

Racial and Social Equity Assessment Tool for Farm to School Programs and Policy

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NATIONAL
FARM *to* SCHOOL
NETWORK

Context

Advancing racial and social equity has been a priority for the National Farm to School Network (NFSN) since the organization's founding in 2007. For example, [NFSN's core values](#) include: "Local foods...should be available in all schools to nourish every child, across race and ethnicity, economic standing, or geographic location" and "Our goal is to strengthen the national farm to school movement, while keeping intact the unique flavor and diversity of individual farm to school program sites across the county." Over the years, NFSN has held trainings for NFSN Core and Supporting Partners, Advisory Board, and staff on this priority, including at NFSN Annual Meetings and National Farm to Cafeteria Conferences, and in 2017 began hosting monthly staff equity calls, hired an equity consultant to advise across the organization, and developed [NFSN's equity commitment statement](#). In 2018, we aimed to move from conversations and trainings to action, and thus the Racial and Social Equity Assessment Tool for Farm to School Programs and Policy was developed.

Introduction

This resource is intended to help advance National Farm to School Network's racial and social equity priority by increasing our understanding of the work in the context of structural, institutional, and interpersonal racism. This tool is designed to be utilized by our national staff, Core and Supporting Partners, Advisory Board, and farm to school stakeholders to:

- Increase our capacity to identify racial and social inequities embedded within organizational, local, state, and national programming and policy advocacy initiatives,
- Support decision making processes which maximize opportunities for advancing racial and social equity,
- Create a community of practice to empower us to take action within our sphere of influence, and,
- Embrace our collective power to address the systemic changes needed for social transformation within the farm to school movement.

Guide for the Reader

NFSN is committed to advancing both racial equity and social equity, and as such we are deliberate in our decision to call out the various inequities rather than working towards a singular concept of equity. This tool embraces the complexities of addressing diverse inequalities within one tool, and therefore we suggest that you be intentional with your use of this tool by utilizing the implementation process outlined below.

- 1. Establish shared language.** Review the Racial Equity Tools Glossary for a comprehensive glossary of equity terms NFSN uses when engaging in this work. This can be found at www.racialequitytools.org.
- 2. Foster an environment for equity.** Have each member of your team complete Section 1 to assess potential impacts of internal priorities and practices on advancing equity with farm to school.
- 3. Plan for equitable outcomes.** Have each member of your team complete Section 2 to analyze the environmental context and potential systemic implications of your initiative.
- 4. Develop a collective action plan.** Engage in group dialogue around the responses to questions within Sections 1 and 2 to develop a participatory strategy for advancing equity in farm to school through a selected program or policy initiative.
- 5. Evaluate for equitable outcomes.** As a group, complete the tables in Section 3 to assess potential equity outcomes for the selected program or policy initiative. This section can also be used to assess existing programs or policies, and partners' programming and policy efforts.
- 6. Reflect and repeat.** Engage in group dialogue to address the findings from the equity assessment checklist. If needed, adjust programming/policy advocacy and repeat steps 3-5 to develop a strategy for advancing equity in farm to school.

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Section 1: Fostering an Environment for Equity

Engaging in racial and social equity work is a journey; progress is not linear and we can never become “experts” in this work. As practitioners we learn, practice, reflect, and repeat. This section is intended to support this process by providing a framework for individual and group assessment of organizational priorities and practices.

How to use this section:

This section should first be completed by all team members separately, then discussed in a group format. The following questions support team members to think critically about the intentions, impact, and long-term equity outcomes of specific programming and policy initiatives.

The information gleaned from this dialogue will help establish team action opportunities for addressing potential inequalities embedded within the organizational culture that could present barriers to advancing equity through programming and policy initiatives.

Organizational Equity Priorities

This set of questions helps clarify organizational priorities for advancing racial and social equity. In addition, these questions provide a foundation for strategy development and collective action planning.

1. What are some examples of racial and social inequities in the farm to school movement?
2. What current qualitative or quantitative data are we collecting that might measure these inequities?
3. Are certain groups disproportionately impacted by the inequities?
Consider racial identity, language, gender, socio-economic status (SES), access to broadband, LGBTQIA status, (dis)ability, employment status, immigration status, education level, geography, environment, religious beliefs, culture, history of incarceration, etc.
4. What are the root causes creating these racial and social inequities?
Examples: Bias in process (e.g., implicit bias in selecting which organizations become partners); lack of access or barriers (e.g., barriers to farm to school funding or staffing); lack of racially and socially inclusive engagement (e.g., lack of racially and socially diverse partners).
5. What factors may be perpetuating these inequities?
6. What outcomes can be defined that would address the most important examples of racial and social inequities in the farm to school movement?
7. What are some immediate strategies (including partnerships, programming, and policy advocacy) to address inequities?
8. What are some strategies (including partnerships, programming, and policy advocacy) to address root causes of inequities?

