

The title "Farm-to-McFarland" is centered in a bold, black, sans-serif font. To the left of the title is a stylized line drawing of a farm scene, including a barn, a silo, and a fence. To the right is a stylized line drawing of a school building with a flagpole flying a flag and a school bus parked in front.

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**Abstract:** Our report presents reasons why an organic food program is beneficial and a viable option for the McFarland school district. Included are reasons for buying locally and organically. In addition, we present examples of institutional organic food purchase programs throughout Wisconsin. Finally, we present recommendations of organic food options that would be a good fit with the current lunch program at Indian Mound Middle School.

## **Overview**

First off, it is important to understand the concept of sustainability. Sustainability is development that meets the needs of the present without sacrificing the rights of future generations. Three factors that affect decision making in a sustainable business are economic, environmental, and social concerns. In other words, sustainable businesses may examine how their decisions impact costs, natural resources and ecological concerns, and social responsibility.

The farm-to-school movement is gaining momentum as a healthier, more sustainable alternative to conventional school lunch programs. Movement advocates lobby school officials to purchase fresh foods from local family farms. Buying locally is more sustainable because it reduces environmental degradation associated with transportation and storage. Additionally, many of the farms involved in the farm-to-school projects are committed to organic practices. By buying local organic products, Indian Mound Middle School will support Wisconsin family farms and help the environment while providing students with healthier and nutritional choices.

A sustainable farm-to-school program should entail economic decisions which are compatible with both society and the environment. For example, choosing Blue Farm corn chips instead of Doritos has not only health benefits but also social and political implications. Organic Blue Farm chips are produced without pesticides, herbicides, or chemicals. This element is important because the majority of all herbicides and fungicides are considered by the EPA to be potential carcinogens. This choice also means purchasing dollars will support family farms and rural Wisconsin economies. Finally, using fresh, organic foods will provide the students of McFarland School District with better nutrition and health habits.

## **The Case for Buying Locally**

In today's global economy it is becoming increasingly important for individuals to rethink how their consumer decisions impact farmers. The rise of globalization and international markets has led to an increase in agribusiness conglomerates taking over the agricultural landscape around the world, and edging out small scale farmers. As trade barriers are lifted with the North American Free Trade Agreement and the World Trade Organization, agricultural businesses have moved in search of cheaper labor and less environmental restrictions. The lifting of trade barriers allow companies to import products from countries outside the United States with no additional taxes. In effect, companies have little incentive to stay in the United States and end up moving to other countries such as Mexico. Over the last 50 years, one out of every 5 acres of farmland has been eliminated and/or moved out of the United States (Nabhan 70). As a result, income and jobs have been taken away from average American farmers.

Huge agriculture is also taking over small farms within the United States. Most of the food we buy in the grocery store or consume in a restaurant is shipped from states that are far away. In fact, 90% of all fresh vegetables consumed in the United States are grown in the San Joaquin Valley of California (MACSAC). Furthermore, the substantial amount of transportation and shipment required to purchase food from California is environmentally costly. Two major food distributors, ConAgra and Sysco, transport food thousands of miles away (Nabhan 37). When thinking about environmental sustainability it is important to think of the ways in which we farm is sustainable. Huge farm

conglomerates make the food industry into a business in which profit drives decisions rather than the general interests of the public. These farms use pesticides and other harmful chemicals to help their crops grow. Actually, pesticide use on American farms has increased fifty-fold (Nabhan 136). In addition, such farms inject animals with hormones and antibiotics to make them grow faster and bigger. Some cows are pumped with as many as twenty-one different growth hormones. These hormones get into the blood stream and are consumed by humans when one eats beef. In contrast to small farms that exercise sustainable agriculture, agribusiness conglomerates are maintaining harmful farming practices. Conversely, small sustainable farms protect and improve the soil and minimize adverse effects on the ecosystem (SARE).

In order to overcome the problems associated with agriculture we need to rethink the importance of buying locally. Buying locally makes one more conscious of the food they are buying and also creates a more direct relationship with the production of food. Much the same way, buying locally reinforces links between community members and farmers. In addition, if one supports local farming then they can get fresh food. Another reason for buying locally is the poor economic conditions with which many average farmers are faced. According to the USDA, just 3% of the farms in the United States supply 75% of the nation's food (MACSAC). Moreover, farmers receive only 23 cents for each dollar spent on their food (WFBF). This is a significant decrease from previous decades (Nabhan 73). Moreover, shippers, processors, packagers, and advertisers are receiving three times the income of farmers (Nabhan 34). In other words, farmers are suffering financially as agribusinesses are dominating the market. Supporting local farms limits the power of huge farm conglomerates and promotes sustainable agriculture.

