

What is a School Farm?

A school farm is a magical place where students come to learn about growing food to develop practical skills with real-life farmers. The students work beside farmers learning to grow and harvest food. The food from the farm goes toward school meal programs, community food programs and other farm to plate opportunities. Students get hands-on learning education, job skills training and improved mental health and education outcomes. Below are some examples of school farms in BC.

Examples of School Farms in BC

Seed the City

Seed the City is a program for high school students in Victoria where they can gain work experience in gardening and farming, earn credits towards graduation, and become part of the local food movement in their city. During the school year, students participate in hands-on learning at the school farm sites where they help to grow food for school meal programs. The micro-farms are managed by LifeCycles and the food is then sold to school meal programs with revenues being used to help cover maintenance costs.



During the summer, LifeCycles delivers an 8-week Work Experience Course where students earn high school credits by growing, cooking, and selling food that is produced on school grounds and participating in field trips and workshops at local farms. This project is run by a Lifecycles Project Society non-profit (Lifecycles Project Society) in partnership with two school districts (SD61 and SD62) and a local urban agriculture business (TopSoil). The goal is to help transform under-utilized school grounds into learning environments that can produce nutritious food for students and their families.

Fresh Roots Schoolyard Market Garden

Fresh Roots is a non-profit organization working with school communities in the lower mainland towards Good Food For All where everyone deserves access to healthy food, land, and community. The organizations work towards this vision by cultivating engaging gardens and programs that catalyze healthy eating, ecological stewardship, and community celebration.



Since 2011, Fresh Roots started the first schoolyard market gardens in Canada, fostered leadership and employment training through schoolyard farm programming, offered food literacy professional development for BC's educators, distributed delicious, freshly grown food into schools and local communities, and provided an inspirational voice in our community.

Farm Roots

This [Mini school farm](#) is located on eight acres of land in Delta, and is an innovative, one-of-a-kind school that directly links students to the multifaceted agricultural industry. While earning dual credits towards high school graduation and graduation from Kwantlen Polytechnic University, students designed, planned and built a learning farm at a small school set on 8 acres. Grade 10-12 students attend Farm Roots every second day, and their regular school on the other days.



Farm Roots allows students to inquire deeply into their interests or passions in a setting that is outdoors, cross-curricular, hands-on, and 'real-life'. Students learn deeply and broadly about food systems and resource management with a focus on innovative sustainability and agricultural sciences. Students are provided with unique skills applicable to varied and burgeoning career paths, as well as the competencies in demand from today's employers: leadership, collaboration, creativity, problem-solving, and communication. Farm Roots also tackles the issue of ethical and environmentally sustainable food security.

Components of a School Farm

The examples above showcase different types of school farms in BC. While every school farm is unique, some components are similar across each school farm. These are some areas to consider when submitting your [Letter of Intent](#).

Curriculum

- All school farms have a course attached to them. These courses can be Board/Authority Authorized Courses, culinary arts, or home economics courses attached to the farm. High school students can get applied credit for working on the farm.

Local Food Supply

- Fresh local food supply that can go into school meal and cooking programs. All school farms can sell food grown to the school, parents, and the broader community.

Job Opportunities

- Each farm offers an opportunity for job skills training in the field of agriculture, value-added food processing, and marketing and sales. Some models offer employment for students who take courses during the fall and winter semester and then work through the summer at the farm.

Agreement between all parties

- All school farms have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the school district or independent school board and non-profit organizations or farmers. These MOUs outline the partnership and responsibilities of all those involved. If you are a successful grant recipient, we will be able to provide you with a template MOU used by school farm projects in BC to adapt.

Benefits of School Farms

In our experience, these are some of the amazing benefits we've seen from school farms:

Students

- There is a wide range of benefits to students who participate in school farms including increased mental health, confidence building, feeling more connected to school and community. There are also nutrition and physical health benefits, as most programs provide local fresh food to the school and students get regular daily activity. These programs have shown to be especially beneficial to students that do not excel in competitive settings. Finally, there is a range of job skill benefits that students receive.



Teachers

- The BC curriculum focuses on hands-on learning and mental health. Bringing students into the school farm can be an easy connection to these curriculum areas. We've seen teachers connect school farm activities to home economics, arts courses, English courses, math courses and everything in between. Teachers also get a mental health benefit by being outside.

School Districts or Independent School Boards

- School farms have been shown to build intellectual, human, social and career development of students. From participating in the farm, students develop a lifelong appreciation of learning, a curiosity about the world around them, and a capacity for creative thought and expression. There is a strong correlation between outdoor learning and the development of a sense of self-worth and personal initiative. Students who participate in school farms develop effective work habits and the flexibility to deal with change in the workplace.



Policies or Challenges to Consider When Starting a School Farm

In our experience, some policies may be a challenge to start a school farm. These include:

School Grounds Policies

School districts or independent school boards must work with facilities to ensure all parties are supportive of the school farm. Some policy areas may require revising.

Fencing Requirements

- Chain-link fences can be expensive and leak lead into school farms. There are different types of affordable fence options, depending on the location of the schools.

Water Access in the Summer

- Many schools shut off the water during the summer. It is important to have a plan set with facilities to keep the water on during the summer for the school farm.

Growing on School Land

- Some municipalities restrict agriculture activities to specific city zones. It is important to understand the policies that could restrict the growing and selling of food on school land.

Procurement Policy

Municipal and/or School District/Independent School Board Sale Policies

- Some school districts or independent school boards do not allow for the selling of food grown on school sites, while other schools have procurement contracts that do not allow food sourced outside of these contracts. These policies will hinder the farm's ability to be successful and allow students access to the fresh healthy food grown on the school farm site.

Administration and Teacher Engagement

Senior management champions and facilities are important to the success of school farms. Teachers also play a role in the farm's success. When beginning to think about a school that could host the farm, it is important to consider if the school has a meal program or culinary arts program, if there is an applied credit course or other courses that allows a teacher time to support curriculum linkages to the farm.

