



SHELBURNE FARMS

Farm-to-School & the Common Core Standards

By Emily Hoyer

Standards? What standards?

There are lots of fads and movements in public education. One that has persisted for awhile is standards-based education, which aims to identify clear, measurable criteria that describe what students should know and be able to do by the time they finish high school. Teachers then use these standards to develop curriculum, and in many states, students have to pass standardized achievement tests covering the content specified in these standards.

Until now, most states have developed their own set of learning standards, resulting in a wide variety of expectations and outcomes. Because we are a highly mobile society, this has created many challenges for students, as well as for colleges and businesses, as they receive graduates from all parts of the country arriving with widely differing skill sets and abilities—essentially, this local control has made it nearly impossible to compare ‘apples to apples’.

Lately, teachers have been hearing a lot about the new “Common Core Standards” that have been developed to address some of these inconsistencies, as well as to create common expectations and outcomes for students graduating high school. The Common Core State Standards provide a framework for what students need to know in math and English/language arts to be ‘college and career ready’ by the end of grade 12. There are also new science standards being developed—the Next Generation Science Standards. Most states have signed onto these standards initiatives, and though each state has set its own ‘roll out’ plan, teachers all over the country are preparing for this transition by studying the standards and applying them to their curricula.

How does this fit with Farm to School and Farm Based Education?

If teachers design standards-based curriculum that is focused on big ideas, and provides students with place-based examples to explore through projects and service, students will be able to transfer their knowing to new situations, and solve complex, real-world problems. The Common Core and the Next Generation Science Standards define many big ideas that students need to understand (for example: systems-thinking, community, interdependence), and farm-based education can provide students with an opportunity to explore these ideas.

Farm-based education providers can familiarize themselves with the standards, and align field trips and farm experiences to focus on the big ideas and cross-cutting themes identified in the standards. Farm-based educators can also provide pre- and post- lessons and curricular material designed from the standards, as well as provide bibliographies or other sources of informational text to support students’ learning back in the classroom. Partnering with a motivated teacher to co-create, or adapt existing curriculum that can then be shared with other teachers can also be a rich way to collaborate. Providing students with

opportunities to apply math, literacy, and communication skills in the real-world will support both these new standards as well as deep student learning.

Standards themselves won't fix education. But if we work together to create and provide opportunities for students to engage in project- and place-based learning and apply their learning in a real-world context, then students will be prepared to succeed— on tests, and, more importantly, in life.

More Information on the Standards

Common Core

The Common Core State Standards are a set of English/language arts and math standards that have been created in a collaborative state-led effort, in partnership with the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), and supported by the federal government. The motivation behind this initiative was to create a common set of goals and expectations for student achievement and readiness for college and careers. At this time, all but five states (Texas, Alaska, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Virginia) have signed on to the standards.

The Common Core English/Language Arts standards are based on a set of “anchor standards” that define what students need to know and be able to do for college and career readiness at the end of grade 12. Planning backwards, these anchor standards were used to develop benchmarks of what students need to know and be able to do at the end of each grade level. The anchor standards cover reading, writing, speaking & listening, language, and media & technology.

The Common Core Math standards provide students in grades K-5 with a foundation in whole numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions and decimals, and geometry. The standards from grades 6-8 focus on preparing students for high school math, which aims to provide students with the skills to think and reason mathematically so they can solve real-world problems.

In New England, a new standardized achievement test is being developed to align with the new CCSS. This assessment will replace the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) tests that are currently used.

The Common Core State Standards can be viewed and downloaded from <http://www.corestandards.org/>

Next Generation Science Standards

Similar to the Common Core, the Next Generation Science Standards are a new set of science standards being developed by a state-led initiative, in a partnership with several non-profit organizations. “The Next Generation Science Standards are based on the National Research Council (NRC) Framework for K–12 Science Education, which describes the major practices, crosscutting concepts, and disciplinary core ideas that all students should be familiar with by the end of high school, and provides an outline of how these practices, concepts, and ideas should be developed across the grade levels.” (NSTA Express).

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