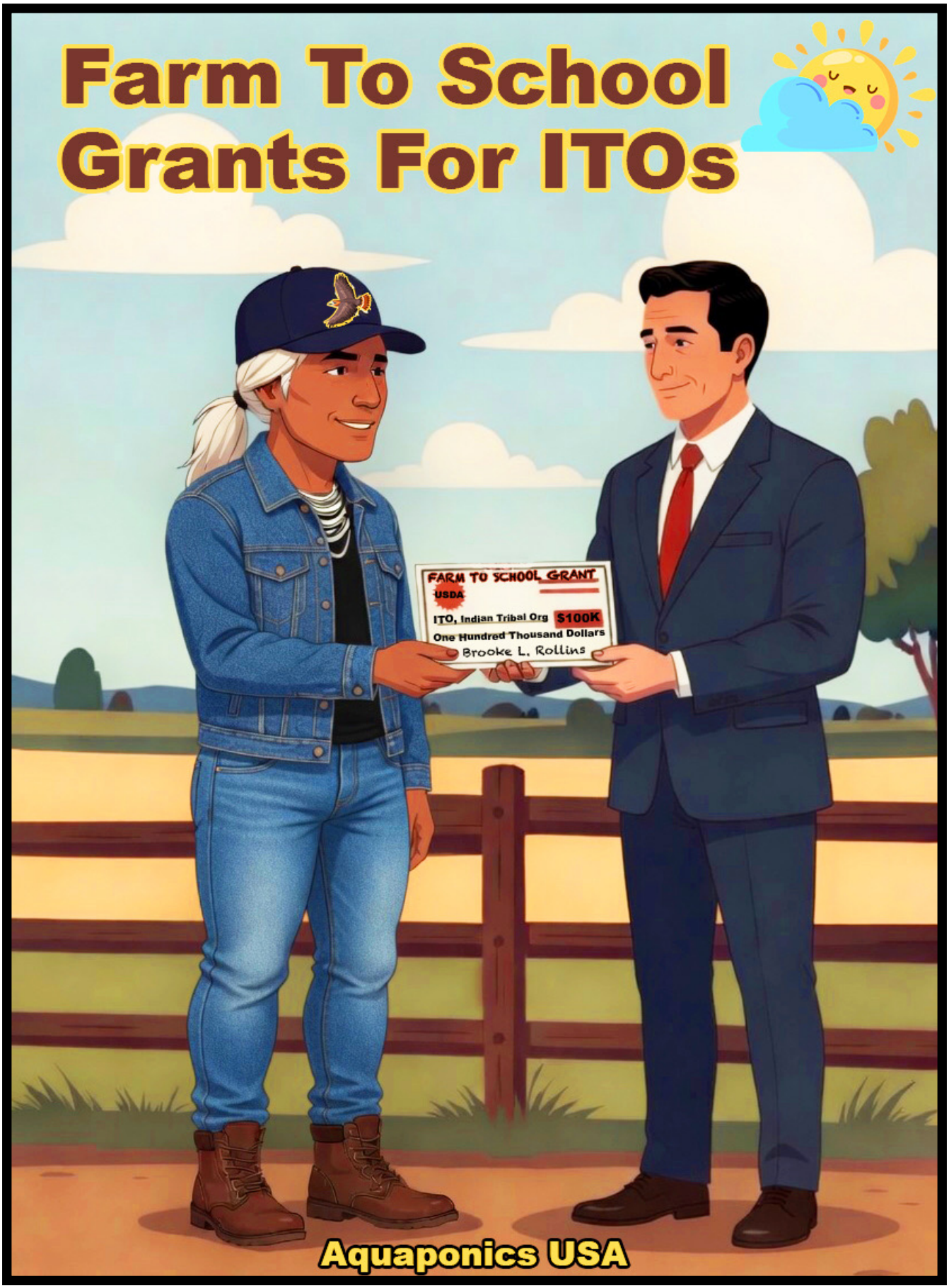


Click the Image to see a short Video

Foreword

Aquaponics USA, (AUSA), introduces **Aqui**, their **AUSA Emoji,** who, in turn, is honored to Introduce the **Farm To School (F2S) Grant Program, administered by the United States Department of Agriculture** and sponsored by the **Arizona Farm To School Network,** which is tied to the **Arizona Department of Education (ADE).** Here's the run down:

The Arizona Farm to School Network is the primary statewide hub supporting **Farm to School** efforts across Arizona. It connects schools (K-12 and early childhood), farmers, child nutrition staff, educators, producers, and communities to increase access to **local foods** in school meals, provide hands-on **agriculture and nutrition education**, and strengthen school gardens and related programs.

Mission and Core Pillars

The network aims to:

- Serve children healthy school meals with Arizona-grown or raised products.
- Educate students through nutrition, agriculture, and garden-based learning.
- Support local producers by expanding markets through school purchasing.

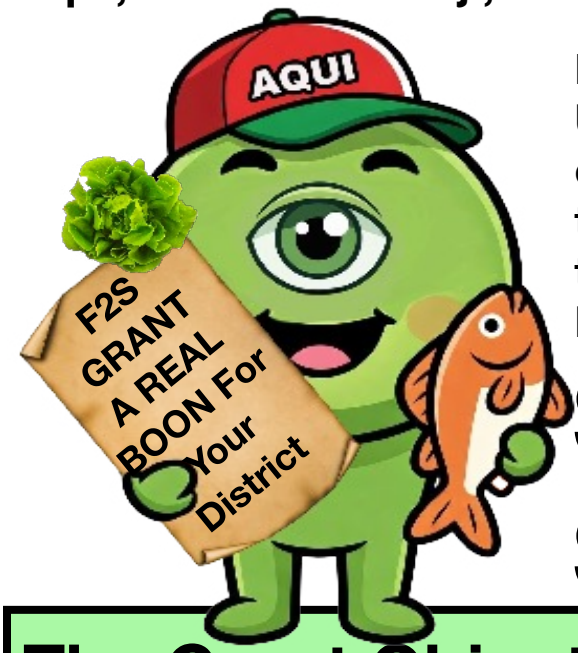
It emphasizes three main elements: **local food procurement**, **food education**, and **school gardens**. The network is a project historically tied to the **Arizona Department of Education (ADE) Health and Nutrition Services Division** and is co-convened with partners like the **Mollen Foundation**.

Aquaponics USA's Mission

Aquaponics USA aims to:

- Make Arizona Schools Citadels For Food Security
- By introducing Aquaponics Food Forever Farms™
- Educating students about Aquaponics as The Future of Farming, due to its ability to solve the 5 biggest Food Growing Challenges of the 21st Century.
  - Water Shortages (See Colorado River Basin Water
  - Fertilizer Shortages
  - Fish Shortages (See Marine Ecosystems Crises)
  - Soil Degradation
  - Climate Change (See The Future Of Farming)

Aqui, the AUSA Emoji, Shares About FARM TO SCHOOL GRANTS



Farm To School Grants are funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and are offering a significant amount of money to their Grantees. For any School District this is a real boon, and the Objective is Ingenious! Learn more on our Website.

$100,000 Min. To $ 500,000

The Grant Objective: To improve access to local foods in Child Nutrition Programs (CNP) through Local Sourcing and Agricultural Education.

It's a WIN/WIN for Students and Local Farmers & Producers.

It Allows Aquaponics USA to Debut their Water Conserving, Multi-Crop Farming Of the Future, Food Forever Farms™, in Local School Districts.

Bottom Line: Be ready to deal with a lot of Government RED TAPE.

This Is a Third Way to Bring an Aquaponics Project into your District or School, which appeals to anyone who believes in the motto:

Go Big Or Go Home!

The Three Ways Are:

1. **One Classroom Aquaponics System in one School.**
2. **A District-Wide Aquaponics Project, which would place 3 Aquaponics Systems in 3 Schools across all 3 Grade Levels.**
3. **A Large-Scale Aquaponics Project called "A Food Forever Farm" (FFF)**

How can you purchase **A Food Forever Farm™?** Get Awarded a **"Farm To School Grant",** which means you write a Grant to compete in the annual **Patrick Leahy Farm to School Grant Competition.** Make a Request For Application **(RFA)** as soon as they are available**.** You can do that in early September of 2026, and your completed Grant would be due, 3 Months later in December of 2026, which means you would need to start on your Grant soon.

Congress Approves a Different Amount of Money for These Grants every year. There are no stats for 2026 as Awardees and Amounts will not be announced until June. There are new Rules as of 2026. The Minimum amount that Applicants can request is **$100,000**. But there is a caveat, which is a **25% non-federal match (cash or in-kind) making the Total Minimum Grant $133,334** (details to be explained later in this document).

Who Is Eligible? All Arizona school Districts (public, charter, or private that operate a Child Nutrition Program **(CNP)** such as the National School Lunch Program **(NSLP)** or School Breakfast Program **(SBP)** are eligible to apply for or participate in the Patrick Leahy Farm to School Grant Program. There is no fixed list of "eligible Districts" — eligibility is open to any District or school that participates in USDA Child Nutrition Programs **(CNP)**, as long as the project improves local food access in **CNP** meals and includes agricultural education components.

However the Eligibility gets complicated as most things do when dealing with the Government, and in 2026, besides the new minimum, the Rules got stricter:

Eligible Applicants and Partnership Rules for (FY 2026 Request For Application RFA)
Eligible entity types include:

- State agencies
- Indian Tribal Organizations **(ITOs)**
- **Child Nutrition Program (CNP) operators** (schools/school Districts, childcare institutions, and summer sponsors participating in NSLP, SBP, CACFP, or SFSP — in good standing with their state agency)
- Local agencies
- Agricultural producers/groups
- Non-profits (with 501(c)(3) status)

What is a State Agency?