### **Case for Buying Organic**

In the past decade the fastest growing sector in agriculture has been the annual sales and production of organic products. This double digit growth is a reflection of high public and media interest in the potential benefits to organic foods. The organic movement is a sense that organic products are both safer for human health and better for the long-term health and well being of the world. Widespread distribution of the latest research and information is vital to entice potential organic consumers.

Increased health benefits, improved taste, and less environmental impact are the top three reasons consumers say they buy organic food. These benefits should also be accrued to the youngest members of our society by making schools an environment that encourages excellent health. By immersing school-age children with the value-added lessons of sustainable agriculture and organic products we shape a generation of consumers who in the near future would reject all unsustainable, unhealthy food production.

Most people are familiar with the term organic but would loosely associate its meaning with a naturalist, hippie coinage. Under the Organic Foods Production Act a product labeled "organic" must have been produced with materials and practices that enhance the ecological balance of natural systems and that integrate the parts of the farming system into an ecological whole. Perhaps less ambiguous is the definition passed in April 1995 by the National Organic Standards Board. "Organic agriculture is an ecological production management system that promotes and enhances biodiversity, biological cycles and soil biological activity. It is based on minimal use of off-farm

inputs and on management practices that restore, maintain and enhance ecological harmony.” It is important to note that organic products cannot be completely free of residues as conventional practices put pollutants into the air, soil, and water.

### **UW-Madison Success with Purchasing Local, Organic Foods**

The UW-Madison has established an organic food purchasing program. The university foodservice program sells locally grown, organic blue corn tortilla chips, locally grown apples, beef, and potatoes. Students are educated and exposed to sustainable agriculture through special dinners featuring organic and locally grown foods. This UW-Madison program would not be possible without student interest. Student demand stems partially from a political and social concern for the decline rural communities and farms. With a large portion of the student body coming from Wisconsin, Illinois, and Minnesota, there is a high awareness of the plight of small Midwestern farmers.

Bob Fessenden, head of the residence halls dining service, sees an increasing demand for organic food. He says changes in the student population influence the demand for locally grown and organic food. “Many students are coming from families where they are used to eating organic food.” Support for the program included the UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems, the USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program, L’Etoile owner and chef Odessa Piper.

The UW-Madison program is part of a national and international movement to bring the organic message to schools. While primarily in private institution and higher education, public grade schools, middle schools, and high schools have successfully embraced a healthy foods initiative. Changes to school meal programs must take incremental steps because there is some resistance to changing the status quo.

### **Home Grown Wisconsin**

Home Grown Wisconsin is one of the two trade organizations with which we propose working. The group is a fairly new organization, as it formed in 1996. It is a cooperative of 25 family farms of southeastern and southcentral Wisconsin. These farms share common philosophies and engage in organic and sustainable agricultural practices. In other words, these farms strive for optimally tasteful and healthy produce. In addition, they seek to fortify the soil in which they farm, rather than deplete and pollute it. Home Grown Wisconsin offers hundreds of varieties of locally grown produce. However, due to certain barriers and limitations, we are only proposing implementing two of their items at this time. As Home Grown Wisconsin continues to develop, it is possible that incorporating a wider range of produce may be a feasible addition to the proposed farm-to-school program. Home Grown Wisconsin has indicated that other groups have expressed interest in purchasing produce that requires less preparation. In addition, Home Grown Wisconsin has been looking to expand its market to other institutional food services such as daycare centers and hospitals. As a result, Home Grown Wisconsin has been looking into creating the infrastructure to increase the ease of its produce.

Two items of produce which we propose purchasing from Home Grown Wisconsin include apples and pears. The produce would come from Future Fruit Farm of Ridgeway, Wisconsin. The varieties of fruit that would be most appropriate for our purposes are Royal Gala apples, D’Anjou pears, and Luscious pears. These varieties

were specifically recommended by the Home Grown Wisconsin director, Linda Caruso. These produce items are all organic, and they are small to medium sized pieces of fruit. Moreover, these varieties are near perfect with hardly any bruises or blemishes. As with all Home Grown Wisconsin services, delivery is weekly on every Wednesday. The apples and pears do not require refrigeration or any special storage conditions. We are excited about potentially working with Future Fruit Farm, and one of the farmers has expressed interest in engaging in an educational classroom presentation or activity.

