

## *Wisconsin Farm to School Newsletter*

*Project: I helped revive the Wisconsin Farm to School Newsletter that connects and supports garden education efforts. We expanded the reach of this newsletter to include Farm to Early Childcare and Education (ECE). I coordinated content from multiple contributors to send out two newsletters a month.*

### *Goals of Farm to School Steering Committee:*

- *Send out two editions of the newsletter per month.*
- *Re-engage audience from previous iteration of listserv at Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP).*
- *Connect educators, farmers, and administrators with resources, funding, and stories that support integrating education, childcare, and community with socio-economically equitable and ecologically resilient food production.*

### *Collaborators:*

*Farm to School Steering Committee, including:*

*Jill Carlson Groendyk, Farm to Early Care and Education Trainer*

*Beth Hanna, Farm to School Coordinator, Community GroundWorks*

*Vanessa Herald, Farm to Institution Specialist, Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems*

*Renata Solan, Communications Manager, Community GroundWorks*

*Marlie Wilson, Farm to School Program Coordinator, DATCP*

### *Project Background*

*I love working with little kids. I was recommended to reach out to Beth, because she was helping lead new Farm to ECE initiatives through Community GroundWorks. When we met, she was excited to help me find a role in that work. I went on to attend a meeting of the Farm to ECE Work Group Meeting.*

*But after a couple of months, Beth realized that my capacity could best be used to revive and coordinate the Farm to School Newsletter. This twice-a-month newsletter used to be housed at DATCP, until time and staff became too limited.*

*Though I had never coordinated a regular newsletter, I was excited for the chance to provide capacity where it was needed. From January to July 2017, I coordinated the construction of the newsletter. I requested stories from contributors, formatted the stories for consistency, addressed formatting and content issues, and ensured that the final product met expectations before sending it out to the list.*

### *Project Timeline*

*September 2016:*

- *I met with Beth, and asked how I could support Community GroundWorks and their ECE work.*
- *She encouraged me to get back in touch with her in November*

*November 2016:*

- *I emailed Beth, and reminded her that I was still interested in supporting her work.*

- *She responded enthusiastically, and invited me to sit in on a Farm to ECE Work Group meeting, to familiarize myself with their work, and to explore a possible role.*
- *The next week, I emailed her back about moving forward.*

*December 2016:*

- *I called Beth to follow up on our possible collaboration.*
- *Beth offered that I could best help her work with their Farm to School efforts, rather than specifically with their Farm to ECE work.*
- *She asked if I would be interested in coordinating the Farm to School newsletter.*
- *I was excited to take on this project, which would have me working steadily every month, producing something tangible, that Community GroundWorks could not do without extra help.*

*January 2017:*

- *I met with Beth and Vanessa. We planned to send out at least one newsletter that month, and two newsletters every following month.*
- *We constructed a Google Drive and documents to help streamline contributions from multiple people and organizations.*
- *I designed and sent out our first newsletter, based off of the old version of the newsletter.*

*February 2017:*

- *Beth designed a beautiful new template for the newsletter.*

*May 2017:*

- *I used the newsletter to share my Garden Songs project.*

*June 2017:*

- *I met with Beth and Vanessa to hear about the experience of our collaboration.*
- *I told them that I would appreciate June being my last month of coordinating the newsletter.*
- *Vanessa suggested that they take over the newsletter, but that I remain available to answer questions throughout July.*

### *Success Stories*

- *We revived and improved the newsletter and sent out two editions a month. At DATCP, the newsletter was sent out twice a month, then reduced to once a month due to limited time and staff. Vanessa and Beth shared that “These things take time to get established. They are undervalued and underfunded. It’s such a simple and powerful tool...” They see growth in the current form of the newsletter. “In it’s previous life, it wasn’t as streamlined and collaborative even though it was one organization.”*
- *The newsletter connected recipients to resources, and to each other. “People see it as a one-way communication,” Beth and Vanessa commented, “but it’s more than that...We use the feature story to show off an organization, and encourage people to reach out to them. We hear over and over how partners rely on the information in it. They see themselves in it. “They want it, they need it and it quickly gets on the chopping block.”*

- *The newsletter supplied a helpful platform for supporting Community GroundWorks' new Farm to ECE efforts. After a couple of months of the newsletter, we simply plugged in a new section, entitled "Farm to ECE," highlighting the goals and intended audience of the newsletter.*
- *The newsletter augmented my other Agroecology portfolio projects. I sent out an item requesting feedback on my "Garden Songs" project, which garnered responses, interest, and input.*

### *Lessons Learned*

- *Support for Farm to School is volatile, limiting, and politically contentious. According to Vanessa, "The newsletter originated at CIAS, and then was handed to DATCP when the Farm to School Program Director position was created. Because it went through DATCP, it had to get approved by the Communications team there, and on occasion they would remove certain content. And there was never the capacity to include anything that was advocacy related." Farm to School programs took a hit when the Farm to School Program Director was eliminated earlier this year. But in its new iteration, the newsletter has the sovereignty to share articles criticizing the budget cuts that eliminated the program director position. Such struggles affirm the political nature of food-work and Agroecology.*