



//This initiative will have impacts that we haven't even fully recognized yet because we were able to bring people together and to support them as they were trying to improve school food and nutrition for our Canadian students.//

Impact Report 2013-2016

NOURISHING SCHOOL COMMUNITIES brought together partners from across Canada with the vision to get more healthy and local food into the minds and onto the plates of school children. The objective of this evidence-based initiative was to implement, scale up and evaluate best practices by guiding school communities to create healthy food environments. With three years of funding from the federal government through the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer's Coalitions Linking Action & Science for Prevention (CLASP) program, Nourishing School Communities provided \$2.4 million to various programs across the country.

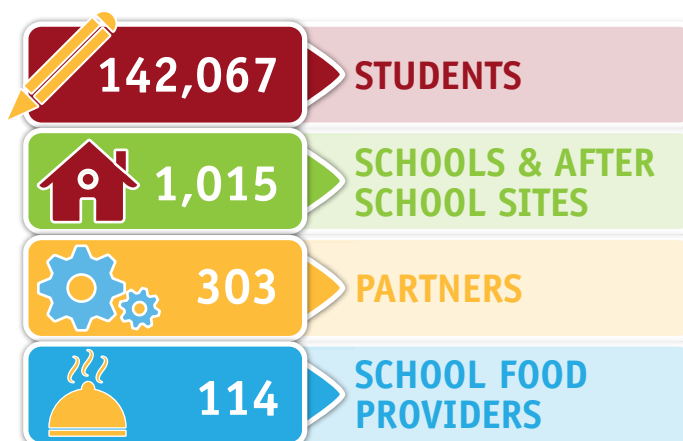
Working hand in hand with multiple partners at provincial and local levels, seven national partners led the work including: Heart & Stroke, Farm to Cafeteria Canada, YMCA Canada, Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations, The Lunch Lady Group Inc., University of New Brunswick and the Propel Centre for Population Health Impact.



Our Approach

- ✓ **ENGAGE** schools, Indigenous communities, food providers, farmers, after-school sites and community partners
- ✓ **BUILD CAPACITY** to provide healthy, regionally sourced and sustainably-produced foods
- ✓ **ENHANCE SKILLS** and improve knowledge about healthy local foods
- ✓ **CREATE AN EVIDENCE BASE** for continuous learning by exchanging ideas, disseminating wisdom and transferring knowledge in order to scale up school food programs, policies and research in other communities
- ✓ **LEVERAGE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS**, build collaboration and sustainability

NOURISHING SCHOOL COMMUNITIES made transformative changes to school and after-school food environments across various programs over the three-year period. Each program worked with multiple partners towards a common vision in complementary and unique ways. These partnerships also facilitated communications and sharing across established school food programs and networks. Together this initiative supported changes that aimed to shift policies and practices in ways that make healthy local foods easier to access and fun to eat.





Elders shares knowledge of preparing and smoking sk'aga (chum salmon) with students from Chief Matthews school, Haida Gwaii, BC

What Was the Impact?

Increased collaboration and synergies

Partners had an opportunity to expand their networks and learn about the experiences and challenges other partners were facing. Working with different people and organizations allowed the scope of the initiative to broaden. In Haida Gwaii, an archipelago island off the Northern British Columbia Coast, the **Local Foods to School Learning Circle program** was able to explicitly show linkages from farm, sea and land to plate. The community has come together to transform the systems in bringing local food and traditions into schools. **“We are essentially supporting our communities to take charge of what our kids are eating and teaching them self-sufficiency through hands-on learning and respect for where their food comes from,”** says Kiku Dhanwant, Local Foods to School Learning Circle Coordinator. Two food pantries were also established as new food hubs. Over a two-year period approximately \$42,245.74 was spent in the local food economy through incorporating these foods into school meals.