Organizational Culture

The intention of these questions is to assess the alignment of organizational culture and capacity with the strategies determined for advancing racial and social equity in farm to school.

1. How do you currently work to address racial and social equities in your position?
2. How do you assess your progress in meeting your racial and social equity goals in your position?
3. What are some SMART goals for your future work to address racial and social equities within the farm to school movement? (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time bound)
4. What existing internal policies may present barriers to aligning your equity goals with the organizational culture? (e.g., hiring practices, staffing structure, financial policies, board structure)
5. What existing internal practices may present barriers to aligning your equity goals with the organizational culture? (e.g., office culture, workplace environment, community accountability)
6. What are the existing internal policies or practices that amplify or support the alignment of your equity goals with the organizational culture?
7. What additional capacity will you need to implement equity advancement strategies? (e.g., partners, staffing, knowledge, funding)
8. What existing capacities are supporting you to implement equity advancement strategies?

Alignment with NFSN Values

This list of questions is meant to assure that programming and policy advocacy align with NFSN's mission, vision, values, and strategic priorities.

1. How are the potential impacts aligned with NFSN's core values (Appendix C)?
2. How does the process reflect NFSN's equity commitment (Appendix B)?
3. How does the initiative benefit farm to school stakeholders?
4. How does the initiative benefit NFSN Core and Supporting Partners?
5. How does the initiative align with NFSN's Strategic Plan?

Section 2: Planning for Equitable Outcomes

Equitable outcomes cannot be achieved without equitable processes. This section provides a space for individual and group reflection on the importance of community stakeholder engagement in programming and policy advocacy. We define community stakeholders as those most directly impacted by the proposed initiative, and acknowledge that these groups are disproportionately impacted by inequitable outcomes.

How to use this section:

This section should first be completed by all team members separately, then discussed in a group format to ensure that foundational decision-making processes are inclusive of diverse understandings and opinions.

Equitable Stakeholder Engagement

The intention of these questions is to ensure that community stakeholders are active in creating equitable program and policy solutions carried out in authentic partnership by NFSN staff and partners.

1. What do your conversations with stakeholders tell you about existing racial and social inequities that influence farm to school and NFSN's scope of work?
 - a. How are stakeholders actively engaged in the advancement of racial and social equity?
 - b. What can you learn from their strategies or tactics?
2. How do you engage community members as key stakeholders in decision-making processes regarding advancing equity in program and policy initiatives?
 - a. Are those who are disproportionately impacted by racial and social inequalities in the food system centered in your efforts?
 - b. What steps have been taken to ensure engagement of community leaders throughout the process?
3. What other organizations or institutions are engaged in advancing equity within the farm to school movement or engaged in racial and social equity work that overlaps with the farm to school sector?
 - a. At what level are these groups focusing their efforts? (e.g., national, local, community-based, sovereign nations)
 - b. Are they representative of the populations they serve?
4. Which farm to school partner organizations are not engaged, and which stakeholder groups are missing from your efforts to advance racial and social equity in farm to school?
 - a. How can we meaningfully engage these partners and stakeholders?
 - b. What opportunities are there for direct representation of diverse voices?
5. What internal policies or structures are in place to ensure that diverse stakeholders are engaged in the development of program and policy initiatives?

Outcomes and Sustainability

These questions provide an opportunity to reflect on the environmental context and potential systemic implications of implementing the proposed program or policy.

1. Are we the appropriate organization to be carrying forward this program or policy?
2. Are we unintentionally reducing funding for another organization who may be more appropriate for implementing this program or policy?
3. Is this program or policy adequately funded to achieve its designed equity goals?
4. Are there clear benchmarks and timelines for short-term and long-term success embedded within this program or policy?
5. Have benchmarks been developed in partnership with those impacted by the program or policy?
6. How will you communicate the racial and social inequities addressed in this program or policy?

Impacts and Accountability

These questions ensure that policies proposed and endorsed are successful in creating meaningful long-term change and are accountable to racially and socially diverse communities.

1. How would different racial and social groups, sovereign nations, and stakeholders be impacted (either positively or negatively) if this policy were enacted or implemented as written?
2. What additional barriers might prevent individuals in certain racial/social groups from benefiting fully if this policy were implemented as written?
3. Does the policy language explicitly address racial and social equity?
4. Are mechanisms in place to ensure successful implementation, enforcement, and evaluation of this policy?
5. Is there a process for those impacted by the policy to provide feedback and solutions to ensure that concerns and strengths are met?
6. Are there provisions to ensure public accountability of policy implementers and enforcers?
7. What partner organizations endorse this policy? Do they work to advance equity?

