

REGIONAL STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOPS

Following the visioning and root cause analysis sessions, a series of regional workshops was held to validate the findings from this process, gather additional input and perspectives from stakeholders who did not participate in the initial meetings, and brainstorm viable state-wide action steps to address or counteract the root causes to move Utah farm to fork towards its vision. An additional goal of the workshops was to get buy-in for the strategic planning process and begin building the trusted relationships necessary for a strong farm to school network. Workshops were held in the following locations:



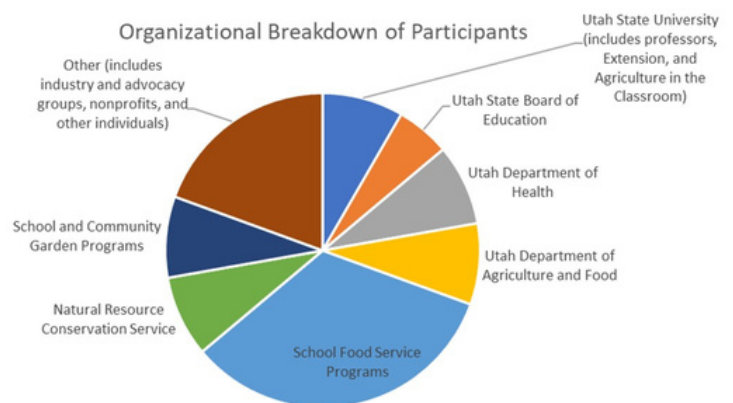
- Logan, July 11th, 2022
- Moab, July 20th, 2022
- Vernal, July 21st, 2022
- Heber City, July 26th, 2022
- Richfield, August 1st, 2022
- Cedar City, August 2nd, 2022

These locations were selected with the goal of making it possible for everyone in the state to attend a workshop with a single day of travel. Local hosting availability and travel logistics were also factors in selecting locations.

USU Extension was a critical partner in planning and hosting these workshops. Dr. Kelsey Hall coordinated with local extension staff to find workshop hosts for each location, and created the meeting registrations in EventBrite, along with graphics to promote the events on social media. Local extension hosts arranged the meeting location, conducted outreach to the community, and promoted the events on social media.

PARTICIPANTS

In total, 77 people participated in the six workshops, for an average of 13 participants per workshop. Attendance was fairly consistent across the workshops, ranging from nine people in Logan (which may be due in part to being the first workshop, so there was less time for advertising and recruitment) and 15 in Cedar City and Richfield. A breakdown of participants by occupational sector is shown here.



AGENDA OVERVIEW

Each session followed the same agenda (a detailed copy is available upon request). The facilitators started by providing an overview of Utah's farm to fork movement and progress thus far, grounding everyone in common language and background. The morning activities then focused on asset mapping, skill sharing, and building connections between participants, while the afternoon was geared toward solution brainstorming and prioritization of action steps. The workshops also provided the opportunity to highlight local Utah products through a taste test model. During the workshop breaks, participants enjoyed bread, jam, tortilla chips, salsa, dried cherries, peaches, and veggie trays purchased from Utah food producers.

IDENTIFIED SOLUTIONS & PRIORITIES

At each workshop, facilitators reviewed the root cause barriers to farm to school identified in earlier sessions, and asked participants for reactions and if there was anything missing. Three of the six workshops chose to add an additional root cause at this point:

- Hunger/food insecurity is not recognized as a problem in Utah.(Logan)
- Lack of societal support for families with kids from 0-5 years old. (Moab)
- Utahns need more information about and practice with collaboration. (Heber City)

Participants in the other three workshops felt that the previously identified root causes adequately captured Utah's farm to school barriers. The root cause barriers were then posted on flip chart paper around the room and participants were asked to add the following information:

- What is already being done in their community to address the issue (if anything)?
- What should be done to address the issue at a local/regional level?
- What should a statewide organization (like the Farm to Fork Task Force) do to address the issue?

Following a group review and debrief of those results, each participant was given three sticky dots with which to vote for their top priorities. Facilitators then compiled data from all the workshops and identified major themes.