Capacity building

Capacity building was supported through various activities including sharing of best practices, guidance on policy development and implementation, facilitating strengthened partnerships, provision of evidence and ongoing communication with schools and after-school programs. One example of capacity building was with The Lunch Lady Group Inc., Canada's largest privately-owned elementary school food provider. When making

changes to adopt a healthier **Smarter Meals** menu they looked for new and innovative ways to put meals together that would include more fruits and vegetables as well as incorporate more scratch cooking in every Lunch Lady kitchen across the country. At first, franchise owners were worried that sales and operations would be negatively affected. Ruthie Burd, founder of The Lunch Lady ensured that the franchise owners were engaged throughout the entire process and had the opportunity to learn from one another at staff meetings and gatherings. Her approach has led staff and franchise owners to now embrace the company's vision of fresher and healthier school food. **“Franchise owners asked for more scratch items at our annual conference last year,”** says Mrs. Burd, **“because they are in it for the health of kids, and believe the food tastes way better.”** There are now two full-time Nutrition and Operations Coordinators at the company as the Lunch Lady extends her reach to include daycares and other types of programs. By strengthening the food team, and harnessing their expertise in nutrition and scratch cooking,



Smarter Meals: Campfire Chili Macaroni with fresh apple slices

the company hopes to continue to find new and improved ways for franchise owners to efficiently introduce foods that are locally grown and as fresh as possible.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Local Foods to School Learning Circle program:

<https://goo.gl/vGwiYT>

Smarter Meals: <http://thelunchlady.ca/smarter-meals>

The Case for Carrots: A Healthy School Food Public-Private Partnership: <https://goo.gl/TqKJD3>

Knowledge transfer and exchange

By supporting various knowledge transfer and exchange opportunities, partners were able to share learnings and bring forth new ideas to advance and sustain their work on school food. First Nations school communities in Southeastern Saskatchewan started school garden programs to help children, youth, and families make healthy, local, and sustainable food choices. On March 24, 2015, representatives from the three communities and partner organizations met to share stories about their first year with the school community gardens. They described what worked, the challenges they encountered, as well as ideas and plans they have for the future. What worked well with the **School Garden program** was the involvement of knowledge keepers and elders to mentor and motivate students. This helped to engage the community in the activities taking place at the schools. At Kakisiwew School in Ochapowace First Nation, students from grades 3 to 6 participated in the school

garden program with the help of community members and Elders who were involved by helping to water, weed and harvest the plants. They also demonstrated how to preserve and prepare the food and they worked with the students to incorporate the harvest into a Thanksgiving Turkey Dinner for the entire community. Ochapowace First Nation also hosted a Leadership Health Empowerment for Youth (HEY) culture camp focused on leadership training and building self-esteem. This included workshops on chronic disease prevention through healthy eating and physical activity. The camp motivated the whole community including students, school staff, elders, parents and community partners.



Students from Marketing to Kids (#M2KPA) group from Prince Albert, SK



Partners from three school garden programs in Southeastern Saskatchewan: Chief Gabriel Cote Education Complex, Keeseekoose Chiefs Education Centre, Kakisiwew School Ochapowace First Nation, Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations, Heart & Stroke and the Propel Centre for Population Health Impact

A key continuous learning and knowledge sharing event took place in November 2015 when Heart & Stroke, Équiterre, and Farm to Cafeteria Canada hosted **Changing the Menu**, the first-ever pan-Canadian school food conference. The guiding themes of the conference were access to healthy food at school, improving food literacy, enhancing sustainable school food systems, and strengthening connections between the school and broader communities. Over 450 participants gathered in Montreal to share their experiences, understanding and visions for school food. One of the key outcomes of the conference was the new connections made among conference participants who came from various sectors across the spectrum of school food.

