

Webinar Transcript - 2020 NYS Farm to School Institute: How to Apply



Mikaela Perry: Hi everyone. My name is Mikaela thank you for joining us on this FINYS webinar. Just a little informational session about the upcoming New York State Farm to School Institute happening in June. And we're so thankful that you could all join us and we're very excited to share more information about this institute with you all and so on this webinar, like I said, my name is Mikaela and I am the New York State Farm to School Training Coordinator with the American Farmland Trust. And I'll have with me my colleagues, Stephanie and Ashlea, and I'll let them introduce themselves.

Stephanie Hsu: Hey, thanks Mikaela, so my name is Stephanie Hsu. I am the Farm to Institution New York State Manager. A little bit about Farm to Institution New York State or FINYS we're a collaborative initiative through American Farmland Trust, and our goal is to increase purchasing of local foods and institutions by 25%. Through educational efforts and through our policy efforts, and also sharing stories of success. Just a little bit of quick side tangent – the New York State Farm to School Institute that we are putting on is organized by FINYS in collaboration with a number of great supporters like the Poughkeepsie Farm Project, Hudson Valley Farm Hub, and also from the NoVo Foundation to Joyce and Irving Goldman Foundation and other supporters of through our AFT.

Ashlea Raemer: Hi, everyone, I'm Ashlea Raemer. I am the New York program assistant with American Farmland Trust, and I spend about half my time working on the FINYS program and specifically focusing on communications and planning events like these.

MP: Thank you both. Okay, so we'll go ahead and get started.



MP: So, here's just a screen of what we are going to be covering today. So we're going to tell you, who is FINYS, it's us, we just introduced ourselves. And we're going to go over what exactly the Farm to School Institute is. And the benefits of attending the Institute, the learning opportunities that the Institute will provide logistics how and when to apply, and then we're going to have a section at the end where you all can ask some questions.



So first, we have a video to share.

Watch the video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nz4lbo6bQ4&t=1s>

NYS Farm to School Institute

- **What is the NYS F2S Institute?**
 - History
 - 3-Cs: Classroom, Cafeteria, Community
 - Hands-on, integrative learning across fields
- **Why host an Institute in New York?**



MP: Okay, so the New York State Farm to School Institute is a year-long program put on by FINYS and the American Farmland Trust. Like Stephanie said, we have many funders and we're modeled after the Northeast Farm to School Institute, which is run through NOFA Vermont and Shelburne Farms, Vermont FEED. And they have been running their Institute for many years now and our state's model is based off that. Last year was the first year that we had the Institute and we had six school teams attend from across the state. The model that we use, like I said, is based off Vermont's model and it includes the three C's. The idea behind the three C's is that for Farm to School, it's very important to integrate the classroom cafeteria and the community when implementing Farm to School programming. So for the classroom, the institute seeks to offer guidance and resources for the school teams on farm to school and nutrition related curricula. So when you're thinking about who might be on your school team, it might be a good idea to have at least one teacher, someone who is working on the ground with students and maybe wants to learn more about how to bring up Farm to School related programming in the classroom with the students directly on a regular basis. The Institute will really empower the teams that are going through the training to engage students and hands on learning whether that be in the classroom per se or on field trips or in other farm to school related programming throughout the year. We also have a strong focus on the cafeteria. Of course, we focus heavily on assisting teams in increasing local procurement. And we really want to help you increase the amount of lunch foods that are being sourced locally. We define local food as New York State food. connecting you with farmers running taste tests, maybe in the cafeteria or helping you to participate in New York Thursday's, some school teams might already be doing this, these types of activities and if not, we're here to help and if so, we really work with each team individually to see how we can augment this program programming. And then the final c is community which is very important in implementing Farm to School programming and ensuring its sustainability, which is a focus of the Institute. So Farm to School programs we have seen strengthen the community and the local economy, especially through supporting local farmers. In turn farmers throughout New York state can expand their markets when they're working with schools and institutions. It's also important that we help the school teams and the Institute engage families and their local communities to learn more

about eating healthy nutrition and also sourcing local food maybe at home, do this through school-based Farm to School events.

So why host an Institute in New York? Like we said, there's already a Northeast Farm to School Institute. New York is a very unique state. It's huge, first of all, and second of all, is home to the largest school district in the country, which is New York City. We also have Buffalo which is another huge urban school district. And of course scattered throughout New York are very small school districts and more rural schools. So our state is a bit more diverse than other states throughout the Northeast. And so our Institute really seeks to address that. And we are trained to work with both those very large urban school districts and those very small rural school districts and school teams. And, and we know the challenges of both and the differences. So, yeah, like I said, we work with each school team individually, and we really try to establish relationships with every member on the school team, in order to get you the resources that you need specific to your school, to your community and to your students.

