

Farm to School Spotlight

*Growing Futures at Seaford High School
Seaford, Delaware*



The Delaware Farm to School Highlights were created by the Delaware Farm to School Committee to highlight the wide range of activities occurring throughout the state in K-12 schools. We hope that through the stories, you will be able to learn, adapt and apply some of the information into your own Farm to School Program.

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Background

In 2022, a visionary partnership between Seaford High School's Nutrition Services Supervisor, Julie Kirby, and Environmental Science teacher, Matthew Cohee, turned a greenhouse into a vibrant hub of agricultural learning and cafeteria innovation. Thanks to funding from the Delaware Council on Farm and Food Policy, Seaford High School was able to refurbish its greenhouse and invest in a hydroponic growing system, laying the foundation for a thriving Farm to School model.



How Seaford Brings Farm to School to Life

- **Locally Grown by Students:** Fresh greens and herbs grown by Future Farmers of America (FFA) students are marketed and served in the high school cafeteria.
- **Curriculum Integration:** Farm to School practices are embedded across classrooms and cafeterias, reinforcing healthy habits and real-world learning.
- **Hands-On Agriculture:** Students engage in meaningful, career-connected work through the school's agriculture science program.

Making It Work

Seaford School District's Nutrition Department purchases produce directly from its student-run hydroponic program, creating a sustainable funding stream that keeps the greenhouse growing year after year.

FFA students manage the full cycle:

- Choosing crops
- Designing nutrient plans
- Managing pests
- Harvesting and packaging
- Pricing their products

This holistic approach prepares students for future careers while providing fresh, nutritious food for their peers.

"One of the greatest parts about this program is the pride that students have when they see food that they or their classmates have grown being served in the cafeteria." — **Julie Kirby**

Lessons Learned

Seaford's success didn't come without challenges. Pest control and student workforce continuity proved to be key learning points:



- **Pest Pressure:** Early infestations of aphids and whiteflies tested their resilience. After limited success with ladybugs, the team partnered with Delaware Technical Community College to implement an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategy that mirrors professional greenhouse models.

- **Nutrient Management:** While early crops grew well, they saw room for improvement. Collaborating with Meherrin Ag helped them fine-tune a more effective nutrient plan for hydroponic success.

- **Sustaining Intern Engagement:** The program relies on motivated student interns. After losing two key interns to graduation, efforts are underway to build a pipeline of committed students who can carry the torch.

Keys to Success

- **Seed Money:** Start-up funds through the First State Food System Grant were essential to launch and sustain the program.
- **Shared Vision:** Strong collaboration between teachers, nutrition staff, and administrators helped align the program's goals.
- **Expert Support:** Partnerships with Delaware Technical Community College (DTCC), Meherrin, and Delaware State University Cooperative Extension helped troubleshoot and plan effectively.
- **Flexible Menu Planning:** Offering student-grown foods as toppings, salads, or extras allows flexibility in menu planning and minimizes waste.
- **Patience and Persistence:** Every challenge was met with the mindset that growth takes time and the learning is just as valuable as the lettuce!

What's Next for Seaford

- **Launching a Dual Enrollment Hydroponics Course** that offers college credits and deepens student engagement.
- **Expanding Crop Variety** to include herbs, microgreens, and cold-season crops.
- **Strengthening Collaborations** with DTCC and Meherrin Ag to enhance both crop yields and student learning opportunities.

Seaford's story shows how Farm to School is about more than meals, it's about growing confident, capable students who understand where their food comes from, how it's grown, and the role they play in a healthier, more connected food system!

For more information about the Delaware Farm to School Program, contact: Delaware Farm to School Coordinator [Scott Schuster](#) RD, LDN, SNS; or visit [Delaware's Farm to School Website](#).