



Featured Farmers of AR *Newport and Damascus, AR*

NEWPORT

Three years ago, Jim Goodson, Bill Landreth, and school nutrition directors from north and central Arkansas met on Landreth's berry farm for a field day to generate interest in partnerships between their farms and local schools. The group toured the farm, discussed harvesting and handling practices, and negotiated the details on price requirements from the perspectives of their different roles. The school nutrition directors then sent a two-month menu to the farmers, helping them determine what was feasible to provide to the cafeteria. Fast forward three years, and both farmers are delivering fresh, flavorful fruits and vegetables to schools.

Bill Landreth is located in Newport, Arkansas, and is known by name for his delicious strawberries. He credits Ron Rainey, an agricultural economist with the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Services, for helping him learn about farm to school. Delivering



▲ *Bill Landreth's strawberry field in Newport, Arkansas. Landreth (pictured top right) encourages farmers to follow food safety procedures when selling to schools.*

produce to over twenty schools, Landreth found that it was not feasible for him to deliver to each school. Instead, he participates in the regional Northeast Buying Cooperative. Through this inventive cooperative, Landreth delivers to three rotating



drop-off points, where schools can then pick up their produce for the cafeterias.

While only 5% of Landreth's produce is delivered to schools, he considers selling to schools an insurance policy and a strong economic choice. Prior to his partnership with schools, he offloaded leftover produce for no profit when he could not locate a market. He also finds that schools

are a consistent and reliable market and has expanded to providing produce for school fundraisers. Now, students enjoy his field-ripened berries, and he has increased his revenue.

Landreth takes pride in the food he grows: the berries he sells to local schools are the same berries his grandchildren enjoy. As such, he emphasizes the importance of food safety when discussing the farm to school market with other farmers. >>

“Between Jim and myself, we have decided to try not to go up on the school price. It is really an insurance policy for us, a give and take on both parts.”

-Bill Landreth

Though schools do not require GAP certification or a third-party audit on produce, many schools appreciate an **on-farm food safety plan** and **traceability components**. For information, visit www.ams.usda.gov/services/auditing/gap-ghp.

DAMASCUS

>> Jim Goodson is located in Damascus, Arkansas, and currently delivers produce to Batesville, Rose Bud, and Dardanelle school districts. He focuses on raising off-season crops that benefit from being delivered directly from the farm; half of what he grows is delivered to schools. Goodson notes local produce has a more pleasing appearance from less handling, and higher quality taste due to less storage and travel time. This is evident through his delivery of 400 pounds of tomatoes every week to one school district alone. To preserve the field-fresh flavor of the tomatoes, schools are asked not to refrigerate them, and students notice the difference—they eat more tomatoes when they're locally grown.

Goodson has found that strawberries, tomatoes, and lettuce are all products that are valuable for farmers to sell to schools, due to the volume school cafeterias require, as well as the quality margin. Goodson prefers to drive his produce directly from his farm to each school because he is passionate about delivering his produce in person.



▲ *Jim Goodson's farm produces about 10,000 pounds of tomatoes every year. He has discovered that certain crops lend themselves to the farm to school market.*



▲ *Jim Goodson's hydroponic set-up. Greens are regularly in demand at schools, and provide important nutrients year-round. That being said, any farmer can adapt some part of their process to the school market.*

In fact, Goodson knocked on school doors to meet cafeteria managers and Child Nutrition Directors face-to-face. As he says, he carved out the demand for the produce he was growing. Ultimately, the schools and the farmers have to meet in the middle.

“The schools have got to create the demand. Right now, I went out and found my own demand. Bill went out and found his own demand.”
-Jim Goodson

To the students of Batesville, Rose Bud, and Dardanelle, Goodson is not only a farmer, but a teacher. He has participated in ten education programs to teach students about where their food comes from. One of his most memorable lessons consisted of helping students identify seeds of different fruits and vegetables, bringing the growing process into the classroom. Goodson wants future generations to understand agriculture and become excited about fresh, homegrown food. ↻

M any thanks to: Jim Goodson, Damascus farmer; Bill Landreth, Newport farmer; and Ron Rainey, University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service.