Institute Benefits & Opportunities



- Special focus on new state Farm to School programs (i.e., 30% Initiative)
- Recognition of diverse New York State schools
- State-specific networking and peer-to-peer mentorship
- Year-long coaching support
- \$5000 Implementation Award for F2S projects

MP: The benefits of participating in the Institute. First of all, there's a special focus on New York state specific Farm to School programs, especially reaching the 30%. So in New York state, as many of you probably know if you can procure 30 percent of your school's lunch food from local sources that you will get a greater reimbursement per lunch going back to your school. And we have been working with the six school teams from this past year. I believe one of them reached the 30% this year. So that is a large focus of the Institute. And other benefits and opportunities is recognition. As I already I already spoke to this but recognition of the diversity of New York state schools, state specific networking and peer to peer mentorship. So now we already have six teams who have gone through this program. And AFT especially we had many connections across the state of different organizations, schools, and experts working in Farm to School programming. And so we're able to connect you with other schools who have already gone through this and other organizations and experts in the field. So, you know, you won't go through this institute and then go back to your corner of the state and not be connected there is a wide range of people who are looking for that networking. We also offer a year long coaching support. So Stephanie and I really act as coaches throughout the year. And like I said, we will set up phone calls with each of you and each of your teams individually. We also go out and conduct a site visit two times to each school throughout the year. And so we're really looking to connect you to the resources that you have asked for. We're always here to discuss your programming with you to answer any questions to connect you to someone in your region. So we act as coaches we're always here for that support which is one of the biggest benefits of being in the Institute. And finally there is a \$5,000 implementation award for your farm to school projects. So when you come to the Institute, you will, hopefully come with some goals in mind with your school team. And then you all will sign what's called an MOU. And you'll write out an action plan for all of your goals and how you will reach them throughout the year. And like I said, Stephanie, and I will also look at that action plan and we'll be working with you to achieve your goals. And so if you have a goal or an action for your school that requires some money that you maybe don't have the funds for yet, that \$5,000 implementation award really is to support you in those projects and to encourage the growth of your specific Farm to School program.

NYS Farm to School Institute

Summer Retreat:
June 1-4, 2020
Omega Institute, Rhinebeck, NY

Call for School Team Applications
Deadline: March 15

The poster features a collage of images: a person working in a garden, a group of people at a table with food, and a large group of people posing in front of a red tractor in a field.

MP: So this year's Summer Retreat will be held from June 1 to 4 at the Omega Institute in Rhinebeck, New York, in the Hudson Valley. It's a very beautiful space. And we will have three days of programming set up for each of the school teams. We're very excited about it. We try to get a very diverse group of speakers, professionals, and cover a wide range of topics. And yeah, it's just a really fun time. So the call for applications this year the deadline will be March 15. And schools will be notified in April if they're accepted. This year we will be taking 10 school teams - last year we took six, this year it will be ten.

Institute Logistics

- Summer Retreat:
 - 3 days, 3 nights at Omega
 - Inclusive meals & lodging
 - School-specific F2S Action Plan Development sessions
- On-site programming: garden-based workshops, guest speakers, Omega open classes.

Courtesy of Omega Institute for Holistic Studies, Rhinebeck, NY, eOmega.org

The poster includes two images: an indoor garden area with various plants and a large, modern building with a glass facade and a swimming pool in the foreground.

So here's some of the logistics and some beautiful pictures of Omega. Like I just said, it's three days and three nights. It's all inclusive of meals and lodging and so all of the sessions will be focused on your school specific Farm to School action planning and development of your existing programs. So you'll have a lot of team time to sit with your team, and focus on your goals for the year, what you want to accomplish, what support you will need from the Institute from the AFT team. And you'll also have many sessions where you'll get to learn as well. So some examples, garden-based workshops, many guest speakers. There's also Omega open classes, they offer yoga, I believe it's yoga and meditation classes. So it's really like a kind of beautiful retreat, and a nice space to be focusing on your farm to school programming.