"Any statewide government agency that administers or works in partnership with the agency that administers the Federal Child Nutrition Programs (CNPs) (e.g., Office of Public Instruction, Department of Education, Department of Agriculture, Department of Health, etc.). Eligibility is not restricted to the State agency that administers the CNP(s)."

It appears the Government makes it **easier** to get one of these Patrick Leahy Farm To School Grants **for Government entities and ITO's than for School Districts**, but if you're willing to deal with the red tape, as a School District, Partner Up with two other eligible entities and can come up with the 25% non-federal match in cash or in kind, you can succeed in getting a significant amount of Grant Funds for a **Food Forever Farm**. **More about what's involved in the Grant Application, and details about what is a Food Forever Farm** later in this document**.**

What Is a Key Rule?

Key Rule: State Agencies and ITOs can apply as a single entity (with one partner required). All other entities—including CNP operators like **school Districts—must apply as part of a 3-Way Partnership**. School Districts/SFAs (School Food Authorities) are explicitly directed to apply under the **CNP** operator category (not as local agencies).

What is a Partnership? (Go to Page 32 to learn more about Partners)

A partnership is defined as **a group of three or more entities** (including the coordinating/lead entity that submits the application and would receive the award). Requirements include:

- At least **one eligible CNP operator** as a partner (if the lead/coordinating entity is not itself a CNP operator/administrator).
- The project must actively involve partners in implementation.
- Only **two partnership letters** are required (max one page each, from non-lead partners, confirming commitment, roles, contributions, and relevant experience/CNP participation).
- All projects must tie to increasing local food access in CNPs via procurement, education, gardens, etc.

CNP operators (like school Districts) are eligible to serve as the **coordinating/lead entity** but still need to form this 3-Way Partnership—they cannot apply solo. Applications from non-eligible entities or those failing partnership/match rules are screened out.

If you have gotten this far, and still think this might be your answer to bring a formidable Aquaponics Project into your District with a Greenhouse that houses a **Large-Scale Food Forever Farm™** System that could feed a significant number of Students while teaching Sustainable Farming, rigorous Science, how to run an Aquaponics Farmer's Market/Store, keep reading.

Click the Image to see a short Video

On page 3, you discovered that as a School District, you are eligible to apply for a Farm To Food Grant, but you have to have 2 Partners to make a 3-way Partnership and your Partners must be involved in the implementation of the Project right from the beginning. So the first thing you want to do is get your Partners lined up.

You also need to always remember, you're going to be tracking everything. Grantees must track and report progress on all proposed activities and indicators using a standardized USDA form. Grantees are expected to collect data that demonstrates progress toward the Grant Objective: improving access to local foods in Child Nutrition Programs (CNP) through local sourcing and agricultural education.

Tips for Building a Strong Partnership:

- Reach out to local agricultural producers, **Arizona's farm-to-school coordinator/network**, extension services, or nonprofits with 501(c)(3) status.
- Ensure partners have clear, complementary roles (e.g., one handles procurement, another education/gardens).
- Document everything clearly — vague commitments can lead to disqualification.

Take Advantage of Your Pre-September Lead Time

Prior to September 2026, you have some Lead Time to work on your Grant before the Request For Application is Released (sometime in September)

- Get on top of the short 3 Month Timeline once the RFA is Released by knowing when the FY 2027 Farm To School **(F2S)** Cycle begins, which means you need to visit the USDA **Food Nutrition Services (FNS)** Website, often starting in mid August as the Call for Applications usually is released in September.
- Contact **USDA FNS Farm to School Staff** for Guidance tailored to your School District.
- Contact **The National Farm to School Network** who can also help identify potential Partners. Look at the "Try It Local" Resource List on Page 2.
- Consider getting involved with the **Arizona Farm To School Collaborative**, which is an Initiative of the Mollen Foundation that offers a one-year professional learning experience designed to empower schools, Districts, early childhood centers, and communities across the state to build strong, sustainable Farm To School Programs.
- Once the RFA is Released, Download the full Document from the USDA Food Nutrition Services (FNS) website and **Review Sections 3.1-3.2 and 4.7** for the latest details.
- Bring in **Aquaponics USA**, **(AUSA)** who will be your **Food Forever Farm™ Vendor** and help you prepare your Project Narrative and Budget Narrative.

Why is AUSA Introducing Farm To School Grants?

AUSA not only sells small-scale Classroom sized Aquaponics Teaching & Food Growing Systems. Their Retired NASA Engineer, Oliver Duffy, has also designed large-scale Aquaponics Systems, called **“Food Forever Farms™”**, and these larger Systems are a perfect match for the Up-scaled Farm To School Grant Program that has a Minimum RFA Request of $100,000.

AUSA is running a small **Food Forever Farm™ Demonstration Greenhouse** in Show Low, Arizona, not far from 10 School Districts in the surrounding area, and they want to be **YOUR VENDOR** that supplies everything you need to have a Sustainable, Highly Productive, Year Round Teaching & Food Growing Vegetable & Food Fish, **Food Forever Farm™** in your District.

They don’t want to be your Partner or a Producer in the 3-Way Partnership you will need to create. **They want to be the VENDOR that will turn your District/School into a Producer of the finest Organic Vegetables, Fruits and Food Fish ever raised while simultaneously Teaching your Students rigorous Science using their accompanying 688 Pages of Science Curriculum for all Grade Levels.**

And they want to start by giving you a **Specified, Itemized Quote for the $133,334 Farm To School Grant** that would cover everything you would need to have a fully functioning **Food Forever Farm™** including:

1. The Greenhouse (Supplied by a Separate Vendor)
2. The Climate-Controlling Greenhouse System
2. The Aquaponics Food Forever Farm™
3. The Delivery of said Farm
4.The Installation of said Farm
5.The How To Operate A Food Forever Farm™ Class
6. The How To Present the Science Curriculum Class
7. The Food Forever Farm™ CTE Program (See Separate Doc)

AUSA offers a **60 Page Document describing the intricacies of “How Food Forever Farms™ Work”**, which requires the signing of an NDA to View. **If you think you would like to file a RFA for the 2027 Farm To Food Grant, and make AUSA your Food Forever Farm™ Vendor, please Request An NDA.**

Discovering **Farm To Food Grants is a Vision Come True for Grace Sylke**, the Marketing Director at AUSA as after **Exhibiting at the ADE Teachers’ Institute & Leading Change Conference in Glendale, AZ** (See Photo on Page 9) and **meeting Dr. Guzman, Associate Superintendent of the Arizona Department of Education**, Grace had a vision, which she shared with Dr. Guzman in a follow up letter which stated the following:

Making Arizona Schools Citadels For Food Security:

"I'm feeling a bit Martin Luther Kingish sharing this idea with you as it's a real "I Have A Dream" kind of Concept that has only been discussed within our company. **The idea is for Arizona to lead a Food Security Movement by building Large-Scale Aquaponics Systems into Greenhouses and/or Warehouses placed on School property** where Food can be grown year round in preparation for possible Food Scarcity due to Climate Change and/or other weather challenges. My feeling is that there are quite a few Schools that have property which could be dedicated to this endeavor, and **Grants could be written to appeal to our new Secretary of Health and Human Services, RFK Jr., who is all about improving our Childrens' Health**. If you find this idea, interesting, please let me know as I would love to discuss it with you further. It just so happens, we not only offer small-scale Aquaponics Systems, but we also have Large-Scale Aquaponics system Designs and are running a Demonstration Greenhouse 6,000 ft. up in the White Mountains of Arizona that is growing Vegetables and Food Fish year round in what we call **Food Forever Farms™**."

At the time that Grace wrote this to Dr. Guzman in the Fall of 2025, she had no idea that the Patrick Leahy Farm To School Grant Program even existed, but somehow she was connecting to it and imagining how it could benefit Arizona Schools, their Students and surrounding communities.

What Is A Food Forever Farm™?

To get the fully detailed description of a **Food Forever Farm**™you need to Request for and Sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement **(NDA) as much of the AgriTech in Food Forever Farms™ is proprietary.** If you are being presented a hard copy of this Document by an AUSA Salesperson, you can get the **PDF** by Clicking on the **"Master Sheet To Access AUSA PDF Docs"**, which was sent to your Email Box.

So here is the short, less detailed version of **What Is A Food Forever Farm™?** Food Forever Farms™ are way bigger than the AUSA popular Classroom Teaching & Food Growing Systems designed for Schools. They utilize multiples of their largest Classroom System, the **FGS-65**, with two Deep Media Grow Beds and a 500 gallon Fish Tank to grow more food than a typical Classroom would need.

Deep Media Grow Beds have been borrowed from Hydroponics AgriTech and are a common component in Aquaponics Systems. The 65 sq. Foot Deep Media Beds that are in a Food Forever Farm™ are 4' x 8' Polyethylene Beds that are 12" Deep, hence the name, "Deep Media".

The advantages of Deep-Media Grow Beds are many when you want to grow Flowering Plants that put out Vegetables and Fruits. Flowering plants are called Angiosperms and have over 352 thousand species. They are the most successful species of Plants on Earth. The ones we are most familiar with grow fruits or vegetables after first producing a flower. They are often large plants that sometimes need Trellis Netting for support. The ones planted directly into the Grow Bed Media need that 12" depth to sufficiently hold the large ones like Peppers, Tomatoes and Egg Plant. Tomatoes need both Deep Media and Trellis Netting for support.

There is more media in Deep Media Beds to cultivate a greater amount of the friendly bacteria necessary to convert ammonia from the fish waste into nitrates for optimum plant growth. This process, which happens in Aquaponics, is a part of the Nitrogen Cycle, one of the main topics in **Part 1** of the AUSA **AGWARTS™** Curriculum.