“It was an amazing conference overall, I feel inspired to move forward with future partnerships in the area of school food”. - Conference participant



Équiterre, St. Charles School, Pierrefonds, PQ

FOR MORE INFORMATION

School Garden program (SK): <https://goo.gl/13CHtJ>

Changing the Menu: <http://changingthemenu.org/>

Schools Take Root: <https://goo.gl/PNVvrb>

Local Foods Strategy (NB): <https://goo.gl/wBjJmh>

In maintaining the momentum from the conference a series of webinars and regional/provincial gatherings were organized to inspire future collaborative opportunities. Further to this, some exciting new provincial school food initiatives were launched strengthening the development of local food in schools:

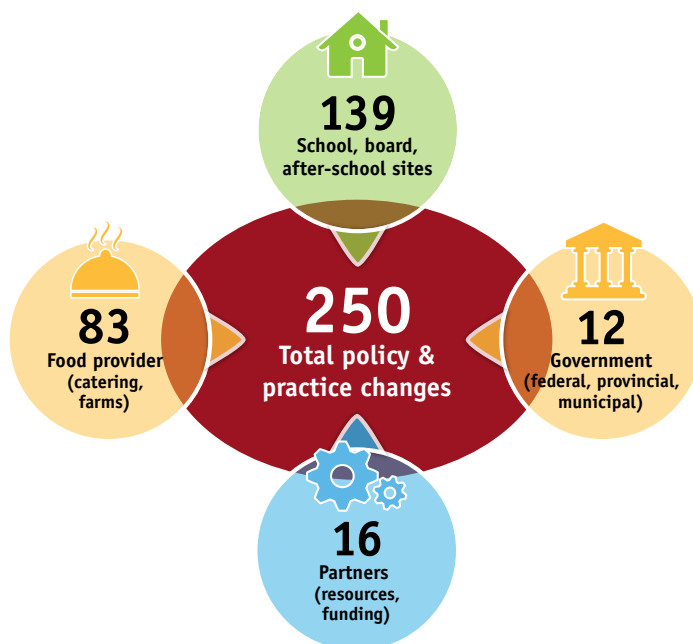


- In Québec, Équiterre is now expanding Farm to School activities in many areas of the province with different projects funded by the Québec Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and Québec en Forme. One example is the **Schools Take Root** project that aims to create awareness about local, organic food in schools in Montreal and Montérégie.
- In New Brunswick, a senior manager within the New Brunswick Department of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries was supported to take on the role of Regional Coordinator of Farm to School in the province. This manager is responsible for the development and roll out of a new provincial **Local Foods Strategy** with local foods in schools as a key strategic direction within that strategy.
- In 2017 the New Brunswick Department of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries announced \$273,000 in funding would be made available to establish a local food cooperative in New Brunswick. A priority of this cooperative is to deliver local foods to school cafeterias.

Policy and practice changes

Over 250 policy and practice changes were achieved at the local and provincial levels as well as across projects and jurisdictions. Significant policy change was seen at the school or provider level in order to support program implementation. Examples of these policy changes included the development of policies or guidelines to facilitate food safety, food preparation, local food procurement and purchasing. Practice changes included involving students in menu planning, field trips to local farms, hands on food literacy activities, changes in food ordering, sourcing from local farmers, and the development of new staff training and resources.

Procurement practices of the School Lunch Association were also positively influenced through a series of **Farm to School Learning Labs** led by Food First NL. Through



a partnership with Farm to Cafeteria Canada, Food First NL supported Farm to School initiatives to bring healthy, local food into schools, and provide students with hands-on learning opportunities that foster food literacy, all while strengthening the local food system. The School Lunch Association is a non-stigmatizing program that provides a hot, nutritious lunch for primary and elementary school children in eastern Newfoundland and Labrador (NL). The Farm to School Learning Lab process supported the formation of a new partnership between the School Lunch Association and Lester's Farm, allowing for the integration of local produce in a select number of schools throughout 2016. This small change sparked great interest within the School Lunch Association to liaise with other food producers in the region to explore potential opportunities for offering more local produce in the upcoming school year.

