

## Executive Summary

In February of 2022, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MO DESE), Missouri Department of Agriculture (MDA), Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS), and University of Missouri (MU) Extension met with staff from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to start a strategic planning process that would inform the State agencies as to why Farm to School (F2S) and Farm to Early Childhood Education (ECE) participation was falling behind in the State of Missouri, according to the USDA F2S Census from 2019.

The Strategic Planning team, made up of staff from the above-mentioned agencies, began meeting on a weekly basis and established core values to guide them. The main purpose of the process would be to hear feedback from stakeholders in MO to set a F2S/ECE vision, determine root causes of under participation in F2S, and identify solutions that the State agencies could then act upon.

In May 2022, the Strategic Planning team held two virtual meetings with stakeholders in MO; the first was to develop a vision statement, and the second was to identify root causes of low F2S/ECE participation in MO. The products of these virtual meetings were distilled by the Strategic Planning team to create a draft vision statement and to fully extract the six root causes that had reemerging themes across all comments made by attendees.

In June and July of 2022, the Strategic Planning team hit the road and held seven in-person listening sessions (and one virtual). The two main overarching goals of these meetings were to engage with local communities in order to 1) Refine the vision statement; and 2) Determine the solutions to the six identified root causes of low F2S/ECE participation in Missouri. Participants prioritized these solutions to give the State agencies a clearer picture of how the vision could be achieved.

When the in-person listening sessions were complete, the Strategic Planning team came up with a final vision statement and prepared the Final Report with seven recommendations for Missouri's State agencies to advance F2S/ECE.

### Vision Statement:

Every Missouri community benefits when children enjoy fresh, culturally relevant local food provided by nearby producers and actively learn about food, nutrition, and agriculture. Youth develop healthy eating habits from a young age, they perform well in school, and the local farm economy thrives into the next generation and beyond.

### Recommendations:

- 1) F2S/ECE, nutrition, and school food service should be prioritized at the highest levels of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- 2) Missouri schools and ECE sites should increase the number of F2S/ECE educational opportunities for students
- 3) Elected officials and policymakers across Missouri should act to incentivize F2S/ECE through State-level policy changes
- 4) Create a F2S/ECE mentorship program
- 5) Extension staff should support opportunities for F2S/ECE stakeholders to connect and work with them to problem solve
- 6) State agencies should establish a centralized resource hub and communication strategy for F2S/ECE for stakeholders

- 7) State agencies should ensure clear, concise guidance exists concerning the regulations and requirements surrounding F2S/ECE in Missouri

With these final recommendations in mind, it is up to the State agencies of Missouri and their partnering organizations and stakeholders to carry this work forward. To do that, they will need to consider structure of workgroups/interactions and the manner of collaboration. This will be critical to staying engaged with stakeholders. Actions such as applying for grant opportunities and measuring collective impact will be imperative in being able to showcase the work that happens as a result of Missouri prioritizing, and acting upon, the findings that resulted from this process.