Grow Beds won't grow anything unless they hold Grow Bed Media. The Media replaces soil that soil gardeners use to grow their plants. The Media also holds the friendly bacteria the plants need to grow and be healthy. Hydroton is the best Grow Bed Media on the market. It is made of pH neutral Expanded Clay and is, therefore, an ecologically sustainable medium. The pebbles have neutral buoyancy in water, do not compact, are inert, contain no nutrients and are completely reusable.

Although Deep Media Grow Beds are a common component in Aquaponics Systems, the ones in a Food Forever Farm™ designed by Oliver Duffy, the retired Aerospace Engineer who is the CEO of AUSA, are totally unique. It's what you don't see that makes them that way and why tyou need to sign an NDA for AUSA to share what is happening underneath the Hydroton.

In the Right Grow Bed are both Pepper Plants and Tomato Plants. Tomatoes grown in an Aquaponics System are beyond delicious. There are two kinds of Tomato Plants, Determinate and Indeterminate. Teachers with 65 sq. Ft. Grow Beds can plant Indeterminate Tomato Plants in them because they are big enough to handle the roots that an Indeterminate Plant will put down into the Grow Bed Media as they continue to grow over many seasons or even years when they are well taken care of.

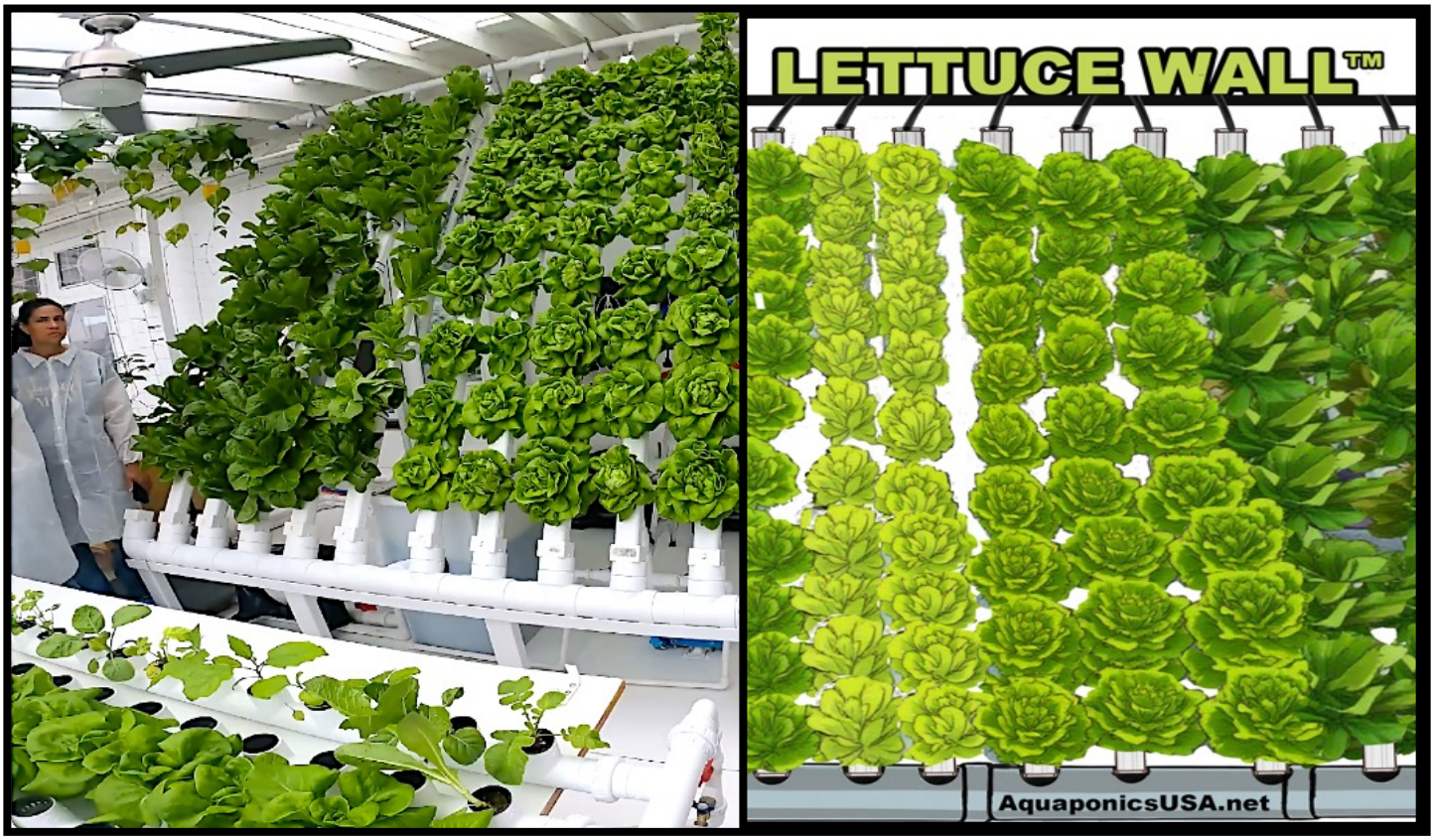
Tomato Plants are the only Plants that have to be pruned, which means the sucker branches that will not produce Tomatoes have to be removed to allow for the producing branches to put out more Tomatoes. Pruning Tomato Plants can be a time consuming chore, which needs to be done weekly to stay ahead of it, and would be an important task for Students who need to learn about maintenance and care of their Food Forever Farm along with the importance of consistency.

Each of the 65 sq. ft. Grow Beds are supported by 3 sturdy steel Tables. All of the Plants you see in the Image on Page 12 are Flowering Plants. In the Left Grow Bed are big Red Swiss Chard Plants. Swiss Chard can grow to be huge in an Aquaponics System, and it stays tender and delicious even if it's left in the Grow Bed for a couple of Months. Aquaponics Farmers do not see Swiss Chard Flower because it does not Flower until it Bolts, which means it's growing time is over and it is ready to go to seed.

Food Forever Farms™ have several other Components besides Deep Media Grow Beds. They also have a Vertical Growing System AUSA calls a **"Lettuce Wall™"** that is capable of growing massive amounts of Lettuce and other Leafy Greens.

AUSA 's **Lettuce Walls™** were named by their over 37,000 TikTok Followers after they put up a Video demonstrating how easy it is to plant and harvest the Walls. **Lettuce Walls™** are another example of why AUSA does not require a Competitive Bid process when a School District brings them in as a Vendor. There simply is nothing like what they are doing in the field. The Farm To School Grant requires AUSA to demonstrate this fact, in the Budget Narrative, which they will write for you.

On page 13, you see a Lettuce Wall™ that is ready to harvest. It is growing two kinds of Lettuce, Butter Lettuce and Romaine. This Lettuce Wall™ in the AUSA Demonstration Greenhouse is capable of growing 108 heads of Lettuce or other types of Leafy Greens like Arugula, Swiss Chard or Basil every 8-9 weeks from seed. Below is a Video of Harvesting A Lettuce Wall™. **Click the Image to View the Video.**



In front of the Lettuce Wall, you see the front side of a Table with Leafy Green Plants on it. These Plants are actually growing out of another proprietary Component created by Oliver, the AUSA Engineer and his System Designer, Keil Plotczyk. This duo created a **4 Stage Growing Process that goes from Seed to Harvest.**

At AUSA , the **Lettuce Wall™** is called the **Stage 4 Vertical Duffy Duct System** after Oliver Duffy. The Table in front of it is called the **Stage 3 Horizontal Growing Table**, **HGT™**, and these two Components work together to grow a lot of Vegetables in two of the **4 Stages**. Almost all other Aquaponics Designers use a 1 Stage Floating Raft System to grow Lettuce as seen in the Photo on the Left.

Oliver's 2-Stage System allows for: **1. The young Seedlings to be transplanted** to the Vertical space-saving Lettuce Wall or the Deep Media Grow Beds about half way through their grow out time leaving space in the Horizontal Growing Table for more Seedlings. All of the Vegetable Seedlings not just Leafy Greens go into the Stage 3 Horizontal Intermediate Growing Table (shown above).

2. The Floating Raft Systems seen below are not only water intensive, but when they are as long as these, of which the photo is only showing a partial section, it becomes difficult to maintain consistent water quality from one end to the other.

In traditional Floating Rafts, which are called Deep Water Culture **(DWC),** Plants need to be spaced according to their fully grown out head width. From a root viewpoint, this spacing is much more than is required. The disadvantage of DWC is the amount of water that needs to be pushed through the system, especially if the grow beds are long, in order to maintain consistent water chemistry from end to end and the pumping and electricity required to do that.

Most of the water going through the DWC trough never comes in contact with the plant root. If the DWC grow bed is elevated, then its heavy weight becomes a factor and a costly supporting structure must be designed appropriately. DWC grow beds are generally limited to leafy green plants whose roots can tolerate continuous water submersion with limited oxygen in the water.