Purchasing whole pieces of fruit is crucial because it would not involve the types of barriers that many other foods would entail. Given the school’s food service’s circumstances, it is imperative that the form of food be simplified. Specifically, food purchased must be pre-cut, pre-sliced, and pre-packaged. Seemingly, the food must be prepared in such a way that it can be served as it is. Obviously, purchasing whole pieces of fruit eliminates these concerns as food service staff are not required to handle or prepare the food, and the students can eat the fruit in their whole form. Farm cooperatives like Home Grown Wisconsin are effective suppliers for farm-to-school programs because using an organized service minimizes the number of transactions. In contrast, if a farm-to-school program were to engage many farmers on an individual basis, the transaction and delivery process would be complex. Overall, buying whole pieces of fruit from a farm cooperative simplifies a farm-to-school program.

The organic apples and pears are significantly more expensive than are the current prices of fruit bought by the school. The proposed fruit from Home Grown Wisconsin would cost the school about twice as much as the current fruit purchased. However, we feel that because these produce items would be just part of the normal lunch and on only a limited basis that the cost would not be a pressing financial concern. Also, the school may consider applying for several USDA grant programs including the Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program (CFP) and the Sustainable Agriculture and Education Program (SARE).

	<b>Current</b>	<b>Home Grown Wisconsin</b>
<b>APPLES</b>		
Variety	Red Delicious, Golden Delicious	Royal Gala
Price	\$0.18, \$0.20	\$0.47
Price per pound	Not available	\$1.58/lb.
<b>PEARS</b>		
Variety	None	D’Anjou, Luscious
Price	X	\$0.46
Price per pound	X	\$2.20/lb.
<b>ORANGES</b>		
Variety	Not available	None
Price	\$0.35	X
Price per pound	Not available	X

## **Organic Valley**

Organic Valley Cooperative was formed 15 years ago with the purpose of cooperatively marketing and distributing organic dairy products. The organization is headquartered in LaFarge, Wisconsin, and has grown to encompass 622 organic farms in seventeen states. Organic valley has become the largest organic farmer owned cooperative in North America. The prices for the products are left up to the farmer's discrepancy in order to allow for enough profit to sustain the farmer's family and farm. Organic Valley stresses ecological diversity and economic sustainability in their business practices. Environmental awareness is woven into all aspects of Organic Valley's business including production, handling, marketing, and operations.

Organic Valley offers practically every dairy related product under the sun. After considering processing and packaging limitations that are involved in an institutional food purchase, two of organic valleys products remain as viable options. The first of those options is a single serve organic chocolate milk. This product comes in an 8 oz. gabletop container. These milks come in cases of fifty, costing twenty dollars, or 40 cents a piece. The second product offering that would be a good fit for Indian Mound Middle School is organic beef burgers. These burgers come in boxes of 40 quarter pound patties at \$35 a box, or 87.5 cents a burger. We realize that these prices are higher than the school is accustomed to paying for similar non-organic products, and the burgers are of a larger size than the typical burger served to students. Therefore, we recommend that Indian Mound Middle School initiate a "Holistic Holstein : Organic beef and dairy" Day on an intermittent basis.

## **A-Maize-ing Corn Products, Inc.**

Located in Janesville, WI, Blue Farm encompasses 500 acres of blue corn certified by the organic crop improvement association. Randy and Judy Hughes are fifth generation farmers operating a farm that has been in the family for over 150 years. Each year, seeds are handpicked to develop a high quality strain of open pollinated blue corn. Furthermore, the blue corn is grown in well-isolated fields to ensure genetic purity. Randy and Judy Hughes believe strongly in the principles of local agriculture, demonstrated by the fact that 90 % of the chips are consumed in the Midwest.

A-Maize-ing Corn, Inc. offers two products that could be offered on a daily basis at Indian Mound Middle School. The first of such products is Blue Farm round tortilla chips. This product comes in a 3 oz. bag (similar in size to the Frito-Lay, Inc. "Big Grab", trade-mark) which is packaged sixty bags per case at \$24.00 a case or 40 cents a bag. The second product which Indian Mound Middle School should offer students is "Blue City Corn Chips" which are short corn chip strips, similar to "Fritos", Trademark. This product is packaged in 1 ½ ounce bags, which come 48 to a case costing \$15.50, or approximately 32 cents a bag.