MP: I just want to highlight some of the work that our school teams from this year have done to get you all excited about the possibilities. And I'm so impressed by this year school teams. This is only a small portion of what some of them have accomplished. And one of the school districts worked with a designer to brand their Farm to School Program, which will be unveiled very soon. And we have high schoolers out in western New York growing hydroponic lettuce and cucumbers as part of their curriculum. Like I said, we had a school who reached the 30% of local food procurement. And they did that through hiring someone to plan ahead and streamline all of their local food purchases. So at the beginning of the year, they already knew that they would reach that that number. Another school district invested in large scale immersion blender so that they could use scratch ingredients from local farms in smoothies for the kids. And another school planted 35 fruit trees. for A school orchard. So really exciting stuff happening across the state. Of course, many schools are holding taste tests in the cafeterias regularly. They are doing New York Thursday programming, building even more connections with local farmers. And so it's just really exciting to feel the energy in the room when they all come back together and to hear what they've been working on and know that there's so many passionate people across the state working in Farm to School.

Who Should Apply?



- Assess your school environment
- Assess capacity and enthusiasm levels from community and school
- Form your school team of 5 participants in different Farm to School roles

MP: So who should apply to the Institute? We are asking this year for school teams. So when you're deciding who will be on your school team, you should think about your school environment. Are you urban, are you rural? What are the demographics of your students, what goals might serve your school and your community and then you'll need to assess the capacity for Farm to School programming and also enthusiasm levels from community and the school. You can be very, very passionate about this work, but it will be best if you have many people who are equally as passionate as you and want to work with you to make your Farm to School goals a reality. And so when you're forming your school team, have we asked for five different participants. It's good to have a nice mix of folks from your school. So maybe like I said, you could have a teacher and administrator, someone from the cafeteria or a food service director. Maybe an ag teacher, if you have a strong ag program. So just think about you know, even It could even be a community members, some schools work with CCE - Cornell Cooperative Extension folks. So just really think about who has invested in your school, who has invested in your existing Farm to School programming if there is any, and who would really add value to the team and help you to achieve your goals?

How & When to Apply

- Visit www.finys.org/institute to complete online application or download and complete Word version.
- Deadline is 5:00 pm, March 15, 2020
- Institute participants notified April 2020



MP: How and when to apply - right here is the link. So you can go right online and you can read the application. You can also download a word version. And this all needs to be filled out by **5pm on March 15**. And like I said, we will notify participants in April if they've been accepted. And there are narrative questions in the application. I believe there's four narrative questions. And we asked the answers say around 250 words or less. And as part of the application this year, we are also asking for a signature from a principal or assistant principal just so we know we have that administrative support as well. The principal at least knows what's happening and is in touch with this portion of school activities.

Questions?



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MP: Okay, so now um, I will open it up to questions. So if you have any questions you can just unmute yourself and ask them where there might be a spot to take them to me. Looks like we have question here - If this was a can districts apply or only individual schools?

SH: Mikaela do you want to answer that?

MP: Sure. Um, so this year, we're asking for individual schools. We may make exceptions if you have a strong case for why you would want to bring the entire district and it could be a very small district that's really only comprised of two very small schools. Whatever your cases, you could contact us individually and let us know why you'd like to attend as a district, but we really are trying to keep it to individual schools. Any other questions?

SH: Okay, I have a question here to see, says my teammates hold some of the same positions as I do in food service. And so can they also be part of my team? Or do - how mixed does the team have to be in terms of educators and food service, staff and administrators?

MP: Okay, great question. It is totally up to you. And you will decide as you're putting together your application, as we review applications, and I will say a more diverse team will definitely add to the strength of your application, but it's not like we're going to see this person has four educators and only one cafeteria staff. We're not going to take them, we're really looking at how well-rounded your application is. And that will only be a piece of what we look at. So we really

encourage you to try and get a diverse just some diversity in your school team, but it's not absolutely necessary if you can't make it happen.

SH: Okay, I have I see we have other questions coming in. You work for a nonprofit farm, would love to have my team apply? We are working with several other schools in the area. My big question I'm running into is how do local farmers get produce into school with such low prices they're competing with?

MP: Well, that is certainly something that we address at the Institute. So when you - I should have mentioned this and the presentation as part of participating in the Institute, we asked you to fill out baseline metrics before you attend, and then you will do a mid-year evaluation and the same metrics form. And then you'll do it again at the end of the year just so we can measure your progress and the overall progress and Farm to School programming across the state. Some of the metrics you'll fill out has to do with where are you procuring your food from? And what are the barriers to purchasing foods directly from local producers? And so in this question, yes, that's definitely a barrier. Some farmers don't have the means to transport their produce. Some of them just cannot sell to school because of, you know, such low prices. There's budgeting issues. So all of these that's a great question to write in your application and say this a barrier. And we will need help addressing this. Stephanie, if you have anything to add feel free.