The **YMCA Healthy Eating Framework** for children's programs was designed to help staff incorporate healthy eating throughout all their program components. The framework, self-assessment and online training tools were developed by YMCA Canada and three Member Associations in partnership with the University of New Brunswick and the Propel Centre for Population Health Impact. *"With our before and after school program we learned a number of valuable things from being part of this project and it has changed the way in which we view nutrition and food. We have completely stopped doing some things (rewarding good behaviours with food) and have become more conscientious about staff modelling as it relates to nutrition". - YMCA Staff*

FOR MORE INFORMATION

YMCA Healthy Eating Framework:

<https://goo.gl/42yp8y>



YMCA Canada and UNB were partners in Nourishing School Communities, an Initiative funded by the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer and Health Canada through the Coalitions Linking Action & Science for Prevention (CLASP) grants. Learn more: farmtocafeteriacanada.ca/nsc

Positive changes in attitudes, beliefs and behaviour

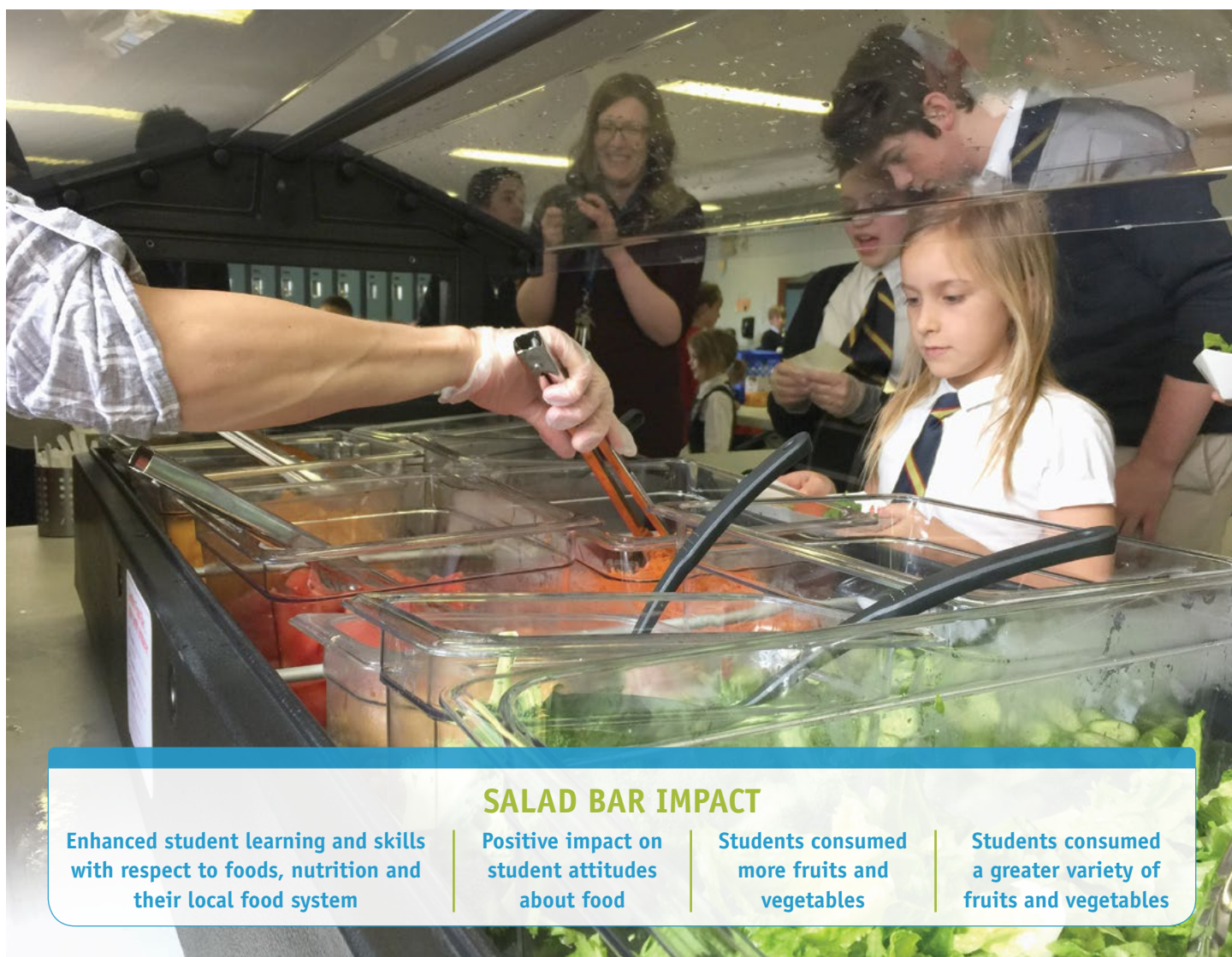
Students involved in the Nourishing School Communities programs demonstrated positive attitudes and beliefs about eating healthy and local foods. Students also learned more about local food systems and enhanced their food skills including growing, preparing and tasting healthy local foods. Positive attitudes and beliefs towards local foods, gardening and healthy eating were also observed in program staff, teachers and parents.

