



# Learnings from the Field



## Tupelo Public School District

Tupelo, MS

**District Enrollment:**

7,098

**Production Model:** Self-Operated

**District F/R:** 62%

**School Year Implemented:**  
2016-2017

**District ADP:** 70%

**No. of Grants Awarded:** 4

# Carver Elementary School

**Age Group:** K-5

**School Size:** Small (Under 300)

**School Environment:** Town Remote

**School F/R:** 68%

**School ADP:** 96%

# Joyner Elementary School

**Age Group:** K-5

**School Size:** Medium (301-900)

**School Environment:** Town Remote

**School F/R:** 66%

**School ADP:** 96%

# Lawhon Elementary School

**Age Group:** K-5

**School Size:** Medium (301-900)

**School Environment:** Town Remote

**School F/R:** 67%

**School ADP:** 96%

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# Parkway Elementary School

**Age Group:** K-5

**School Size:** Medium (301-900)

**School Environment:** Town Remote

**School F/R:** 71%

**School ADP:** 95%

# Project Description



The Fruitemon and Veggiemon card program was central to the Project Produce grant in Tupelo Public Schools. A take on the popular Pokemon game, players would have to capture fruits and vegetables in their stomachs by trying them in order to collect cards. A seventh grader at Tupelo Middle School designed the cards, which featured nutrition facts about the fruits and vegetables. This creative collaboration was a great way to get kids excited

about trying new foods.

All four elementary schools expanded garden bed programs during the grant period. The beds were built and maintained by FoodCorps service members, parents, principals, farmers from local Native Son Farms, teachers, and students. Garden lessons were implemented in which students learned about plant anatomy, planting, harvesting, nutrition, composting, etc. It was a collaborative effort that offers not only health benefits, but diverse learning opportunities.

Taste Tests encouraged students to try new foods from local farms and their own gardens. Taste Test surveys created at Parkway Elementary found that students were more open to trying foods they grew in the school garden, and enjoyed the taste better. A Harvest of the Month feature went along with the garden lessons. A board was posted near the cafeteria at each school featuring seasonal fruits and vegetables, information about the farmers who grew them, and nutrition benefits. Fliers were sent home with students so they could share cafeteria recipes with their families.

Native Son Farm has been a particularly strong local farm partner to the school district. They were enthusiastic about engaging in the school food economy and were able to offer price breaks to the school district. They acted as more than just a produce vendor. They engaged with students on many levels, including educational talks about local agriculture, helping plant garden beds, facilitating Taste Tests, joining students for lunch, etc. They looked at the partnership with the school district as an opportunity to make an impact in the health and wellness of the children in the community.

Donna Loden, Volunteer Coordinator at Growing Healthy Waves, Tupelo Public School District's farm-to-school initiative, has helped to coordinate and champion these initiatives in the district. She expresses what drives the

passion behind her and other folks who have helped improve school food in their district, “It really takes a whole community to make sure our children are not obesity statistics. Everyone came together to work towards that.”

## Successes

- Kids were open to trying new fruits and vegetables and enjoying them.
- Other schools in the district that had not received the grant were able to benefit from the purchasing power of local produce.
- Dynamic connections to local farms, particularly Native Son Farms.

## Challenges

- Finding time in the day to include nutrition education. Different subject teachers, such as PE and science, took on the job of implementing nutrition education.
- Students are out of school during peak growing season, which begins in April/May and lasts through the summer.
- Making sure the farmers provided paperwork such as tax forms, inspections, etc. This is not typical protocol for many of these small farmers.

For resources related to Project Produce, visit [www.thelunchbox.org](http://www.thelunchbox.org).