SH: Yeah, no. And that is that is always the perennial question, right? I mean, what do you think that you could do? And what I'd recommend? I mean, again, I said, I know you mentioned that you already are kind of you already have a team, which is fantastic. If your team includes some of the local farmers and organizations around your area, or even the CCE folk, that is something that we always really encourage. And again, I think it depends on the particular location that you are and you know, we can help you take some steps and kind of figure out where, you know what you what, what you've been doing so far, what barriers like Mikaela said are preventing that maybe you've worked with some of the food hubs around the area. Maybe we could try different solutions. Now. Again, we're not saying we're going to wave a magic wand and everyone getting a lot of local food, it's going to take time. But this specific Institute this program is to help you, you know, set realistic goals for the year and for your two and hopefully five year goals as well. And with the hopes that you know, I would love to see you get more local produce from your farmers and getting them directly to school. But yeah, that is a question that everyone grapples with, you know, when you're competing with these online distributors offering this physical product, so I get it. long winded answer. Yeah. Thank you.

MP: Yeah. Um, okay, great. Next question. Do you have an estimate as to what the acceptance rate may be this year? No, I don't. And maybe Stephanie and Ashlea if they have an idea they can jump in. But um, like I said, we're taking 10 school teams this year, but we really aren't sure how many school teams will apply. So it will be dependent on that.

SH: Last year was 35% rate. But I'm sure you know, we're actually in the reason we got a lot of applications, we only had six position six slots for people. And it was we felt very badly having to turn a lot of people away, which is why we increased it to 10 schools this year. And we do encourage school teams if they are not accepted in this fiscal year to reapply the following year, because like Stephanie said, we do wish we could take every school team. So I mean, we like to stay in touch with the schools and there would be, you know, a chance to take you the following year.

MP: Okay, do you. Is there a copy of this presentation to share to form a team? Yes, this entire webinar is being recorded and Ashlea has more details on this but I believe will be uploaded to the FINYS website so you can watch this entire webinar again. And we can also upload the PowerPoint as well. Any other questions? I also I want to add. So the format of the Institute I focused on the three day Summer Retreat that's happening in June, and Omega and the Hudson Valley. And then I had also mentioned that as part of being a participant in the Institute, you fill out metrics, you know, three times through the year, the beginning the middle and the end, and touched on the coaching, you'll get coaching for an entire year. And we do two site visits per year per school team. And then at the end of the year, I forgot to mention this but at the end of the year, there will be a celebration in the spring, it will be in the Hudson Valley, it is mandatory for your school team to be there. And it's just a really special time where everyone can present back what they have accomplished through the year. Network again with the teams and really build those relationships with other alumni of the program and do some networking and get more ideas and get kind of reinvigorated for the following year because even though this institute is only one year long, we do. Obviously your Farm to School program isn't going to

just be one year long so it will be a good time to set some goals for moving forward in your second year and beyond. Any other questions?

SH: We might want to mention the cost of the program for accepted team.

MP: Yes, so there is if you are accepted as a participant in the Institute, we do ask for a \$300 participation fee, and scholarships are available. If your school needs them, you can get in touch with us again, this is not an application fee anyone can apply. It's free to apply. This is only if you're selected as a participant in order to participate in the year long Institute. It's a \$300 fee per school team. So that includes all five members. Any other questions? So the emails and phone numbers for myself, Stephanie and Ashlea are right here on this slide, please feel free to reach out to me anytime via email. That number you can call you can text during business hours, nine to five, and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have that you didn't think to ask on this webinar. Um, yeah, so just we're really here to answer all questions and to support you in the application process and beyond and we are very excited to be continuing this institute this year. So please reach out to say hi or to touch base or ask questions. Because we're happy to chat.

SH: Great, and I think that is about it. Again, like this, Mikaela mentioned before, it's too if you're interested in, in forming a team and you maybe you have a couple folks on board, but you're, you know, this is something hindering you. Give us a call, we're happy to last year and we'll do it again this year, we're happy to work it through, you know, working through with you to see if this is, you know, a good time to apply, or if you want to wait 'til next year, if there's any other steps that we can help them take to, you know, to form that team. So, you know, we're, we're happy to help like we said, so just give us a call and we can kind of work on to see if this is

MP: Great. Thank you, Stephanie, and thank you everyone for attending. Have a great day.