Section 3: Group Equity Assessment

These questions will help groups assess the equity outcomes that could result from specific programming and policy advocacy. This tool can be used to evaluate existing initiatives or the development of new programming and policy advocacy proposals. In addition, this exercise helps NFSN staff and partners articulate the benefits of crafting and endorsing farm to school initiatives in terms of racial and social equity.

How to use this section:

Select one program or policy and engage in group assessment using the checklists provided. Table A can be used to evaluate programs or policies being proposed by your organization, or for initiatives proposed for endorsement by partners. If the initiative is farm to school specific, please complete both Tables A and B.

Once the assessment is complete, engage the team in group dialogue around the findings and comments in the notes section of the tables below. The information gleaned from this dialogue should be used to establish team action opportunities for addressing potential inequalities embedded within the proposed initiative.

While the ultimate goal is for every answer in this assessment to be “yes,” the reality is that specific programs and policies will not address every type of inequity in the food system. Spend extra time addressing the questions where “no” was the selected answer and analyze opportunities for implementing strategies that could shift the answers to “yes.”

Table A: Food System Program or Policy Initiative

Program or Policy:			
	Yes	No	How or Why?
Could this program or policy lead to greater access to healthy, affordable, and/or sustainably produced food in communities of color or socially disadvantaged* communities?			
Could this program or policy lead to greater production of healthy, affordable, and/or sustainably produced food in communities of color or socially disadvantaged* communities?			
Do people of color or socially disadvantaged* individuals have a greater opportunity to remain or become economically sustainable farms as a result of this program or policy?			
Will communities of color or socially disadvantaged* communities have greater control over food system resources as a result of this program or policy?			
Do communities of color or socially disadvantaged* communities have greater and more meaningful opportunities to build wealth through the food system as a result of this program or policy?			
Do communities of color or socially disadvantaged* communities have more stable and safe jobs in the food system as a result of this program or policy?			
Will this program or policy work towards providing living wages for food system jobs disproportionately held by people of color?			
Does this program or policy target beneficial outcomes for food system workers regardless of immigration status ?			
Does this program or policy allow Native communities to exert food sovereignty ? (e.g., control over local food systems, tribal food codes, tribal policies)			

Continued on next page

Table A: Food System Program or Policy Initiative, continued

Program or Policy:			
	Yes	No	How or Why?
Does this program or policy strengthen and support Native foodways ? (e.g., traditional foods, foraging methods, processing and preservation techniques)			
Does the program or policy have targeted impacts for a specific community of color or socially disadvantaged* community? If so, then list.			
Are targeted communities of color or socially disadvantaged* communities engaged in the development and implementation of this program or policy?			
Does the program or policy explicitly include a strategy for direct representation of community stakeholders?			
Are there components of this program or policy that may unintentionally further racial and social inequities ? (e.g., in the way partners are selected or funding is distributed)			
If we create this program or achieve this policy, could it create immediate change in how the food system affects communities of color or socially disadvantaged* communities?			
If we create this program or achieve this policy, could it create systemic change in how the food system affects communities of color or socially disadvantaged* communities?			

* The deficit-based term “socially disadvantaged” was used intentionally to align with federal classifications. Socially disadvantaged individuals are those who have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice or cultural bias because of their identities as members of groups without regard to their individual qualities. Small Business Act (15 USC 637).

Questions in this table are adapted from the following source: Giancattarino, A., & Noor, S. (2014, July 17). Building the Case for Racial Equity in the Food System. New York, NY: The Center for Social Inclusion. Retrieved July, 2018, from <http://www.centerforsocialinclusion.org/publication/building-the-case-for-racial-equity-in-the-food-system/>.

Table B: Farm to School Program or Policy Initiative

Program or Policy:			
	Yes	No	How or Why?
Would this program or policy lead to greater access to gardens in schools and early care education (ECE) sites for communities of color or socially disadvantaged* communities?			
Would this program or policy lead to greater access to locally produced foods for schools and ECE sites serving communities of color or socially disadvantaged* communities?			
Would this program or policy lead to greater access to indigenous, ceremonial, and/or cultural foods for schools and ECE sites serving communities of color or socially disadvantaged* communities?			
Does this program or policy create new opportunities for careers within the school food value chain within communities of color or socially disadvantaged* communities? (e.g., marketing, processing, distribution)			
Would this program or policy lead to greater access to culturally appropriate education related to food, nutrition, and/or agriculture for children in communities of color or socially disadvantaged* communities?			
Does this program or policy directly address the needs and desires expressed by community stakeholders?			
Does this program or policy support local leadership within schools in communities of color or socially disadvantaged* communities?			
Does this program or policy allow communities of color and socially disadvantaged* communities to adapt implementation to local needs and desires?			
Was this program or policy developed through partnership with and engagement of community stakeholders?			
Does this program or policy include a plan for ongoing engagement of stakeholders throughout implementation to support community-based evaluation?			

