



## Screening Summary

The screening stage of a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is intended to evaluate the appropriateness and value of an HIA based on its potential health impacts, feasibility, timeliness, and receptivity of decision makers to the HIA findings and recommendations.

The Farm to School (F2S) Coordinator HIA Project Team completed a screening exercise that identified the key decision, policy relevance, evidence base, timeline, resources, and stakeholder interest for the project. Below are results of this screening exercise.

**Decision** – The Center for Childhood Obesity Prevention (CCOP) at Arkansas Children’s Research Institute (ACRI) has been the state lead agency for the National Farm to School Network since 2013. In this role, COPRP has worked to develop the Arkansas Farm to School (ARF2S) Network, promote F2S practices, and provide training in F2S activities including local food procurement, nutrition education, and school gardens. Through this work it was proposed that a state-funded F2S Coordinator may be needed to further grow F2S practices in the state. As an academic research institution, COPRP desired to obtain formal evidence as to whether a State F2S Coordinator would increase F2S activities and improve nutrition-related health outcomes among Arkansas children.

In 2015, Arkansas House Bill 1979 initiated an Interim Study Proposal (ISP), which created an opportunity for a group of interested parties to “study and report on the policies necessary to enhance the economy, expand the locally produced food market, improve nutrition and health, prevent food waste, and evaluate a local food-based initiative.” The ISP determined a timeline for collecting and reporting evidence on the creation of a F2S Coordinator position in the state. Based on this timeline, HIA findings will be reported to state F2S partners by December 31, 2016 in order that they may be considered by legislators during the upcoming 2017 legislative session.

**Policy Relevance** – The ISP clearly demonstrates the relevance of local food system policies to current legislators. The ISP leadership team is comprised of stakeholders from the state legislature, Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, ACRI COPRP, and others. Although the HIA Project Team is health-focused, many of the ISP team members are not, and utilizing the HIA is a critical tool to ensure that health is considered systematically throughout the process.

Beyond the ISP, several members of the Arkansas elected leadership indicate a high value on health. For example, Governor Asa Hutchison recently endorsed the Healthy Active Arkansas plan, a 10-year collaborative plan to improve health across the state. Arkansas also has its own Surgeon General who prioritizes obesity prevention. Recent data show that Arkansas ranks first in the nation for obesity, which contributes to increased medical costs across the nation and the state as a whole. As such, policies to improve health and reduce obesity are certainly relevant and timely.

Additionally, the HIA considers economic opportunity for farmers and other producers within the state. With Arkansas’ rich history in agriculture, policies that simultaneously



address economic opportunity for the agricultural community and promote the health and wellbeing of children will likely receive bipartisan support.

**Evidence Base** – Existing data expected to inform the HIA process with respect to establishing a State F2S Coordinator position are housed by multiple state agencies, including the Arkansas Department of Education, Arkansas Agricultural Department, Arkansas Department of Health, University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, ACRI COPRP, and others. Farm to School and health-related data may also be found in national reports such as the USDA Farm to School Census, CDC Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, and more.

In addition to these sources, the HIA Project Team plans to examine literature on school gardens, nutrition education, fruit and vegetable consumption, and other F2S-related intermediate measures. These secondary data, combined with primary data collection through interviews and focus groups, will be the primary base of evidence for the HIA.

**Timeline and Resources** – The HIA timeline is determined primarily by the ISP, which calls for results to be reported to the Legislative Council by December 31, 2016. To fund the HIA, ACRI COPRP was awarded a grant of \$56,044 for the Arkansas Farm to School Coordinator Health Impact Assessment from the Arkansas Biosciences Institute. This grant will fund the principal investigator (Dr. Judith Weber) at 5% time, project team lead (Jenna Rhodes) at 45%, an additional staff person, (Emily English) at 9%, and an administrative analyst (Lori Delfos) at 10%. It also provides \$2500 for travel and \$15,100 for a technical assistance subcontractor, Dr. Tia Henderson from Upstream Public Health. Dr. Henderson will provide guidance to the HIA Project Team on the technical aspects of the HIA but will not be responsible for contributing to HIA content. Grant funding ends February 28, 2017.

**Stakeholder Interest** – The ACRI COPRP is the lead state agency for the National Farm to School Network. In this role, COPRP hosts the ARF2S Network and has built many partnerships around the state that support farm to school activities and offer a strong starting point for the HIA process. Within the existing ARF2S Network, farm to school activities are supported by the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) Child Nutrition Unit (CNU), University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service (UAEX), Arkansas Agriculture Department (AAD), Arkansas Coalition for Obesity Prevention (ARCOP), Coordinated School Health (CSH), FoodCorps, and others. Collectively, these organizations offer unique insights into the many nuances of farm to school, from the impacts on child health and school meals to the economic opportunities for Arkansas farmers.

Many of these stakeholders are already interested, invested, or involved in F2S activities, and the HIA will provide a platform for them to work together in order to examine the potential nutrition-related health outcomes of creating a statewide F2S Coordinator. In addition, many of these stakeholders may be able to use the resulting data analysis, reports, and policy recommendations as advocacy, educational, and promotional tools in the work they are already doing. For these reasons, the HIA Project



Team feels that there is significant stakeholder interest for both F2S practices at large and the F2S Coordinator HIA.

**Screening Decision** – Based on the relevance of F2S policy in the state, timeliness of the ISP process, existing base of evidence, and support for F2S from stakeholders, the HIA Project Team has decided that an HIA is appropriate. This HIA will be of intermediate depth, involving both primary data collection and secondary data analysis, and is expected to be completed by December 31, 2016.