



Nebraska Farm to School Institute

The Nebraska Farm to School Institute was established to strengthen local food purchasing and education practices within interdisciplinary school teams. Eight school teams were competitively selected to participate in the Institute during the 2021-22 school year, engaging in training, technical assistance, and coaching support. The Nebraska Farm to School Institute is modeled after the “3 C’s” approach, pioneered by Vermont FEED, which integrates the Classroom, Cafeteria, and Community into the development of farm to school action plans. Nebraska Farm to School Institute teams were granted \$3,000 in funds to assist in advancing their farm to school goals.

Cafeteria SMART Goal

- Develop and expand the grow tower program to supply fresh food to the salad bar.

Classroom SMART Goal

- Create lesson plans to support the grow tower program.

Community SMART Goal

- Build connections with local farmers to purchase more local products for the cafeteria.

Accomplishments

- Students designed and built an aquaponics system with Nathan Rice from Extension.
- Field trip to a local bison ranch.
- Students harvested apples from a local orchard, and processed the apples to make apple crisp.



Banner County Public Schools	Banner County Public Schools participated in the inaugural school year 2021-2022 Nebraska Farm to School Institute as a full school district.
Student Population	Pre-K to 12th grade students: 150
Farm to School Team Members for School Year 2021-2022	Witni Boettcher: Food and Consumer Sciences Teacher Dr. Evelyn Browne: Superintendent Bill Gifford: FFA/AgScience Teacher Nathan Rice: 4-H Extension Assistant Kelly Rundell: Food Service Manager Sue Talkington: Cook
School Year 2021-2022 Coach	Justin Carter: Center for Rural Affairs



Outcome

When Banner County Public Schools does their farm to school work, they do it with student experiences in mind. Over the course of the 2021-2022 school year, Banner County students had opportunities to visit a bison ranch, harvest apples and prepare them for apple crisp, shuck corn and make popcorn, visit a sugar beet processing facility, and build their own aquaponics system from scratch. Banner County's focus on the classroom component of the Farm to School Institute has paid dividends in terms of student interest and involvement in Farm to School, as well as teacher buy-in to their program.

But it all starts at the top. Banner County benefited greatly from the leadership and commitment of superintendent Dr. Evelyn Brown. Dr. Brown was among the most engaged administrators in the 2021 Farm to School Institute, regularly attending workshops and networking calls, and attending each day of the Institute.

The Banner County team also leveraged key partnerships to increase learning opportunities for students. In particular, a strong relationship with the local Nebraska Extension office and 4-H educator Nathan Rice. Nathan led students in the research, design and building of an in-school aquaponics system. For students, this project included lessons on engineering and 3-D design, agriculture production planning, construction skills, and care for fish and plants. Such skills are great building blocks for students pursuing numerous careers.

Banner County also found creative ways to bridge classroom and cafeteria learning opportunities. Students were invited to join Kelly Rundell, the kitchen service manager, in learning how to process and prepare fresh vegetables, local honey, and butter to make some of the items featured in the cafeteria. Local zucchini were used to make muffins and local honey and butter to make honey butter to go with the muffins. And jalapenos from the school tower garden were processed by students to make "cowboy candy."

Collectively, these efforts and experiences have given Banner County students invaluable lessons in food, farming and cooking. At the same time, the Banner County Farm to School team has also taken away insights and relationships that will carry their Farm to School efforts into the new school year and beyond.



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