* The deficit-based term “socially disadvantaged” was used intentionally to align with federal classifications. Socially disadvantaged individuals are those who have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice or cultural bias because of their identities as members of groups without regard to their individual qualities. Small Business Act (15 USC 637).

Acknowledgements

This tool is being released as an updated version in April 2019. The original version of this tool was developed and released by NFSN in August 2018.

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This tool draws from work and equity assessment tools including the following: The Center for Social Inclusion's [Building the Case for Racial Equity in the Food System](#) report, Dismantling Racism Works' [Taking Action for Racial Justice Toolkit](#), the Greenlining Institute's [Racial Equity Toolkit](#), and the Race and Social Justice Initiative's [Racial Equity Toolkit to Assess Policies, Initiatives, Programs, and Budget Issues](#).

Appendix A

Racial Equity Tools Glossary

National Farm to School Network recommends referencing www.racialequitytools.org's glossary, developed by MP Associates and Center for Assessment and Policy Development. The glossary can be accessed at <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>.

Appendix B

National Farm to School Network Core Values

The National Farm to School Network is bound together by the vision that vibrant local and regional food systems are essential to the health of our children, farms, environment, economy, and communities. The National Farm to School Network was established in the spirit of inclusivity and collaboration to promote farm to school programs by leveraging shared resources, ideas, and strategies, and engage in creative problem solving. In representing the National Farm to School Network, participating individuals and organizations share these core values:

1. Local and regional* food systems, which use environmentally sound, sustainable, and just approaches to food production, processing, transportation, and marketing, are an essential part of the efforts to create healthy schools, healthy foods, healthy economies, and healthy communities.
2. Local foods, sustainably produced and processed, should be available in all schools to nourish every child, across race and ethnicity, economic standing, and geographic location. In order for children to develop to their full potential, they need access to local and healthy foods, the opportunity to learn how to eat healthfully, and to develop a connection to their source of food.
3. Those involved in the production, processing, packaging, distribution, and serving of food deserve living wages, safe working conditions, equal opportunities for marketing, value addition and distribution, across race and ethnicity, economic standing, size of operations, and geographic location.
4. Our goal is to strengthen the national farm to school movement, while keeping intact the unique flavor and diversity of individual farm to school program sites across the country. As such, the National Farm to School Network does not recommend, prescribe, or impose a list of practices or products for farm to school. We recommend establishing relationships between local foods and school children by way of including, but not limited to:
 - Local products in school meals – breakfast, lunch, afterschool snacks.
 - Local products in classrooms – snacks, taste tests, educational tools.
 - Local foods related curriculum development and experiential learning opportunities through school gardens, farm tours, farmers in the classroom sessions, chefs in the classroom, culinary education, educational sessions for parents and community members, visits to farmers' markets.
5. We strive to operate democratically in making decisions that affect our collective work. We seek to build mutual trust and respect for everyone within and outside the network.

* Individual programs define "local or regional" to fit their conditions for implementing a farm to school approach.

Appendix C

National Farm to School Network Equity Commitment

As a network of farm to school stakeholders and partners in all 50 states, Washington, D.C. and U.S. Territories, the National Farm to School Network has the opportunity to partner alongside communities to address inequities in the food system. We hold significant collective potential to advance racial and social equity as a central tenet to organizational programming, partnerships, and policies, which enables accomplishment of our vision and strengthening of the farm to school movement.

We acknowledge that prioritizing racial and social equity in our network structure, programming, and operations is only a start. We are acutely aware of our shortcomings and barriers to progress, including the lack of leaders of color in farm to school and challenges coordinating efforts across the network. Our activities need to be informed and vetted by each partner organization but at the same time, the network as a collaborative entity has a role and responsibility in the movement to push uncomfortable conversations and bring equity to the forefront of all work.

While we are experts in farm to school, we still have much to learn about racial and social equity. We recognize that each individual among our staff and partners understands and approaches the need for racial and social equity differently. Concurrently, we must focus on internal organizational changes needed to emerge with a common understanding and advocacy approach to foster a more inclusive, equity promoting network. Our role is to facilitate deeper discussions and engagement with our partners and stakeholders to address racial and social inequities through farm to school. We strive to be transparent in our intent, approach and capacity to advance racial and social equity within the farm to school movement.

To learn more visit: www.farmtoschool.org/equity