Most of the solutions proposed in the workshops were generated in response to the following two root causes:

- Small farming is not valued, visible, appreciated, or viewed as profitable/viable in Utah, and
- The Utah education system focuses on providing students with knowledge to prepare them for college or specific careers, instead of learning how to learn and developing lifelong/employable skills.

While participants agreed that school nutrition programs not being seen as equal partners in education was a barrier to farm to school success, they struggled to elucidate solutions that should happen at the state level. Many proposed solutions either did not actually address the root cause (e.g., "more scratch cooking") or are things best addressed at the district/local level, like reclassification of nutrition staff in order to allow salary increases. The role of the network here may be to support local-level efforts rather than to champion a state-wide solution for this particular issue.

IDENTIFIED SOLUTIONS & PRIORITIES, continued

The most dominant ideas proposed across all meetings can be captured in two broad themes.

Theme One

Make agriculture a universal part of the Utah education experience. Not everyone needs to be a farmer, but everyone needs to know about farming. All students from pre-K on should receive hands-on experience with the whole food chain.

The specific solutions proposed under this theme were:

1. Explicitly include agriculture/farm to school in the curriculum standards for all subjects and all grades.
2. Provide funding to expand existing resources like Agriculture in the Classroom and Create Better Health so that all schools have access to these resources. This includes training teachers on how to provide these opportunities and providing resources for them to do so.

Of particular note, Solution #1 was unanimously proposed at every workshop, and also received the highest number of priority votes out of all solutions.

Theme Two

Increase market opportunities for small producers through education, communication, and infrastructure.

The specific solutions proposed under this theme were:

1. Increase local processing facilities and the ability to create value-added products.
2. Educate farmers on high-value crops and marketing techniques.
3. Increase state-level support for marketing and distribution of Utah-grown and Utah-created products, including support for school partnerships.
4. Create regional/county co-ops to centralize the efforts of small farmers, making it easier to sell to institutional buyers.

This final point has been discussed extensively in Utah, but faces some additional barriers that are not necessarily unique to farm to school. It may be helpful to refer to Ken Meter's 2021 feasibility study when deciding whether or not to focus on co-ops as part of the farm to school strategic plan.

EVALUATION



At the end of each workshop, participants were asked to share one word summarizing their feelings about farm to fork. Excited, hopeful, and optimistic were the most common responses although some participants did report more negative feelings like frustration, confusion, and discouragement. Full responses can be seen in the word cloud, where the size of each word is correlated with its frequency.

Participants also completed a longer (nine-question) evaluation to capture both quantitative and qualitative responses to their experience with the workshop. That data is currently being analyzed and will be used to inform future work.

POST-WORKSHOP

After the workshops concluded, a debrief meeting was held over Zoom to share results and next steps with everyone who participated. Meeting attendees revised the draft vision previously developed based on workshop feedback, to ensure everyone could still see a place for themselves and their work in the vision. The identified themes and prioritized solutions were also shared with participants. A discussion about potential gaps was held, but did not result in adding any additional solutions.

Task Force Vision

A revised vision is presented below, based on feedback obtained during the workshops.

The Utah Farm to Fork Task Force collaborates to build a strong local food economy for all Utahns, resulting in healthy children and adults, interconnected communities, and prosperous farms. We envision a life where:

- *All people have access to nutritious local food;*
- *School and community gardens provide space for growing food, educating people, and connecting communities; and*
- *Teachers and caregivers are empowered to integrate food-based learning and agriculture education in all curriculum areas.*

NEXT STEPS

Next, input from these workshops will be used to create a workplan that establishes and prioritizes goals and activities for the coming years for the Task Force to accomplish. A contractor will work with a small co-design team to develop a draft of that plan over the next few months. They will also conduct interviews with individuals currently connected to farm to school fork to develop a proposal for a fluid, multi-nodal network structure that will empower communities to support each other in working towards these strategic goals.

Stakeholder meetings will be held in late February/early March to solicit feedback on the draft plan and network structure.

LEARN MORE

If you have questions or would like to be more involved in Utah's farm to fork efforts, contact Kate Wheeler.

Email: kate.wheeler@schools.utah.gov

Phone: 801-538-7659