## **Wisconsin Homegrown Lunch**

Wisconsin Homegrown Lunch is a grassroots program which strives to introduce fresh, nutritious, and locally grown food to children in Madison's public schools. At the same time, Wisconsin Homegrown Lunch seeks to develop a stable market for local and sustainable farmers, and provide a model for future farm-to-school programs in the Midwest. Consequently, Wisconsin Homegrown Lunch is an appropriate program to

emulate and analyze. Additionally, this farm-to-school program has incorporated educational activities to provide a link between the classroom and the lunchroom. Wisconsin Homegrown Lunch has been a joint-effort of REAP Food Group and the UW Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (CIAS).

Currently, Wisconsin Homegrown Lunch is working with three Madison elementary schools as pilot schools. Chavez, Lincoln, and Shorewood Elementary each had a special meal event in October known as a Harvest Festival. The Harvest Festivals featured an educational assembly and a special lunch consisting of a tortilla wrap sandwich, veggie chili, an apple, and a cookie. Children had the opportunity to choose from spinach, tomato, or original flavored wraps, and they folded the wraps on their own. The tortilla wrap sandwiches included chicken, yogurt cream cheese dill sauce, and locally produced organic spinach and shredded cabbage. The apples came from a nearby orchard. The lunch and the activities were well received by the children and staff members. Similarly, Wisconsin Homegrown Lunch provides special meals in the spring as part of a few of the schools' picnics. Special items included at the picnics last spring were fresh mixed salad greens and rhubarb muffins. Correspondingly, this farm-to-school program holds events bi-annually. This infrequency is because of certain barriers such as the need for an extended lunch period and the cooperation of volunteers to help serve meals. However, Wisconsin Homegrown Lunch is looking to increase the regularity of meals with locally grown food, and to expand the number of schools included in the program.

Another aspect of this farm-to-school program is educational classroom presentations. Farmers from Home Grown Wisconsin gave a series of classroom presentations in the fall of 2002 to strengthen students' understanding of their local food system, and to raise overall awareness about the Wisconsin Homegrown Lunch program. Wisconsin Homegrown Lunch also suggests incorporating nutrition-education into the curriculum, providing field trips to farms, school gardening, composting, and taste-testing of local products. In the fall of 2002, Wisconsin Homegrown Lunch staff and volunteers launched a Lunch Tasting Day in which they brought a dozen varieties of organically grown heirloom tomatoes into classrooms. An event like this one, allowed students to taste a variety of foods grown in their own region and gain an understanding of the local food system. Another group involved with giving presentations is MACSAC. MACSAC is a group of farmers who grow organic produce for the Madison area. MACSAC farmers have visited classrooms and initiated games, role-playing activities, and discussions about local agriculture. MACSAC's efforts have increased students' understanding of commitments to growing food sustainably. On the whole, these efforts have reinforced the meaning behind farm-to-school programs.

### **Miracle In Wisconsin**

Schools transition to natural foods as way to improve the health of students but for Central Alternative High School in Appleton, Wisconsin, the switch did a whole lot more. Dubbed by the media as a "miracle," school officials attribute the scholastic and behavioral improvements of Central students to the implementation of a fresh, healthy

food program. Principal LuAnn Coenen says since the start of the program there have not been any dropouts, suicides, expulsions, drugs found, or weapons found. Teacher Mary Bruyette says the students are now calm and well behaved. "I don't have to deal with the daily discipline issues; that just isn't an issue here." The effects on students' attitudes and academic achievement has been very positive.

This program has been largely funded and organized by Natural Ovens. Natural Ovens has contributed over \$100,000 for the construction of a new kitchen, food service equipment, employment of two cooks, and food. In addition, a Wellness and Nutrition Program has been implemented to improve nutritional habits, physical fitness, and cognitive development. Also, candy and soda machines have been replaced by juice machines and water coolers. In general, the high school's lunch program has been dramatically transformed to emphasize healthy, nutritious foods.

### **How Industry and Government are Helping Schools Make the Switch**

Industry side steps are being taken to make it easier for schools to transition to an organic, locally grown food service. Organic producers and manufacturers are working to meet the needs and interests of institutions with foodservice packaging, value-added marketing, and pricing adjustments. Pricing may not be competitive with conventional food products but it could put organic foods into the realm of possibility for some school food program budgets.

