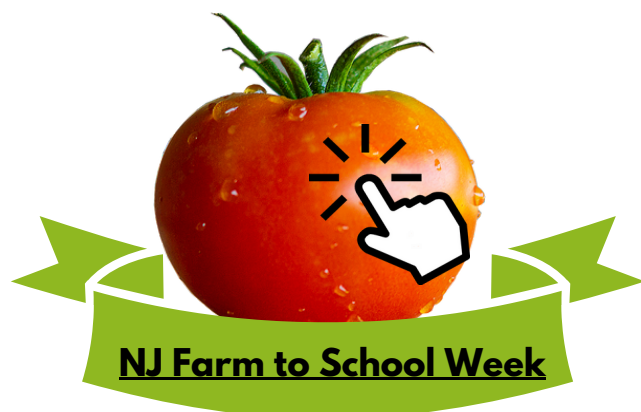




A Quarterly Newsletter from the NJ Department of Agriculture
Farm to Everything Program

SEPTEMBER



OCTOBER



FRESH FARM TO SCHOOL SPIRIT WEEK SEPT. 22nd - 26th, 2025

Muddy Monday

- ✓ Plant seeds and watch them grow!



Tasting Tuesday

- ✓ Feature Jersey Fresh produce in a tasting or on the menu



**TASTE TEST
STICKERS**

Wellness Wednesday

Become a "Farm to School Top Chef" use the NJ Seasonality Chart and show us the recipe you created



Traveling Thursday

- ✓ Map out how far your lunch food has traveled or plan a Farm to Table lunch using a NJ map

Farmer Friday

- ✓ Dress up as a farmer.
- ✓ Invite a farmer or food producer to eat with students in the lunchroom.



TOP TOMATO FALL 2025

SHINING A SPOTLIGHT ON THOSE MAKING
A DIFFERENCE IN FARM TO SCHOOL

Rachel Johnson
Food Service Director, New Brunswick, NJ



When Rachel Johnson first joined the New Brunswick School District as a FoodCorps member, she was seeking a way to reconnect with her passion for nutrition. What she didn't anticipate was how profoundly the experience would reignite that passion—and reshape her outlook. "I thought I was coming here to teach the students," she often reflects, "but they ended up teaching me just as much."

One of the standout features of Rachel Johnson's work in New Brunswick has been her involvement in the district's innovative Farm to School efforts. From bringing locally sourced foods into cafeterias to introducing students to unique seasonal items like Asian pears and kiwi berries, the commitment to fresh, local produce is woven into daily student experiences. Through programs like the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP), students are regularly introduced to new flavors—and encouraged to explore them with curiosity.

Rachel credits much of this success to the incredible support system surrounding her, including her Aramark teammates, FoodCorps partners, and the school community. Key contributors like Eric Wiggins (General Manager), Bianca Mitchell (Manager), Billy Cole (Manager), Nick DiBartolomeo (Chef Manager), and Deirdre McManus (District Manager) and kitchen staff have played essential roles in building and sustaining these impactful programs.

The experience has also been transformative for Rachel personally. While she arrived confident in her nutrition expertise, she admits gardening was unfamiliar territory. "This role has helped me connect with the full life cycle of food—from seed to table," she says. "Seeing students harvest vegetables they've helped grow is an experience that never gets old."

Beyond the gardens and classrooms, family and community engagement has become a central focus. Rachel and her team host nutrition talks to share strategies for reducing sodium and added sugar in meals and promote access to farmers markets that accept EBT to make local produce more affordable and accessible for families.

In partnership with organizations like FoodCorps and America's Grow-a-Row, the team also facilitates hands-on educational experiences—from garden lessons and cooking demos to taste tests that spotlight New Jersey-grown favorites such as corn, tomatoes, and blueberries.

Rachel's work in New Brunswick is more than just a job—it's a dynamic mission to ignite curiosity, empower students, and foster lifelong wellness. "Keeping your passion alive is so important," she reflects. "You never know how it might spark something in someone else."





FARM TO SCHOOL

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT 101

Registration is now open!



REGISTER HERE:

- October 8, 2025 [Click Here](#) for Bridgewater
- October 15, 2025 [Click Here](#) for Blackwood
- October 22, 2025 [Click Here](#) for Pittstown

WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

- 👤 Teachers
- 🍏 Food Service Staff
- 🤝 School Community Partners

WHAT'S INCLUDED:

- ✓ Mini Farm to School Academy experience
- ✓ Actionable steps & planning tools
- ✓ Hands-on activities:
- ✓ Small group discussions
- ✓ Collaboration across roles & sectors
- 🤝 Work together to share ideas, address challenges, and build sustainable Farm to School programs in your community.

The workshop is funded through the USDA Farm to School Formula Grant.



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DIVISION OF FOOD & NUTRITION
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