

Making the healthy choice the easy choice

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It is no secret that Americans are facing an obesity epidemic, exacerbated by high consumption of unhealthy foods and too little physical activity. According to the National Cancer Institute, the U.S. does not produce or import enough fruits and vegetables for Americans to consume the recommended daily amount. Now, a national grant has allowed University of Missouri Extension to expand two projects that promote healthy diets and physical activity for Missourians.

The grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) funds the Missouri Farm to Institution Project, designed to provide tools and support to schools, hospitals and other institutions that use locally grown produce in their cafeterias. The grant also funds Livable Streets, a program aimed at educating citizens to advocate for "livable or complete streets" or those that are safe for all modes of transportation, including pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists.

"We are trying to change policies and environments to make [healthy choices](#) easier for Missourians," said Donna Mehrle, extension associate in the College of Human Environmental Sciences. "The goal is to give citizens access to [nutritious foods](#) and safe environments that promote physical activity."

The Missouri Farm to School/Farm to Institution Project connects schools and institutions with local farmers and distributors and supports the institutions as they implement programs for purchasing and serving locally grown produce. The support includes a food service guide that provides information about buying produce in season to get the best price and advice on storing and preparing fresh produce.

"Along with the added nutritional bonus of eating fresh foods, Missouri Farm to School is a way to educate students about how food is grown and where it comes from, along with putting a face to the food they are eating on a regular basis," said

Lorin Fahrmeier, Farm to Institution project coordinator. "When students try new foods at school that they like, they are more likely to ask their parents for the same foods at home. This encourages healthier eating habits for families too."

The purpose of Livable Streets is to give citizens access to streets that are safe for a variety of transportation modes. Program directors provide training for advocacy groups throughout the state. The groups share the training with citizens who encourage locally elected officials, transportation planners and engineers to consistently design streets and sidewalks for users of all ages and abilities.

October is National Farm to School Month. Enacted last year by the U.S. Congress, National Farm to School Month recognizes the strong role that Farm to School programs play in promoting good health and strong economies. More than 2,300 Farm to School programs exist across the nation. In Missouri, 78 school districts are using locally grown produce. During the month, school success stories will be featured on Missouri Farm to School's website and families are encouraged to share photos of their own locally grown, home-cooked meals.

"Farm to School month is a great way to highlight the different programs and schools that are supporting the movement state wide," Fahrmeier said. "The key to success is to start small and tailor a program that fits into your school and community."

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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