In June of 2003 lawmakers Fred Upton (R-MI) and Ron Kind (D-WI) introduced to the House of Representatives a bipartisan bill to amend the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act and the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 to improve certain child nutrition programs among other purposes. Senator Leahy (D-VT) introduced similar to the Senate as well. If enacted, The Farm to Cafeteria Projects Act of 2003 would authorize \$10 million annually for grants of up to \$100,000 to assist with the initial costs of a farm to school project. The Leahy (Senate) bill is more favorable because it provides for long term committed funding. The grants will be used to purchase adequate equipment to store and prepare fresh foods, develop food procurement relationships with nearby farmers, plan seasonal menus and promotional materials, and develop experiential nutrition education related to agriculture. Local communities would be granted a direct, one-time matching grant which allows for flexibility in designing a farm to cafeteria project tailored to specific farm and school community needs.

### **Old McFarland: How to bring Local, Organic Foods to McFarland School District**

After analyzing existing farm-to-school programs, a plan can be created to adapt to the circumstances and needs of Indian Mound Middle School and its students. Incorporating organic apples, pears, blue chips, and hamburgers are appropriate choices for creating a sustainable farm-to-school program. These choices do not bare barriers concerning form of food or preparation. The proposed items come pre-packaged or in whole, and do not require additional treatment by food service staff. Buying produce and other goods from area farms helps support local farmers, promote sustainable agriculture, and diminish adverse environmental impacts. Moreover, buying organic food is beneficial to students' health and the ecosystem. Additionally, implementing educational activities and presentations gives students an understanding of the food system in which

they take part. The steps proposed in this plan may be further built upon as financial support increases, viable food options expand, and the infrastructure improves.

### **Future Sustainable Goals: Overcoming Obstacles**

Indian Mound Middle's transformation to a sustainable nutrition program requires incremental steps. The initial recommendation of low cost, low prep organic foods from local farmers can be implemented without changing the existing infrastructure or format. A more ambitious, long-term goal would be to use organic foods from local sources, which would require more extensive food preparation on site. These further changes would require a combination of food service equipment, employment of cooks and/or assistants, and training. These improvements require additional budget funds, a financial taxing initiative considering the already increased cost of purchasing organic products. The McFarland Middle School could apply for a The Farm to Cafeteria Projects Act of 2003 grant if this legislation is passed. This money could help subsidize the increased costs of labor, facility, and equipment improvements.

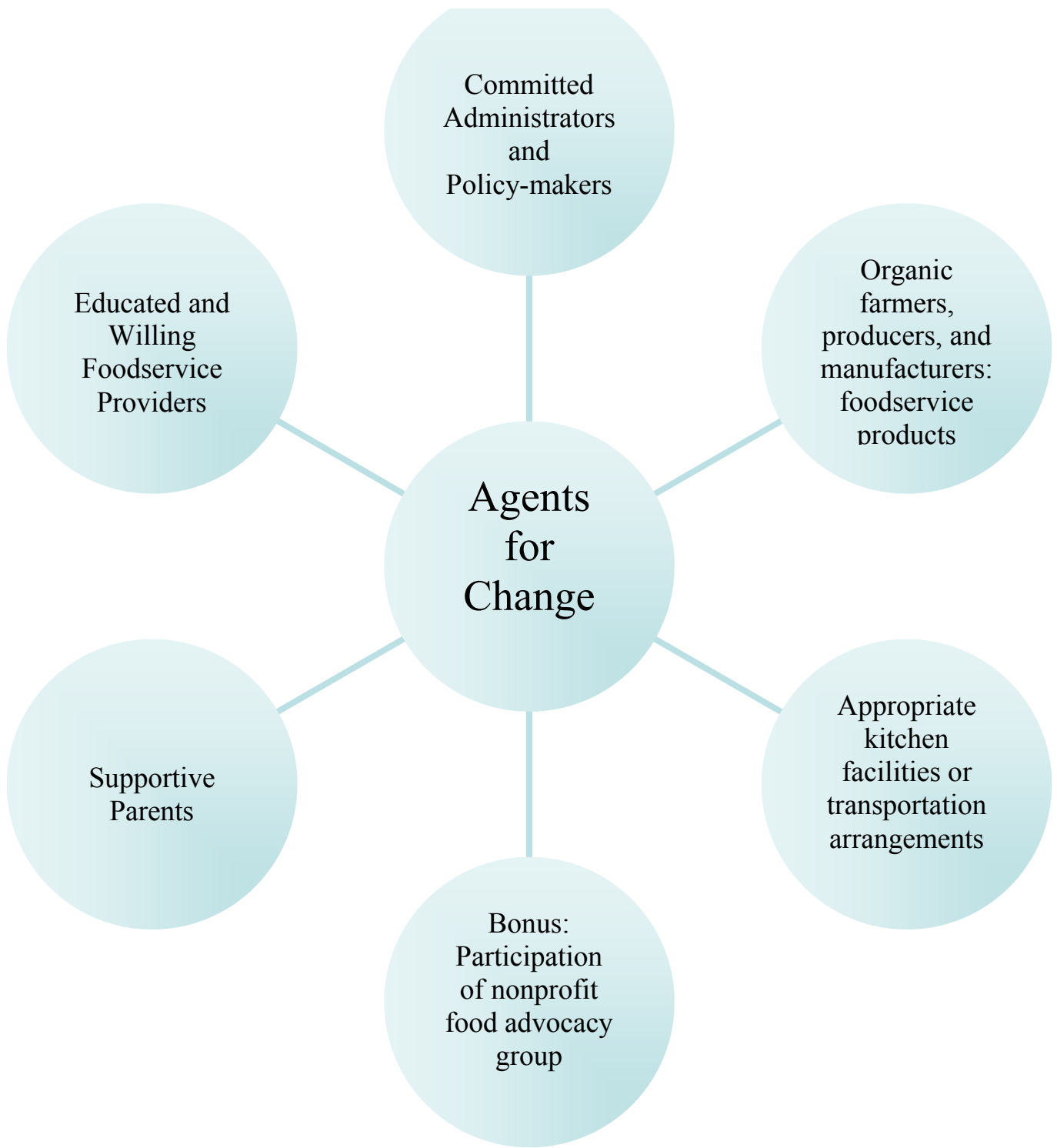
Communication as well as adaptation will be key to the success of a long-term healthy, sustainable food program. The farm to school movement is taking place at schools of all levels, public and private, in many education institutions. It will make implementation and troubleshooting easier to network with these school officials (including Alternative High School in Appleton), nonprofit groups (including Wisconsin Homegrown Lunch or the Midwest Organic alliance) and government program personnel (including the USDA's SARE-Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education and in the near future the Farm to Cafeteria Project). Included in this proposal is a list of other schools, nonprofits, and government branches involved in bringing local and organic foods to school foodservice programs. This list is not exhaustive, as new groups and schools are becoming active in this nutrition trend.