With regards to impact on student behaviour, positive behaviour change was demonstrated in several of the programs and practices. For instance, students in Haida Gwaii schools were found to eat a high proportion of local foods including deer, fish, and berries. In addition, students from the YMCA after-school program in Moncton, New Brunswick reported eating

fewer salty snacks after the program was implemented. Finally, there was a positive relationship between student's meeting the national guidelines for eating fruits and vegetables and the **Farm to School Salad Bar** program at St. Bonaventure's College in St. John's Newfoundland and Labrador. The salad bar program at St. Bonaventure's College was the first of its kind in NL and where possible, the food was locally sourced from Lester's Farm. The partners involved are hopeful that the salad bar will inspire similar initiatives in schools across NL and are eager to provide mentorship and educational opportunities to enhance the Farm to School capacity for the province.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Farm to School Learning Lab & Salad Bar (NL):
www.foodfirstnl.ca/our-projects/farm-to-school



SALAD BAR IMPACT

Enhanced student learning and skills with respect to foods, nutrition and their local food system

Positive impact on student attitudes about food

Students consumed more fruits and vegetables

Students consumed a greater variety of fruits and vegetables

Students from St. Bonaventure's College Salad Bar program, St. John's, NL



Students from Bernice MacNaughton High School, Moncton, NB

Transforming school food systems

Transforming food systems to support the vision of more healthy local sustainable food into the minds and onto the plates of school children was an overarching aim of the Farm to School initiatives within Nourishing School Communities. “Food systems are the chains of commercial and non-commercial actors – from suppliers to consumers, regulators to advocates for system change – who collectively determine how we grow, process, distribute, acquire, and dispose of food. Food systems’ thinking reflects an awareness of how actions by one group in the system can affect other groups, as well as the environment, the economy, the fabric of society, and the health of the population, and ultimately, consumers”.¹ Food system change was realized in all of the regions and schools that implemented a Farm to School initiative.



¹ Municipal food policy entrepreneurs: a preliminary analysis of how Canadian cities and regional districts are involved in food system change. June 2013. <http://www.farmtocafeteriacanada.ca/2013/06/municipal-food-policy-report/>



Students from Salisbury Elementary School, Salisbury, NB

When Nourishing School Communities arrived in New Brunswick, various actors in many parts of the province were already engaged in food systems change. The situation was ripe for the addition of new Farm to School programs, the establishment of a network to facilitate knowledge exchange and to support planning amongst actors, as well as the establishment of a provincial position to lead this activity.

Specifically, Nourishing School Communities helped scale up food system change in New Brunswick in the following ways:

- 7 new schools received a grant to establish a **Farm to School Salad Bar** program
- 7 schools developed relationships with local food producers and local food suppliers to procure foods for their Farm to School programs
- Scaled up food production on school grounds through the establishment or enhancement of a garden or greenhouse
- Redesigned their kitchens to establish a new salad bar service featuring healthy local foods affording 2642 students with an opportunity to feast on a variety of fresh local vegetables and fruits
- Engaged students in growing, cooking, serving, and/or eating local foods on school premises
- Today, there are 72 schools in New Brunswick who report operating a Farm to School program

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Farm to School Salad Bar (NB): www.farmtocafeteriacanada.ca/2015/09/f2s-salad-bars-take-root-in-new-brunswick

Farm to School Grant Program: <https://goo.gl/kjfqXf>

Nourishing School Communities advanced the Farm to School movement in Canada.

