafeteria Manager
<b>Totals</b>						