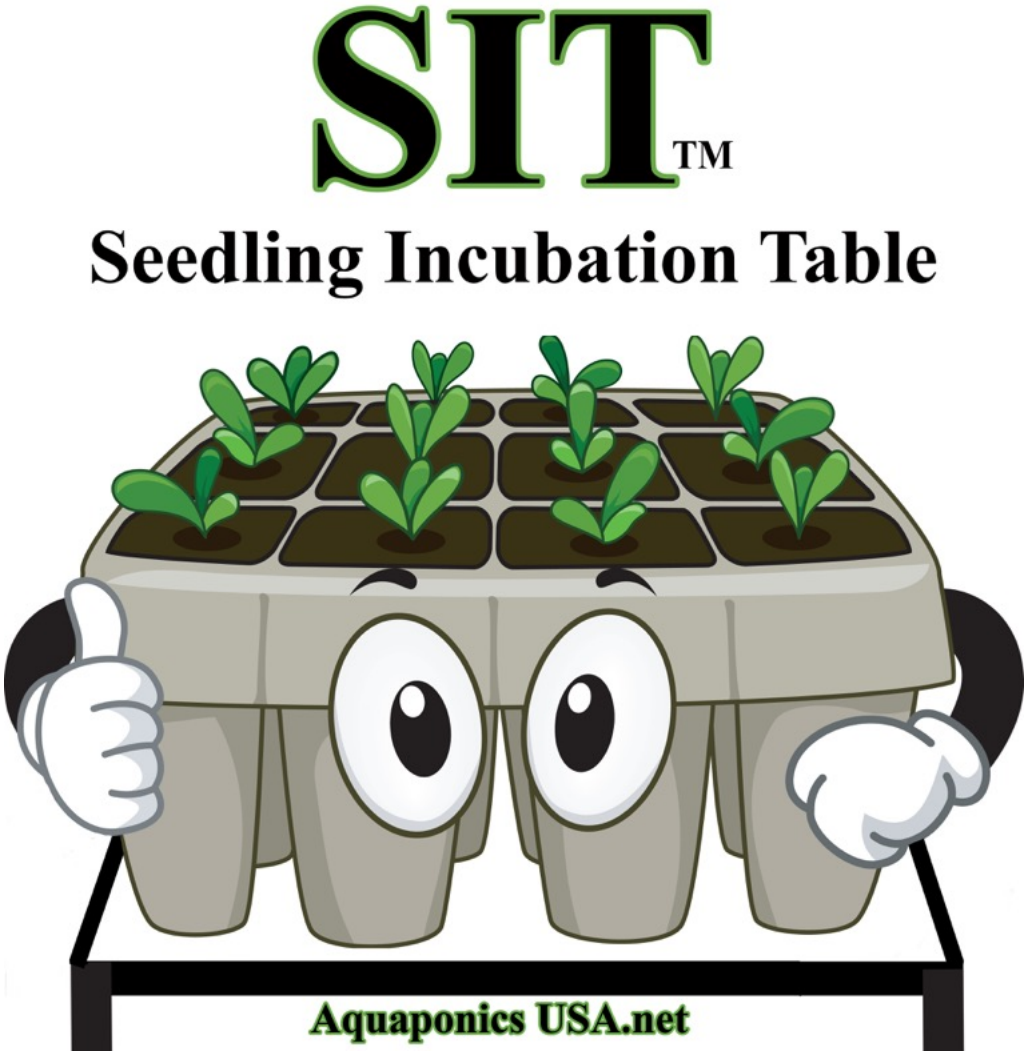
Oliver's redesign of Floating Rafts (seen on Page 15) **i**s a Horizontal System of PVC Pipes designed exclusively fo**r** Seedlings rather than **f**ully grown out plants because the Seedlings get transplanted either to the Deep Media Beds or the Vertical Stage 4 Duffy Duct System when they are still small.

3. The Stage 3 Horizontal Growing Table, HGT™, pumps way less water through these Pipes. It has multiple raised PVC T's within which a Net Pot with the bottom cut out fits perfectly.

The roots grow out of the bottom of the Net Pot to make contact with the water that is flowing through the System. In the photo above, Keil, our System Designer and Greenhouse Manager, is using the extended front end of this multi-purpose **HGT™** to harvest one Duct from the **Stage 4 Vertical Duffy Duct System**, which snaps into place within clips that sit at both ends of the Table. At the back of the **HGT™**, is a second Duct from the Vertical System, aka: Lettuce Wall™, which was just harvested.

On the Left, is another view of the **HGT™** full of Seedlings that are past ready to transplant.

The Second Stage of the AUSA 4-Stage Growing Process utilizes another proprietary Component called the **Seedling Incubation Table, SIT™**.



The **SIT™** is designed for **growing out Seeds into Seedlings**. Using proprietary Seedling Trays**,** the **SIT™ automatically waters your Seedlings** until they have enough root mass to move over to the **Stage 3 Horizontal Growing Table, HGT™.**

How the automatic watering happens is described in the Document called "**How Food Forever Farms Work**", which is subject to an NDA. Request your NDA here today, and AUSA will get it out to you.

Below is an Image of their proprietary Trays sitting in the **SIT™.** You are only getting a top View of these Trays, so just like what is under the Hydroton in their Deep Media Beds is what makes AUSA 's Grow Beds unique, the parts of these unique Trays that are not seen inside the **SIT™** is what makes them proprietary and functional.

Above are four Seedling Trays which AUSA calls **SPEED SEED™** Trays, **SSTs,** that are especially designed to work in the **SIT™** where water from the Fish Tanks is routed into the **SIT™** and floods them 2 times every day up to the roots of the growing sprouts until the sprouts have fully sprouted into Seedlings and are ready to transplant into the **Stage 3 Horizontal Growing Table, HGT™.**

The First Stage of the AUSA 4-Stage Growing Process utilizes these **SPEED SEED™** Trays**, SSTs** to hold the Seeds from the moment they are dropped into one of their separated segments until they go into the **Stage 3 Horizontal Growing Table, HGT™.**

As has been demonstrated, AUSA likes to divide processes into different stages for ease of both comprehension & function. **SSTs** are no exception. The 2 Stages of the **SST** Process are **SST1 & SST2**.

SST1 actually involves another commonly used Product in the Aquaponics field, an A-OK Seed Starter Plug. AUSA has been using A-OK Starter Plugs to start their Seedlings for years, and supplies them with their Classroom Teaching & Food Growing Systems along with a Super Sprouter for Teachers who do not have a **SIT™**.

These Starter Plugs are made from chalk and the basalt rock that is formed by volcanoes, heated to a high degree (3000°F) of heat then spun and cooled. Next, a binder is added and the substrate is flattened to form a sheet. These Plugs work great, but they are not soil and need to be pH adjusted to around 5.5 to 6 in pH to make them more like nature's soil so your seeds will feel at home.

Part 1 of the Science Curriculum goes into this subject in detail with an entire explanation about what is pH, Lessons and Teaching Videos, but for this document, suffice it to say, the AUSA Video on Page 21 from their YouTube Channel shares everything you need to know to accomplish this pH adjustment.

Click the Image to View this Instructional Video

What Oliver has done is he has prepared the A-OK Starter Plugs to be used, but not in the original flattened sheet as seen above. These pH adjusted Plugs are all separated from each other and stuffed into the individual segments of the **SSTs.** But before you separate them, you need to take a pencil and widen the holes where the seeds are going to be placed. Let's have Grace demonstrate that process, which is simple but necessary and could be easily left out or forgotten.

Put Grace with Pencil Video here:

There are 98 Plugs in one A-OK sheet that will be put into two **SSTs**, each with a Center Segment left empty as **SSTs** have 50 Segments. That process is **SST1.**The number of Seeds you want to sprout depends on the Size of your **Food Forever Farm™**, what was recently harvested that you want to replace or what new Vegetable you want to grow.

Now you are ready for **SST2**, which is the process of actually dropping the Seeds into the Plugs with the widened holes that have been placed into the separated segments of your **SST** and labeling them. **Part 1** of the Science Curriculum goes into the labeling process with appropriate Codes, which are not discussed here.

Once you have your **SSTs** filled with their Seeds, there is another common component in the food growing space called a Black Seedling Tray that is added. In fact, you will use four of the Black Seedling Trays that come with your **Food Forever Farm™** Accessories.

You will place one of the Black Seedling Trays under each of your planted **SSTs** and place another Black Seedling Tray on top of the **SST**.

Now you are ready to put your **SSTs** anywhere there isn't a lot of Light, which means not in your Greenhouse. After about 24 Hours, you hand spray the **SSTs** with water, and repeat daily for about three days. This is the dark sprouting method, and is a part of what speeds up the sprouting process as the seeds grow faster due to being challenged to seek light.

Once the sprouted Seedlings are about 1" tall, you have completed **SST2.** However, on occasion, the Seeds get what is called "Leggy" meaning their stems have gotten too long. If that happens, you need to add another **SST** Step**, SST3.**

SST3 involves removing each of the Plugs from the segmented **SST**, carefully splitting the Plug apart to reveal the roots inside it, gently pulling the root away from the Plug, and pulling the entire sprouted Seedling down further into the Plug so the stem is shorter. Then you put the Plug back together and reinsert it into the **SST**. Now you are ready to go to **Stage 3, the Intermediate Horizontal Growing Table**, that was described on Page 15 of this **4-Stage Growing Process from Seed to Harvest.**

This has been a rather long discussion of this Proprietary **4-Stage Growing Process** that is exclusive to AUSA and which has evolved over several years of testing and retesting under the tutelage of their retired Aerospace Engineer, Oliver Duffy. The bottom line is this Growing Process has been carefully Engineered over years of R & D and serves as the Foundation of their claim that **Food Forever Farms™** are some of the most efficient Food Growing Environments on the Planet.

The following is a Summary Outline of the **4 Stage AUSA Growing Process** that goes from Seed to Harvest:

- **Stage 1** happens in **SPEED SEED™** Trays, **SSTs**, where the Seeds are planted in 2 or 3 stages:

  SST1=Starter Plugs are pH adjusted by soaking in 5.5-6 pH water and then separated into their individual cubes to be placed in the **SSTs**

  SST2=Seeds are dropped into the individual cubicles of the **SSTs**, which are placed into a bottom Black Seedling tray & covered with a top Black Seedling tray for dark spouting and put in a shaded location to be hand watered for 3 days until they sprout.