### **In Summary**

We feel that by making small changes and supporting local farmers we can begin to act more sustainable as a society. Sustainability is a broad term that will not be realized overnight but will take many generations working hard to help save our environment. By buying organic, local food, you are helping promote sustainability and pass this valuable knowledge on to future generations, creating a new value system that considers the effects of our actions on the environment and humanity as a whole. There are some stuff challenges to implementing these changes but the benefits accrued to sustainability and to the students of Indian Mound will be much greater.

### Contact Information

ORGANIZATION	PERSON	PHONE NUMBER	Website/Email
Blue Farm	Randy Hughes	(608)756-3567	
Center for Integrated Agricultural System			<a href="http://www.wisc.edu/cias/new/organic_dorm.html">www.wisc.edu/cias/new/organic_dorm.html</a>
Community Food Security Coalition			<a href="http://www.foodsecurity.org">www.foodsecurity.org</a>
Future Fruit Farm	Ellen Lane	(608)924-1012	
Home Grown Wisconsin	Linda Caruso	(608)967-9368	<a href="http://www.reapfoodgroup.org/farmentoschool">www.reapfoodgroup.org/farmentoschool</a>
Natural Ovens		920-901-6867	<a href="http://www.naturalovens.com/Better_Health/Schools/index.html">http://www.naturalovens.com/Better_Health/Schools/index.html</a>
Organic Foods Sourcebook	Elaine Lipson		<a href="mailto:emlipson@aol.com">emlipson@aol.com</a>
Organic Trade Association			<a href="http://www.theorganicreport.com">http://www.theorganicreport.com</a>
Organic Valley	Derek Lee	(608)257-2120	
San Francisco Food Systems Council			<a href="http://www.sffoodsystems.org">www.sffoodsystems.org</a>
The College Food Project			<a href="http://www.wisc.edu/cias/research/colgfood/econimp.html">www.wisc.edu/cias/research/colgfood/econimp.html</a>
USDA's SARE			<a href="http://www.ams.usda.gov/directmarketing/sare.htm">http://www.ams.usda.gov/directmarketing/sare.htm</a>
Wisconsin Homegrown Lunch	Sarah Tedeschi, Heather Stouder	(608)263-6064	



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