It was an opportunity to expand and evaluate promising Farm to School practices and processes from Haida Gwaii to Newfoundland and Labrador. It strengthened and expanded Farm to Cafeteria Canada's national Farm to School network and it deepened the appreciation and understanding of the partners and the various contexts they are working in to achieve similar aims. Seasoned and new partners including practitioners, policy makers, funders and researchers are now at the pan Canadian Farm to School table pooling their resources and growing the movement. In November 2015, Farm to Cafeteria Canada and

Whole Kids Foundation announced a new **Farm to School Grant Program** aimed to deliver \$500,000 to schools in Ontario and British Columbia. These grants valued at up to \$10,000 will bring the harvest to schools – engaging students and community in gardening, cooking, preserving, purchasing and serving healthy local foods at school.

It is estimated that at least \$2 was raised for every \$1 that was provided to Farm to Cafeteria Canada to advance Farm to School through the Nourishing School Communities initiative. In total the amount raised has been \$1,727,000 through various grants.

Future Directions

Nourishing School Communities was successful in creating environments where healthy local food was encouraged, supported and celebrated.

Across this country, thousands of people are championing a new and improved 'menu' for school food and we are excited to see the Nourishing School Communities partners leading as a catalyst for future action.

Beyond the three year time period, a number of important impacts will remain and continue to grow:

- ➡ The partnerships that were developed will continue to be strengthened;
- ➡ The living legacy of supportive and healthy local food environments through policy and practice outcomes;
- ➡ The physical infrastructure – gardening equipment, greenhouses, salad bar units, dishwashers, and freezers;
- ➡ Many resources and tools, such as the Local Foods to School: Reconnecting the Children of Haida Gwaii to Their Food and Their Land [video](#), the YMCA Healthy Eating Framework, [Canada's School Food Map](#) and [Farm to School Canada Digs In!](#)
- ➡ The lessons learned from our evaluation including the need to work with local partners to adapt existing evaluation methods to collect the best data possible to support continuous learning and sustainability;
- ➡ Heart & Stroke in collaboration with the Childhood Obesity Foundation founded [The Stop Marketing to Kids](#)

Coalition to restrict all food and beverage marketing to children and youth 16 years and under;

- ➡ The Lunch Lady Foundation was officially incorporated in March 2017. They are currently offering operational support in an advisory capacity, to the Meal Box Program in Toronto. The Meal Box initiative has two goals. The first is to provide food services training as a pathway to employment for those at risk. The second is to deliver the nutritious hot meals they prepare to individuals experiencing chronic homelessness in downtown Toronto. In the future, the Foundation will be looking for additional projects where they can offer logistical and operational support to help other programs to become more viable;
- ➡ The Learning Circle: Local Healthy Foods to School initiative is expanding to four Indigenous communities with a three-year project funded by the Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR) through its Pathways to Health Equity for Aboriginal Peoples initiative. This project is intended to build on the successes and lessons of the Learning Circle on Haida Gwaii and support communities to develop their own ways of strengthening a culture of healthy local food in schools. ♦

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Local Foods to School: Reconnecting the Children of Haida Gwaii to Their Food and Their Land video: <https://vimeo.com/164774819>

Canada's School Food Map: www.farmtocafeteriacanada.ca/school-food-map

Farm to School Canada Digs In!: <https://goo.gl/TejHhm>

The Stop Marketing to Kids (Stop M2K) Coalition: www.stopmarketingtokids.ca



Partners from the Nourishing School Communities initiative

Thank YOU!

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