  SST3=If sprouts have stems that are over ¾" long and look leggy, the Starter Plug needs to be removed from the **SST** and gently separated so the sprout can be pulled down to shorten the stem

- **Stage 2** happens in the Seedling Incubation Table, **SIT™,** where the **SSTs** are placed once they have sprouted and where they are automatically watered until the sprouts are mature enough to go into the Stage 3 Horizontal Growing Table, **HGT™**

- **Stage 3** happens in the Horizontal Growing Table, **HGT™**, when the Seedlings are removed from the **SSTs** and placed into Net Pots with the bottoms cut out so their roots can grow long enough to reach the water running through the **HGT™** and the Seedlings become about 4" wide and ready to be transplanted into the Stage 4 Vertical Duffy Duct System, aka **Lettuce Wall™**

- **Stage 4** happens in the Vertical Duffy Duct System, aka, **Lettuce Wall™** when the Seedlings in their Net Pots are transplanted into the **Lettuce Wall™** where they are automatically watered until they are fully grown out and ready to harvest

Food Forever Farms™ have other proprietary Components besides High Tech Deep Media Grow Beds, Lettuce Walls, Horizontal Growing Tables, SITS and SPEED SEED Trays, so let's take a look at them next starting with the following:

1. **The <u>Dilution Solution System™</u> allows Quick & Safe Additives & Conditioners to go into your AP System.**

2. **The <u>WET™ System</u> helps create Clear, Clean water that is highly Oxygenated.**

3. **<u>AquaHeat™</u> heats the Fish Tanks 24/7 without depending on expensive electric Heaters.**

To see the details about these Components in the "How Food Forever Farms™ Work" Document, just Request the AUSA NDA.

AUSA 's recently added Component is the:

Food Forever Farms™ are designed to be space efficient with a little extra space here & there to add Tuck It, Buckets in order to grow a single plant.

Determinant Tomato Plants work well in these Buckets because they only grow out for a limited amount of time and are much smaller than Indeterminant Tomato Plants discussed on Page 11. You can also grow other Flowering Plants in Tuck It, Buckets.

Before ending this section on the added Components of Food Forever Farms™, here is one last reminder of how **out of this world** Lettuce Walls really are. Let's talk Agri-Tech. In order to grow Lettuce and other Leafy Greens on a Lettuce Wall, which in the field is called **Nutrient Film Technique (NFT),** the water has to be really clean. In NFTs, the Nutrient rich water from the Fish Tanks is delivered to the vertical ducts through a tiny tube. The roots drink up the water as it passes, but the water has to be ultra clear to pass through the tiny tube. There would be no way to operate the **Stage 4 Vertical Duffy Ducts** and save about half of the space it would take to grow the same amount of Lettuce in a Horizontal System without pristinely clear water.

Food Forever Farms™ for the Patrick Leahy Farm To School Grants, are sized precisely to meet the Grant's Awarded Amount. That means they start at $100,000, and along with the graduating Grant Awards, could go up to $500,000. Of course, the $500,000 **Food Forever Farm** would be five times larger than the $100,000 one.

Above is a rendering of a Food Forever Farm with five of the Components described in Pages 8-21. They include the **Stage 4 Vertical Duffy Duct System,** aka, Lettuce Wall, two **65 sq. ft. Deep Media FGS-Systems** with their two 500 gallon Fish Tanks and four **Tuck It Buckets**, two with Pepper Plants and two with Tomato Plants.

What is not being shown are the **Stage 3 Intermediate Horizontal Table**, the **Stage 2 SIT** with the **SPEED SEED Trays**, the **Dilution Solution System**, the **WET System** and the **AquaHeat System**.

AUSA has been operating a Food Forever Farm in their Arizona Greenhouse since 2019, which they have self funded, and they are eager to organize Tours to share it with all of the bells & whistles described in this document, but they have yet to build one beyond the one they built for themselves.

They created a separate website called **BioPonic Earth** featuring Food Forever Farms™ and have a **Food Forever Farm** Project pending with the Biocybernaut Institute in Sedona Arizona, which is discussed on their Website. There are other potential **Food Forever Farm Projects** pending that depend on the Project Leads getting Funding as Start Ups for large-scale Aquaponics Systems can be costly. (See their **Verified Market Research** Doc). So the only Food Forever Farm that has been built to date is the one AUSA funded themselves.

At some point after several of other People's Funding endeavors failed to materialize, Oliver and Grace decided to put **Food Forever Farms™** on the back burner and focus on their small-scale Classroom Aquaponics Systems for Schools, which is what they have been doing since moving their entire Company from California to Arizona a decade ago.

Nevertheless, their efforts and investment in Food Forever Farms™ has not been wasted. AUSA has invested over $300,000 in R & D between that previous California Greenhouse, Grow Room and Fish Room and their Arizona Greenhouse and Fish Room to get to this point where they are ready to put **Food Forever Farms™** in as many Schools as possible around the U.S., and they are staring in their home State of Arizona.

This is why they are so happy to have discovered the **Farm To School Grants** because these Grants are such a perfect fit for their **Food Forever Farms™**, and put the job of getting funding into their hands for the first time. To them it feels like they created **Food Forever Farms™** with the accompanying 688 Pages of Science Curriculum for all Grade Levels just for this purpose.

If you're feeling the push to **GO BIG OR GO HOME** with a Food Forever Farm, keep reading.

How To Write Your Winning Farm To School Grant:

Successful Patrick Leahy Farm to School Grant proposals score highly on the **USDA's formal evaluation criteria (totaling 100 points)** and **demonstrate a clear, feasible plan to meet the program's core objective: Improving Access to Local Foods in Child Nutrition Program (CNP) Sites Through Comprehensive Programming that includes Local Sourcing and Agricultural Education**.

Early in this Document, you learned that as a School District, you need to have two Partners who are involved in the implementation of your Awarded Grant. **AUSA , needs to make it ultra clear that we are not one of those Partners. We want to be your Vendor/Contractor.**

Your Partners are involved in the Grant playing their specified roles for the duration of the 24-Month Project. AUSA , your Vendor/Contractor, installs your Food Forever Farm, Trains you and your Partners on the Operation and Maintenance of the Farm and the Delivery of the Science Curriculum, then Exists the Project at a specified date in the **Activities/Indicator Tracker** except for Follow Up Tech Support.

Therefore, you can bring in AUSA to design, build and install your Food Forever Farm, Train Staff regarding its Operation and Maintenance, and the use of the Science Curriculum, all Budgeted under the F2S Grant and simultaneously partnering with one or more local Arizona farmers for ongoing produce supply and educational activities.

This dual approach strengthens the application by demonstrating both infrastructure development (via contractor) and authentic farm-to-school connections (via producer partner). USDA explicitly allows essential services through line-item contractors and encourages partnerships with agricultural producers to increase local foods in school meals. This model has appeared in past successful awards, including Arizona projects involving greenhouses, gardens, or controlled-environment systems combined with local producer partnerships. The Project Objective has to be Addressed and Tied Into the Proposal: Improve access to local foods in eligible CNP sites (schools, CACFP, NSLP/SBP, SFSP, etc.) through comprehensive farm-to-CNP programming that includes:

- **Local sourcing** (procuring and using local/regional foods in meals)
- **Agricultural education** efforts (connecting students to food sources via gardens, taste tests, curriculum, farm visits, etc.)

The Project needs to address at least 3 of the 5 priorities listed below and described with data in the Narrative:

- Scaling up and expanding reach of farm-to-CNP efforts.
- Partnership building (collaboration, network building, peer learning).
- Innovative methods for lasting success and impact beyond the grant period.
- Creating new or expanding opportunities to connect America's farmers to CNPs.
- Enhancing innovation and capacity for States providing farm-to-school support.

The USDA Scores the Farm To School Application on a 100 Point Scale. **As of 2026**, **Farm To School Grant Awards are within the $100k to $500k range**, with a **25% match** required. The following are the **Areas to cover in your Proposal:**

Project Description: The heaviest section in strong proposals:

1. Project Narrative: 5-14 Pages that clearly establishes:

- **Project Overview:** Purpose, activities, deliverables, expected outcomes. Describe AUSA's specific, time-limited services (e.g.,"The District will contract with AquaponicsUSA for turnkey installation and training of the Food Forever Farm system, after which District staff will independently operate it")
- **Project Need:** Data showing the need: (e.g., current local food sourcing levels, student demographics, gaps in agriculture education) any project that addresses it.
- **Objective Alignment:** How the project improves local food access via sourcing +agricultural education + on-campus food production.
- **Priority Alignment:** Which 3 priorities are addressed and how do they apply.
- **Explain Activities:** Present a well-designed project with detailed activities, deliverables, expected outcomes, and a realistic timeline. Explain that an Aquatic Wildlife Stocking License (Form 2710-A) and Disease-Free Certification will be obtained from the approved Arizona Game & Fish Dept. (AZGFD) Fingerling Vendor, AmeriCulture.
- **Tie In Farmer Partner** to grant objective: Improve access to local foods via sourcing + education. integrating it into school meals (local sourcing), and agricultural education (curriculum, taste tests, student involvement).

- **Sustainability Section** explains how the District will continue the project independently after AUSA's contract ends (e.g.,through trained cafeteria and teaching staff, integration into existing curriculum, and use of the system's produce in the National School Lunch Program.
- **Letters of Commitment:** From all formal Partners (not required for Vendor/ Contractors like AUSA, but helpful if they choose to include one), which AUSA would gladly do.
- **Standard Federal Forms:** SF-424, SF-424A, SF-424B, etc., plus any certifications.
- **501(c)(3) letter** (if applicable).

