Farm-to-School Conference Call

October 3, 2012

Present on call: Linda Kingery, Brett Olson, Jane Jewett, Molly Zins, Kathy Draeger, David Fluegel, Sarah Eichberger, Stephanie Heim, Okechukwu Ukaga

Sarah began the call be reviewing information about the Farm-to-School Specialty Crop Grant (SCG), titled “Apples to Zucchini.” This builds on a previous SCG – funded pilot project in 2010. Sarah also described the Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Program of the USDA Food and Nutrition Service, which provides on average about $0.40 per serving for fresh fruit and vegetable snacks for K-6 students in schools with >50% participation in free and reduced-price school lunch. A goal of the current SCG is to educate schools about the options for making those snacks Minnesota-grown. Also noted: the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids act took effect in January 2012, and requires that all students eating school lunch are offered fresh fruits and vegetables every day.

Four fact sheets about local food in schools were prepared through the 2010 SCG. Feedback was received from schools and buyers that more time was needed to plan to be able to source food locally; planning needed to take place by January or February for the following school year.

Current SCG objectives: 1) Reduce barriers to local food use by schools; 2) Educate students about local fresh food.

Planned outcomes: 1) Increase of 10% by 2013 of dollar value of Minnesota-grown produce used in the Fresh Fruit & Vegetable (FFV) program; 2) Increase of 10% by 2013 in number of FFV-funded schools doing Farm-to-School educational activities.

Stephanie Heim noted that the Minnesota Department of Education is now tracking Minnesota-grown produce use at schools through the addition of columns to its reporting form that ask what produce was purchased and where it was grown. The MN Dept. of Education is moving to an online reporting system, and the U of MN Extension Farm to School program is working on incorporating Minnesota-grown tracking into that system.

Workshops are one aspect of the SCG.

Brett Olson gave an overview of the SCG obtained by Renewing the Countryside. This builds on their last four years of work around the “Got Local?” theme. They have done farmer-school food service “speed dating.” Their current grant includes funding for 8 workshops which are intended to complement and co-locate with the Farm to School workshops. They also allocated money for field trips that would bring farmers into school kitchens and food service staff out to farms, for better understanding on both sides of the challenges of incorporating local foods into school lunch menus. Also, a component of the grant is for working with MISA to bring post-harvest handling information to farmers. Some funding is also included for public education. Renewing the Countryside will be the lead organizer for the East and West Metro Farm-to-School workshops.

Roles and Responsibilities for the Farm-to-School workshops: RSDP regional directors will promote and implement the workshops in their regions. This will include assembling a regional organizing team, which should include Extension educators, food service personnel, and farmers.

Linda stated that the timeline looked all right. David and Molly both indicated a need to make connections with the Health & Nutrition Extension Educators in their regions, and said they were both working on this. Suggestions for contacts were offered by Stephanie; and it was also noted that there is a new Extension Farm to Fork working group that involves Community Nutrition Educators, and these are also potential resource people for these workshops. A list of suggested regional community partners could be helpful to some of the workshop organizers.

Timing of the workshops will be January through March of 2013. Jane Jewett has a list of events already scheduled for that time frame.

Stephanie has put together a draft agenda that can be a starting point for the planning committees. This will be a day-long event that needs to include the farmer – buyer networking component.

Stephanie and Sarah described a Washington Farm-to-School conference that they attended. There were a number of ideas coming out of that conference that could be used here. Farmer-school mobile tours were one example; this could be a model for the field trips that Brett Olson wants to arrange. Another potentially useful idea is peer-to-peer training in breakout sessions at the workshops. It was noted that Minnesota School Nutrition Association has a list of trainers with expertise in various areas, and those people could be tapped for peer-to-peer local food training at these workshops. Sarah also suggested looking at information available from the Gretchen Swanson Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

For additional workshop content ideas, Sarah directed workshop organizers to information from the MN Dept. of Education surveys that were done of farmers and food services. She suggested that the level of training could be different in different areas, but it would be helpful for reporting purposes if similar content could be presented in all areas. There was debate on this point. David commented that this could limit the effectiveness of a workshop for a particular region, and Brett noted that the base knowledge of farmers on these topics varies greatly between regions of the state.

The next steps for this group are to reach out to community resource people and invite them to be on the regional planning committees. Stephanie noted that the SHIP program staff were very helpful in organizing the previous round of Farm-to-Cafeteria workshops that took place in 2010. The expectation is that each region will have a planning committee: NE, NW, West Central, Central, SW, SE, and two Metro.

There were some additional questions about organizing. Linda invited David to work with her to organize a workshop in a location near the south part of her region and north part of his region.

Sarah will: 1) Send information to Brett about the mobile tours, and send a 1-page description of these out to the committees. 2) Contact Health & Nutrition Extension Educators and CC: regional directors. 3) Contact Rural Advantage about taking the lead for planning a workshop in the SW region.