**Executive Summary**

The ‘Farm to School’ initiative connects schools with regional or local farms in order to serve healthy meals using locally produced foods. The Washington State Farm to School team conducted a survey about Farm to School activities in the state to learn more about local efforts, identify areas of need and opportunity, and prioritize actions.

**Methods and Sample:**

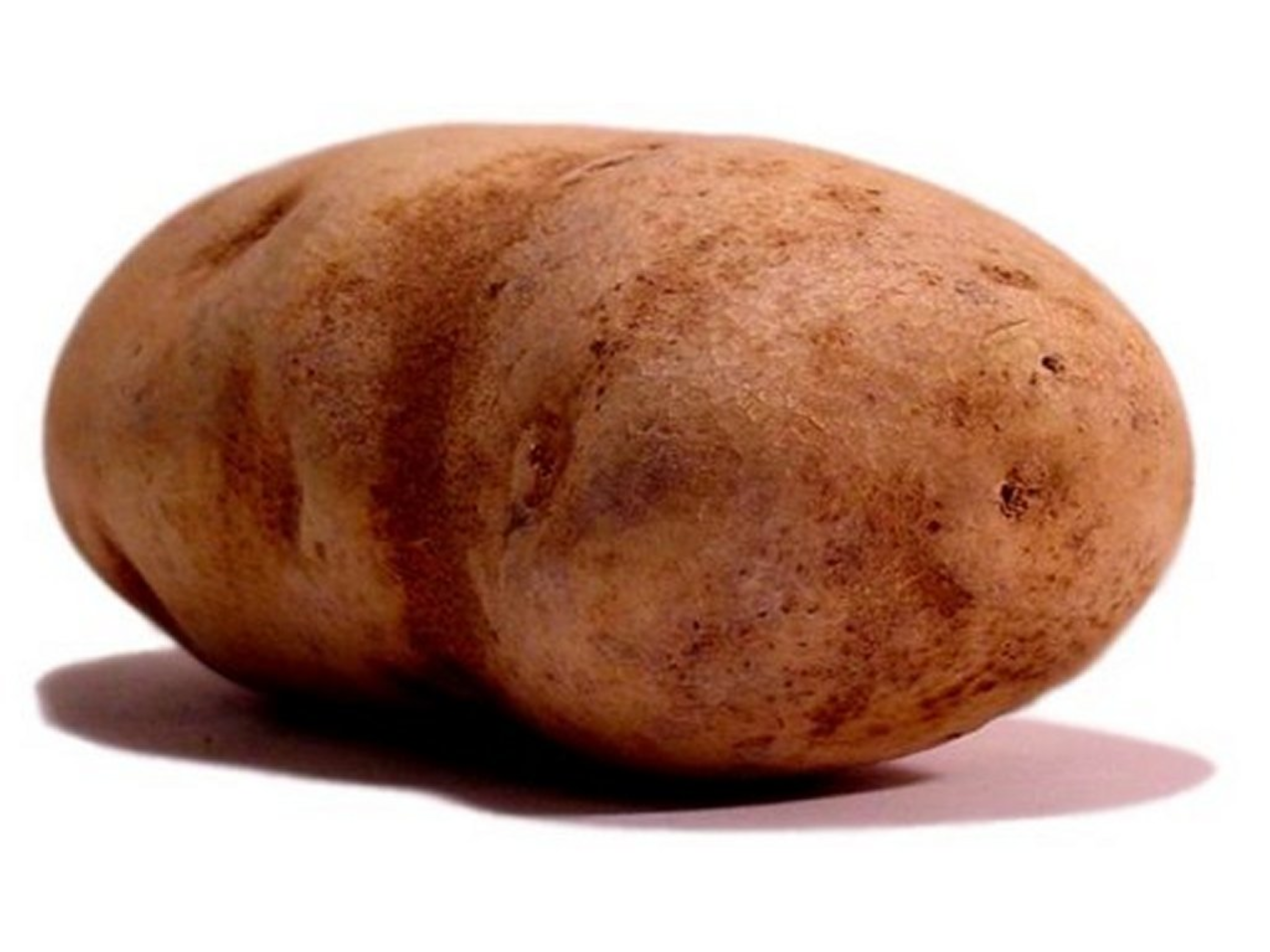
* Food service directors from the 295 school districts in Washington State and other entities that participated in the National School Lunch and National School Breakfast programs in 2009/2010 were invited to participate in an on-line survey in 2011.
* A total of 82 surveys were completed. Respondents represented diverse and geographically distributed school districts.
* The 39-question survey asked about current practices, capacity to overcome barriers, and need for technical assistance.

**Main Findings:**

* Farm to School efforts are underway across the state; there is strong interest in doing more; these efforts are not usually integrated into district policies.
* All of the 22 districts that had experience purchasing food locally stated they would continue to purchase locally.
* Four of the top 10 fruits and vegetables purchased by schools (apples, pears, potatoes, grapes) are also among Washington’s top 10 commodity crops.
* Schools may lack kitchen facilities to process fresh produce; those with larger percent free and reduced price lunch eligibility are more likely to have this capacity.
* Larger school districts require a large volume of produce, which is a barrier to sourcing foods locally.
* The top three Farm to School training interests are:
  + Learning about the availability of farm products in the region
  + Seasonal recipes and menu planning
  + Budgeting and cost management

**Recommended State-level Actions to Support Farm to School in Washington:**

* *For Food Service*: Promote use of central kitchens or other processing facilities; train foodservice staff on food preparation and safety.
* *For School Communities*: Provide resources and training to teachers, administrators, parents and farmers to extend the benefits of Farm to School beyond the cafeteria; support integration of the program into school wellness policies by coordinating with state wellness policy training efforts and offering model policies.
* *For Farmers:* Develop matchmaking tools and networking opportunities to connect schools and farmers.
* *For the Farm to School Program:* Build state leadership for interagency coordination, program evaluation, and marketing.

 Washington State is well positioned to grow its Farm to School Program.