2. Activities/Indicators Tracker: Usually limited to a 3 page **Required Table** that includes all activities from the Narrative. A sample Table appears in the RFA with examples like recruiting advisory committees, delivering trainings, or installing gardens. The Tracker structure comes from the FY2027 Farm To School RFA documents to be released in early September of 2026.

- Anticipated Start and Completion Dates
- Lists activities (e.g. "Food Forever Farm installed and operational by Month 9; 100% of relevant staff trained on Operation and Maintenance by Month 10" along with how to "Deliver student Ag Education Lessons")
- Include at least 5 required Indicators (e.g., dollar value of local produce used, number of students reached via education, number of gardens/ systems supported, training indicators, partnership indicators) plus your own additional **SMART** Indicators (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound) ones (e.g., "By Month 12, produce X pounds of greens/fish for school meals, measured via harvest logs").
- **SMART** Indicator Examples: Number of new local procurement guides developed and distributed to 20 CNP sites by June 2028, Number of on-farm field trips conducted, reaching 300 students with pre/post knowledge assessments showing 75% improvement in understanding local agriculture measured quarterly. Indicators must be trackable during the performance period (common examples: people reached/trained, materials created, events held). Align everything with the objective; grantees report via semi-annual FNS-908 forms and a final report.
- Activities involving Farmer Partner, food procurement, integrating it into school meals (local sourcing), and agricultural education (curriculum, taste tests, student involvement).

3. Budget & Match:

Food Forever Farms™ involve proprietary Aquaponics Agri-Tech systems. Therefore, the District can request a sole-source Contract rather than full competitive bidding. With the help of AUSA, the District will provide a detailed justification in this Budget Narrative, explaining the unique nature of the technology, why no equivalent alternatives exist, and that the price is fair and reasonable. USDA reviews and approves this during the budget review process. Past Districts have successfully used this approach for specialized garden, greenhouse, and hydroponics/ Aquaponics installations.

- **Detail costs for the Food Forever Farm** including installation, training, curriculum, evaluation (e.g., "AquaponicsUSA will be contracted to deliver and install the Food Forever Farm system and provide 40 hours of on-site training for school staff")
- **Provide a clear justification** explaining why competitive bidding is not feasible. Strong, acceptable reasons for sole-source in this context typically include:
    - **Proprietary technology** — Food Forever Farms™ involves unique, specialized Aquaponics Agri-Tech components (e.g., proprietary designs of integrated fish + produce systems, advanced complimentary components, training protocols) that are not available from other vendors. Include supporting documentation (e.g., technical specs of Food Forever Farms™ showing proprietary elements, a statement that AUSA is the sole provider of this integrated system with training).
    - **The District (as the lead applicant)** is responsible for following federal procurement standards (2 CFR 200.317–200.326). Sole-source is allowed only when one of the regulatory conditions is met (e.g., item is available only from a single source, or public exigency/emergency — proprietary specialized tech often qualifies under the "single source" rationale when properly documented).
    - **Only one source is reasonably able** to provide the specific services needed to meet the project's technical requirements.
    - **The cost is fair and reasonable** (include supporting documentation such as price quotes, market research showing no equivalent alternatives, or technical specifications demonstrating uniqueness).
    - **After award**, the District will need to maintain records of the justification for audits.

- Show 25% non-federal match (cash or in-kind, e.g., district staff time, facilities). (See Matching Concepts on Pages 34-35)
- Align with at least three USDA priorities (e.g., geographic diversity, serving Tribal communities, rural areas, or specific producer groups) and back this with data.

4. Evaluation & Reporting: Evaluation and reporting in the USDA Patrick Leahy Farm to School (F2S) Grant Program are tightly linked to the Activities/ Indicators Tracker submitted in the application, which becomes the backbone for all reporting.

- How you'll track progress (pre/post surveys, harvest records, meal participation) and report via FNS-908 forms.
- Post-Award Reporting: FNS-908 Performance Progress Report (PPR**)** Grantees report progress using the **FNS-908 Performance Progress Report** (a fillable PDF form provided by USDA/FNS).
- Frequency: Semi-annual progress reports (typically due at the end of each 6-month period during the 24-month performance period).
- Final report due no later than 90 days after the end of the period of performance. (See Page 40 for Downloading/Saving Video Links)

5. How Tracking & Reporting Happens in Practice:

- Districts maintain internal records throughout the grant (e.g., invoices for local food purchases, training sign-in sheets, student contact hours logs, garden/system harvest data, taste test results).
- For a **Food Forever Farm** project: Track pounds/dollars of produce/fish used in meals, staff training completion, student education hours, and hand-off to District staff after AUSA's installation/training phase.
- Use simple tools like spreadsheets, Google Forms, or existing school systems to collect data quarterly or as activities occur.
- The District (as lead) coordinates all data collection, even if partners (e.g.,
- In the tracker: List time-limited activities like "Contract with AquaponicsUSA for system installation and training" with early completion dates and indicators (e.g., system operational by Month 9; X staff trained).
- Ongoing activities (local farmer partnership, meal integration, education) get longer timelines and indicators like dollar value of local produce used or student contact hours.

- For the 25% match and sustainability: Document District staff time/facilities as in-kind (helps reporting) and explain post-handover operations in the narrative and final report.
- AUSA's role ends after training. There is no ongoing reporting burden on AUSA. The District handles data collection afterward.

6. Technical Support:

- USDA provides an **FNS-908 Overview video** that walks through each page of the form, including how to add indicators.
- Short webinars on "Downloading/Opening" and "Saving/Submitting" the form (must open in Adobe Reader and enable all content).
- Indicator keys and FAQs for current Grantees.
- Grantee resources page includes sample reports and guidance on accurate reporting.

7. Evaluation Aspects:

- **Built-in via Indicators**: The primary "evaluation" is quantitative progress against the tracker indicators (e.g., increased local food dollars, students reached, systems supported). This demonstrates impact on local sourcing and agricultural education.
- **Qualitative Elements**: Narrative sections in the FNS-908 allow discussion of outcomes, sustainability (how the Food Forever Farm and partnerships continue post-grant), and broader impacts (e.g., student knowledge gains via pre/post assessments).
- No mandatory external evaluator or complex logic model is required, but strong applications often include simple evaluation methods (surveys, logs) that feed directly into reporting.
- USDA may conduct broader program-level evaluations across all grantees (e.g., past reports on economic contributions or local food spending

Practical Steps for the District to Secure the Two Partners:

Here's the most effective sequence that successful Arizona and nationwide Districts have used:

1. **Start Internally (Fastest First Step)** Identify internal champions: Food Service Director, Superintendent/Principal, and a teacher or STEM coordinator. These count toward building the team but not as external "partners."

2. **Engage a Local Farmer/Producers** (Essential Partner #1) This relationship provides ongoing produce supply (supplementing the Food Forever Farm output), participates in taste tests, farm visits, or student education and directly supports the Grant's local sourcing goal.
    - Contact Arizona farmers through:
        - Local farmers' markets.
        - Arizona Department of Agriculture or Arizona Farm Bureau.
        - Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona or Pivot Produce (they already connect farmers to schools in Tucson and are expanding to Maricopa County/Phoenix area).
        - Existing school relationships (many Districts already buy from nearby producers).
    - Offer a simple **Letter of Commitment** template (one page) describing their role: supplying local produce for meals/taste tests, participating in education activities, etc.
    - Emphasize mutual benefits: steady market for the farmer + fresh local food for students.
3. **Add One More Complementary Partner (Partner #2 or #3)** — Choose the easiest high-value option:
    - **University of Arizona Cooperative Extension** or Arizona State University (common in past AZ awards; provides education expertise, curriculum support, or technical assistance — low burden).
    - A nonprofit such as Arizona Sustainability Alliance, Project Roots AZ, or a local food bank.
    - Another school or District for peer learning (especially useful for scaling).
    - A local agency or 4-H/FFA chapter. These partners often already have experience with Farm to School and can provide in-kind support (e.g., training or curriculum) that also helps with the 25% match.
4. **Document Everything:**
    - Obtain Letters of Commitment from each formal partner (required). Each letter must describe: overall support, specific role/responsibilities, and relevant experience. Keep them to one page.
    - List the partnership clearly in the Project Narrative (under Priority Alignment and Activities sections).
    - Include partners in the Activities/Indicators Tracker (e.g., rows for joint taste tests, farm visits, or sourcing goals).

How School Districts Typically Satisfy the 25% Match:

Grantees often document the match through a combination of these. For example, a District might cover staff salaries/time as in-kind while using cash from its food service account for materials. The value of in-kind items must be reasonable, allocable, and documented per federal rules (2 CFR 200.306).:

- **In-kind contributions** (most frequently used, reported by ~58% of grantees):
  - Staff time (e.g., food service director, teachers, or administrators dedicating hours to project activities like training, curriculum development, taste tests, or garden maintenance).
  - Use of existing school/District facilities, equipment, or space (e.g., cafeteria kitchen for processing produce, classroom time for agricultural education, or land for a garden/greenhouse).
  - Volunteer labor (e.g., parents, community members, or students helping with installation or events).
  - Donated materials or services (e.g., seeds, tools, or expert time from local partners).
- **Cash from District or school food service budgets** (reported by ~78% of grantees):
  - General District funds or school nutrition program operating budgets allocated to the project (e.g., for supplies, minor equipment, or partial staff salaries not covered by the grant).
- **Other non-federal sources**:
  - Local, state, or private grants/foundation funding.
  - Fundraising (e.g., garden tours, farmers' markets selling student-grown produce, or school events).
  - Corporate or community donations/partnerships.
  - Individual donors or PTA/PTO contributions.

