



Impact Report

Verdigre Public Schools

The Heartland Farm to School and Early Care and Education (ECE) Institute was established to strengthen local food purchasing and education practices within interdisciplinary school teams. Nine ECE teams from Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska were competitively selected to participate in the Institute during the 2024-25 school year, engaging in training, technical assistance, and coaching support.

The 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 teams were granted \$3,000 in funds to assist in advancing their Farm to School goals.

Verdigre Public School's is located in Verdigre, NE and provides education to nearly 180 children Pre-K through 12th grade.

Farm to School Goals

- Expand current garden space and create a better outdoor learning environment for classes to use.
- Incorporate more educational activities around Farm to School into the classrooms.
- Hold quarterly taste test activities at lunchtime.
- Procure more locally grown foods from local producers
- Start a "Crop Drop" program to gather donations of local produce.

Team Members:

Shelly Hamilton - Student Nutrition
Kendyll Tiedtke - Ag/FFA teacher
Jeanette Mervicker - Secretary

Coach:

Emily Hulse, Nebraska Department of Education

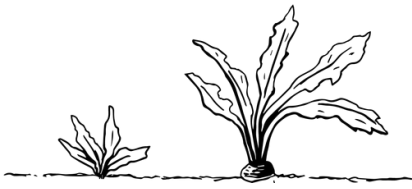


**Classroom
Cafeteria
Community**



The Heartland Farm to School & ECE Institute is offered in collaboration with Farm to School and ECE partners from Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska. This initiative is formally led by the Kansas Department of Education, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Nebraska Department of Education.





Accomplishments



Verdigre Public School's Farm to School efforts are driven by a commitment to fostering empathy, strengthening community relationships, and equipping students with lifelong skills through meaningful, hands-on learning. Guided by the Farm to School "3 C's" – Classroom, Cafeteria, and Community – the team created authentic food and agriculture experiences that connected students to where their food comes from while promoting healthy eating and community engagement.

A major focus this year was expanding the school garden and creating a space for more outdoor learning opportunities. What began as a small inherited garden grew into a vibrant learning space with the addition of fruit trees, fruit bushes, donated seeds from community members, and an expansion from 10 to 20 raised garden beds. Students played an active role every step of the way – helping build, install, plant, maintain, and harvest the garden – while gaining valuable hands-on skills. The school's Garden Club gave students the opportunity to select plants and get involved from the very beginning. Community partnerships were instrumental in bringing these projects to life, and the school celebrated its first-ever Crop Drop, encouraging community members to donate fresh produce. Students also participated in the Mountain Plains Crunch Off during National Farm to School Month, celebrating local foods and healthy eating.

The cafeteria became an extension of the classroom as produce harvested from the school garden was incorporated into the salad bar, allowing students to enjoy foods they had grown themselves. The school also expanded local procurement by introducing Nebraska-grown beef, eggs, and fresh produce into school meals. For the first time, quarterly taste tests gave students opportunities to sample local foods, including honey, beef products, popcorn, and cucumber-mint citrus-infused water. These taste tests not only introduced students to new flavors but also provided valuable insight into how food preferences vary across different age groups.

Looking ahead, Verdigre is building on their recent momentum with ambitious goals for continued growth. Plans include offering Garden Club weekly throughout the summer and early fall, increasing the purchase of locally sourced foods, pursuing funding for a greenhouse and chicken coop, completing outdoor octagon picnic tables to expand outdoor learning opportunities, and growing the Crop Drop initiative to further strengthen community engagement and increase fresh produce donations.

