902 N. Mangum Street, Durham, NC 27701
(919) 701-2543
info@farmerfoodshare.org
farmerfoodshare.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Jan. 15th, 2025

MEDIA CONTACT
Elizabeth Figgie | ElizabethF@farmerfoodshare.org

FOOD HUB SUPPLIES DURHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS WITH FRESH, LOCAL PRODUCE: SCHOOL DINING SERVICES SUPPORT NC FARMERS AND FEED STUDENTS LOCAL FOOD

Durham, NC— Farmer Foodshare is thrilled to announce its new local food procurement contract with Durham Public School (DPS), launched at the beginning of schoolyear 2024-2025. With new initiatives to provide more NC-grown food through school dining services, not only will students in Durham County have access to nutritious, locally grown produce throughout the week, but area farmers will also benefit from this investment in our local economy. Linden Thayer, Assistant Director for Food Systems Planning at Durham Public Schools says, "We are committed to providing students with what they need to be successful at school, and this new menu is an important step in ensuring students have access to quality nutrition. Working with Farmer Foodshare and sourcing from local producers means we can provide healthy food for our students while supporting the greater community."

Pallets of fresh, local produce are prepared for delivery at the Farmer Foodshare warehouse.

Farmer Foodshare, a nonprofit food hub based in Durham, sources fresh food year-round from North Carolina farms, prioritizing small and historically marginalized producers and creating new revenue opportunities by aggregating their products and selling them to local institutions.

Farmer Foodshare's sourcing network includes 70+ growers across the state, who can supply year-round local food, so when the opportunity arose to partner with DPS for the next five years to provide Durham students access to fresh, NC-grown produce, the team was eager to submit a proposal to the District. "This partnership is really exciting. It means there are growing opportunities for local farmers to scale their businesses, which is exactly what our goal is at Farmer Foodshare. We are grateful to be doing business with DPS. They've been incredible partners for many years, and we are delighted to be providing their students with excellent food from our farmers." -David Szczepankowski, Director of Operations

Farmer Foodshare Director of Operations, David Szczepankowski unloads a delivery of apples from Deal Orchards at the DPS warehouse.

DPS has been working intently for years updating in-school food options that better serve students and the local economy. With a new whole-food-focused menu that launched early September, DPS has already made big strides in their commitment to provide healthier meals and support our state's farmers. School Meals for All, an effort of DPS School Nutrition Services, provides free daily breakfast and lunch to all students, regardless of family income or school assignment, and the program was designed around the use of fresh, locally sourced ingredients. With the district's plans for a more homegrown future, Farmer Foodshare's near-decade of aggregating millions of pounds of locally sourced food, the partnership is a favorable collaboration for both organizations.

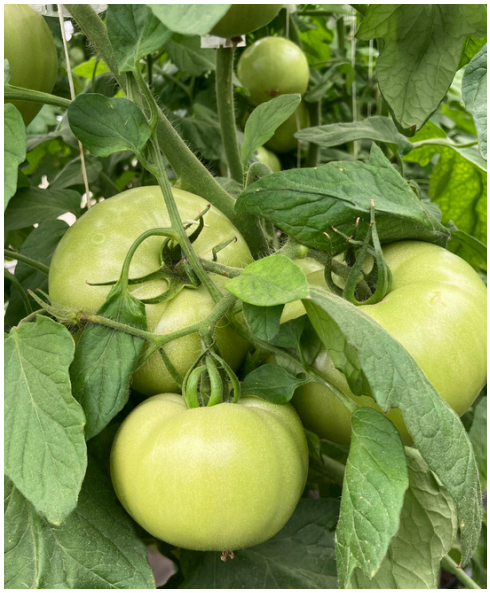
DPS first received Farmer Foodshare produce for the new menu just one week into the school year back in September, and now, the food hub is making its first deliveries for spring semester. Distribution associates deliver pallets of fresh fruits and vegetables grown all over the state — apples and pears from orchards in the west, chopped kale prepared by ByWay Foods in Warrenton, melons and peaches from down East, and a range of other fresh, seasonal foods.

Orders are delivered to the DPS warehouse in East Durham, where Paul Johnson, warehouse manager [pictured below], divvies up and reloads smaller orders onto DPS delivery trucks before they arrive at individual elementary, middle, and high schools.

Farmer Foodshare sources fresh produce from 70+ NC farmers, including value-added products like fresh-cut vegetables from ByWay Foods in Warren County.

DPS Warehouse Manager, Paul Johnson, receives produce orders and prepares them for delivery at individual schools.

Keeping such large quantities of food central to one location takes significant logistical pressure off cafeteria managers. Weekly shipments of produce will continue until school lets out for the summer in June 2025 before gearing up again next fall. Investing in getting locally sourced ingredients on school menus poses significant impacts for DPS students and beyond. With about one in six children lacking access to sufficient meals in NC, school dining services can provide students with essential nutrition on a regular basis. With new initiatives in place, the number of students receiving consistent, nutrient-dense meals will measurably increase.



Tomatoes ripen on the vine at Lee's Produce, one of the farmers in Farmer Foodshare's network, in Benson, NC.

Of course, feeding early learners locally grown produce supports dozens of NC farmer families as well. DPS's partnership with Farmer Foodshare is expected to invest millions of dollars in the greater Triangle foodshed over the next five years. "This will be a game changer for our farmers," said Kelly Crane, Farmer Foodshare Executive Director. "When larger institutions make a multiyear commitment like this, we can really move the needle for our agricultural communities." Local farmers, especially within historically marginalized demographics, face many obstacles when breaking into wholesale markets, and the support of an organization like Farmer Foodshare and purchasing partners like DPS, bridges the gap between small-scale growers and new end markets. DPS has purchased some produce from Farmer Foodshare for a number of years, but securing a contract at this scale is a huge win for local farmers. Plus, the ripple effects will help feed eaters in the wider Triangle foodshed. Revenue from the contract will bolster Farmer Foodshare's food access programs, helping feed community members experiencing food insecurity through various hunger relief initiatives.

Farmer Foodshare is proud to be a part of bringing this initiative to life and looks forward to supplying local schools with fresh, local produce while generating more business for NC farmers.

Farmer Foodshare will supply Durham Public schools with locally grown fruits and vegetables for in-school dining services for the next five years.

INQUIRES & IMAGES

For image and interview requests, please contact Elizabeth Figgie, Communications & Marketing Manager, at ElizabethF@farmerfoodshare.org.

ABOUT FARMER FOODSHARE

Farmer Foodshare is a Triangle-based food hub whose mission is to increase access to fresh, local food for all and to support the viability of marginalized NC farmers to create an equitable food system.

Farmer Foodshare is located at 902 N. Mangum Street in Durham. It is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and led by Executive Director Kelly Crane. For more information, please visit farmerfoodshare.org.