Examples from Past Awards (Including Arizona-Relevant Ones)

- Many Districts use **staff time and existing facilities** as the bulk of their match, especially for garden, greenhouse, or Aquaponics-style projects similar to a **Food Forever Farm**. This keeps cash outlay low while showing District commitment.

- In Arizona projects (e.g., Prescott Unified School District, Westland Charter School, Espiritu Schools, or Arizona Agribusiness & Equine Center Aquaponics/garden initiatives), match often comes from District resources for garden teams, maintenance plans, and integration into existing STEM/Ag Education Programs.
- Nationwide examples from USDA reports show Districts leveraging:
    - Partner contributions (e.g., a local farmer or nonprofit providing in-kind expertise or produce for taste tests).
    - Fundraising tied to the project (e.g., garden produce sales or community events).
    - Supplemental private grants or donations to supplement District in-kind.

In this AUSA Vendor/Contractor model, the District could potentially value portions of staff training time, ongoing system oversight after handover, or facility use as in-kind match. AUSA's installation work would be a **contractual expense** paid by grant or District cash (not match), while the District handles the 25% through its own resources.

This approach has enabled hundreds of school Districts (including many in Arizona and rural areas) to successfully win and implement F2S Grants. For the most current details, review the **Budget Narrative** and **Match** sections in the upcoming FY2027 version when released).

What To Consider Given the new Minimum Award, $100,000

- The 25% match is **not** a barrier for most Districts once they realize heavy reliance on **in-kind** (especially staff time and facilities) is allowed and common.
- Emphasize sustainability: Reviewers like to see that match sources demonstrate the District's ability to continue the project (e.g., operating the Food Forever Farm) after the grant ends.
- Calculation example (from recent RFAs): For a $100,000 federal request, the required match is approximately **$33,334** (total project cost ~$133,334). Round properly to hit exactly 25% or higher.
- Districts should include signed match commitment letters in the application for each source.

IMPORTANT RESOURCES

AZ Resources for School Districts to Participate in Farm To School:

1. Try It Local Guidebook
2. Information Sheet for SFAs = School Food Authorities/School Districts
3. Aggregators and Mainline Distributors Guide
4. Try It Local Resource List of Mainline Distributors, Aggregators and Farmer/Producers
5. School Interest Form
6. How To Receive Try It Local Funding for Eligible Food Purchases
7. HNS 08-2024 Revised Try It Local Program Reimbursement

Resources for Farmers/Producers

1. Information Sheet for Farmers and Producers
2. Farmer and Producer Guide

AZ Key Contacts and Engagement:

- **Primary Contact**: Raevyn Xavier (Health Specialist, ADE) — 602-542-2405 or Raevyn.xavier@azed.gov.
- Arizona Farm To School Network **Website**
- Arizona Farm To School Instagram for updates on local produce features, workshops, and events.
- **How to Get Involved**: Join **Communities of Practice (CoPs)** — free monthly Zoom sessions for networking, problem-solving, and sharing best practices. Examples include:
    - Local Food in Schools CoP (procurement, menu integration, engaging with ADE's Try It Local program).
    - School Garden + Education CoP.
    - Options for Nutrition Education and Farm to Early Childhood.

There is also the Arizona Farm to School Collaborative (via Mollen Foundation), a structured professional learning program with monthly technical assistance (recent cycles targeted 2025–2026).

Resources for Schools and Communities

Visit the Farm To School Network Resources page for free or low-cost tools tailored to Arizona's desert climate and needs. Categories include:

School Gardens:

- Food safety tips, ADHS customizable Food Safety Plan template, and Buy Local, Buy Safely Checklist.
- Curricula: The Great Garden Detective Adventure (grades 3–4), Sonoran Desert School Gardener's Almanac, Sustainability via Active Garden Education (SAGE) for early care, plus links to Life Lab, Edible Schoolyard Project, and University of Arizona workshops.
- Arizona-specific planting calendars (e.g., Maricopa, Yuma, Yavapai counties).

Local Food Procurement:

- Producer Workbook: Bringing the Farm to School.
- Guides for procuring/selling local foods to schools.
- Harvest of the Season posters and USDA DoD Fresh fact sheet for using entitlement dollars on local produce.

Funding and Grants:

- **Funding Farm to School** tool — guidance on grants and other sources.
- Western SARE grant opportunities for sustainable agriculture projects.
- Links to Kids Gardening grants and broader funding ideas (highly relevant when pairing with Patrick Leahy Farm to School Grants).

Other:

- Climate-smart practices, policy advocacy tools, and connections to National Agriculture in the Classroom (NAITC), Food Corps, and more.
- Note: Resources mention hydroponics programs (e.g., in "The Wonder of the Universe Starts with a Seed"), which align closely with Aquaponics for hands-on production systems.

USDA Resources to Help Districts Move Quickly:

- National Farm to School Network "Building Your Farm to School Team" tools and state contacts:
- USDA Farm to School Planning Toolkit (free guide with partnership examples): Available from Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) website.
- Sample Letter of Commitment templates appear in past RFAs or on the National Farm to School Network site. The Template is in a docx Format.

- **Direct Download Link** (Microsoft Word .docx file):
- https://files.simpler.grants.gov/opportunities/fbf4bcdc-17dc-44d8-8c2d-9cc286fe63ca/attachments/0f442327-cf6d-472b-9d47-9dce021b7e8e/FY2026_PartnershipLetter_Template.docx
- Formal partners (e.g., a local farmer or Cooperative Extension) should use this template or a similar format. AUSA, as a **time-limited vendor/ contractor** (installation + training only), typically does **not** need a formal Letter of Commitment. If the District wants supportive documentation from AUSA, a simple letter on their letterhead describing the contracted scope and timeline can be included voluntarily (but it is not required as a "partnership" letter).Up to three Letters of Commitment are generally allowed. **Check the current RFA for Formatting** and/or limits. They are submitted as attachments.
- Main FNS Farm to School Applicant Resources Page

USDA Key Resources for Districts:

- Current Grantees Resources Page (reporting guidance, webinars, FNS-908 overview):
- **FNS-908 Overview Video**: Available on the USDA site (explains adding indicators).
- FY2026 RFA (Section 7.3 on Reporting Requirements and Appendix G on FNS-908):
- **Download the FY2027.RFA when it becomes available in September of 2026 and use it as your Resource.**
- These brief videos were created specifically for current Farm to School grantees to help with the semi-annual and final reporting process. They are very practical and focus on technical steps that often cause issues (e.g., form compatibility and proper saving).
- Reporting is straightforward using the FNS-908 form. Two short USDA videos cover the technical steps:
  - Downloading and Opening
  - Saving and Submitting

Where To Look for a Grant Writer?

Best Ways to Find Experienced Farm to School Grant Writers:

Here are the most practical and effective approaches that Arizona school districts (and others) typically use:

1. **National Farm to School Network (NFSN)** Consultation Services NFSN offers paid or low-cost consultation services to help organizations build capacity for farm-to-school work, including grant-related guidance. They can sometimes connect you with experienced professionals or provide referrals. This is often the best starting point for F2S-specific expertise.
2. **Contact State or Regional Farm to School Coordinators** Many states (including Arizona) have a designated Farm to School coordinator through the state Department of Agriculture, Education, or Cooperative Extension. They frequently know local grant writers who have successfully helped districts with F2S applications.
    - Search for "Arizona Farm to School" or contact the Arizona Department of Agriculture or University of Arizona Cooperative Extension.
    - They can share informal recommendations based on past successful awards.

3. **General Agriculture/USDA Grant Writers Who Have F2S Experience** Several firms and consultants handle USDA grants (including F2S, Value-Added Producer Grants, or similar local food/agriculture programs) and have documented success with school districts:

- **Stewards Unlimited** — Specializes in USDA grant writing for farmers, food hubs, nonprofits, and agriculture supply chain projects. They have helped secure millions in USDA funding.
- **Robert J. Miller & Associates** — Has a track record of winning multiple Farm to School Grants for school districts (e.g., in NY, LA, ID). They focus on education-related grants.
- **Kim Joyce & Associates** (Phoenix/Scottsdale, AZ) — Large Arizona-based firm that works with school districts, charter schools, and nonprofits on federal and state grants.
- Other agriculture-focused writers appear on state lists (e.g., Wisconsin or Massachusetts agricultural grant writer lists) or general USDA-related directories.

4. **Local Arizona Resources**

- Raise the Bar LLC or other Arizona grant writing companies listed in local directories.
- University of Arizona or Arizona State University grant support offices sometimes provide referrals or training.
- Community foundations or food policy councils in Phoenix/Tucson areas may know consultants familiar with local food and school projects.

5. **Other Channels**

- Post in relevant Facebook groups (e.g., Farm to School practitioner groups) — people often seek or recommend writers there.
- Check platforms like Upwork or LinkedIn for freelancers with "Farm to School" + "grant writer" in their profiles.
- Review past F2S awardee lists (on the USDA site) and reach out to successful districts to ask who helped them with the application.

6. **Important Tips When Hiring**

- Ask for **specific F2S experience** (e.g., "Have you helped with the Activities/ Indicators Tracker, sole-source justifications for proprietary tech, or partnership requirements?").
- Request references from recent school district clients and success rates on F2S grants.
- Clarify scope: Many writers charge a flat fee or percentage for full application support (narrative, budget, tracker) versus hourly review/editing.
- Remember that the District remains responsible for the content, certifications, and compliance (including sole-source justification for AUSA in the Budget Narrative).

So You Decided To Move Forward

With a Farm To School Grant For A Food Forever Farm! What's Next?

- You need to decide how much between the Minimum of $100k-$500k you want to request. There are no required increments. That means you can request any amount within that range.
- To help you with that decision, AUSA has designed and 3D Illustrated a $100,000 Model in a separate Document. Just Click the Link.
- If you decide to go with the $100,000 Model, the size of the Greenhouse is 20' x 100', so that is the starting size, and you can go larger from there.
- Remember, the 25% Grant Match, which means the Total Amount of the $100,000 Grant is Funded at $133,334.Reword This
- Once you get firm on the Food Forever Farm Model Size, AUSA can move forward with the Itemized Budge Narrative, that you will put into your Proposal along with the justification for why you have chosen to Contract with a sole-source Vendor offering proprietary Agri-Tech.
- Aquaponics USA will also be involved in the writing of the Project Narrative in which the deliverables are described in detail along with expected outcomes over a 4-Month period once the Food Forever Farm is installed and fully operational.

Conclusion

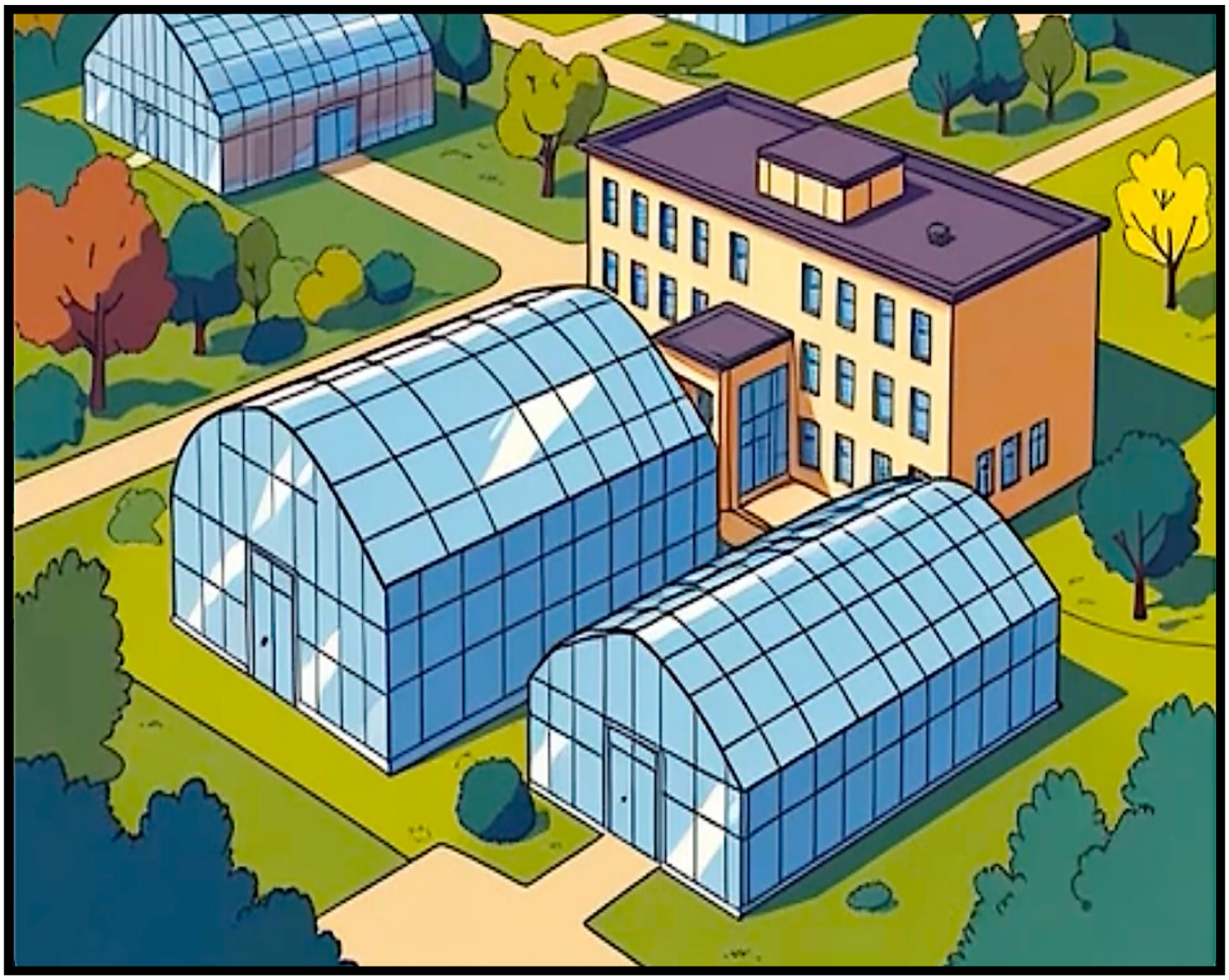
The Aquaponics USA Sales Team is on a Mission to get as many Classroom Teaching & Food Growing Systems as possible into U.S. Schools, but along the way it sure will be grand when a Team Member arrives back at Home Base & announces:

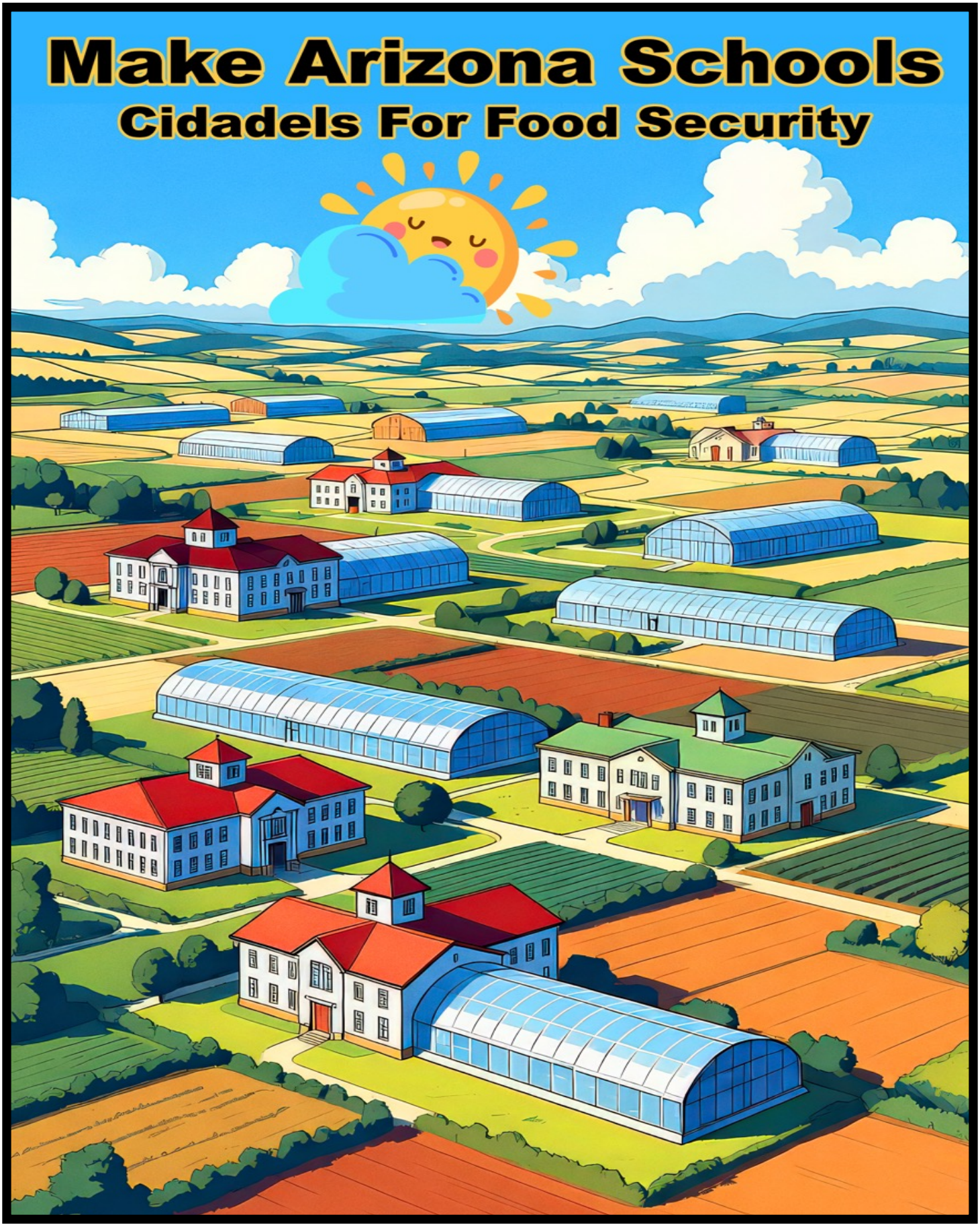
Click the Image to see a Short, Fun Video

It will be grand not only for Aquaponics USA, but for the entire state of Arizona because the more School Districts Arizona has with Food Forever Farms™, the more Food Secure our State will be because Food Forever Farms™ are capable of growing food year around without soil, independent of Seasons all while conserving water and growing Multi-Crops of Vegetables and Food Fish. **(See Colorado River Basin Water Wars Doc** and **Marine Ecosystems Crises Doc)**

Food Forever Farms™ are perfectly named because they are so much more than a Garden. They are the Future Of Farming because they solve every Food Growing Challenge facing Farmers today including Water Shortages, Fertilizer Shortages, Fish Shortages, Soil Degradation and Climate Change. **(See The Future Of Farming Doc)** Food Forever Farms™ on many Arizona School District Campuses is the culmination of Grace's Dream (See Page 10) to:

Make Arizona Schools Citadels For Food Security.



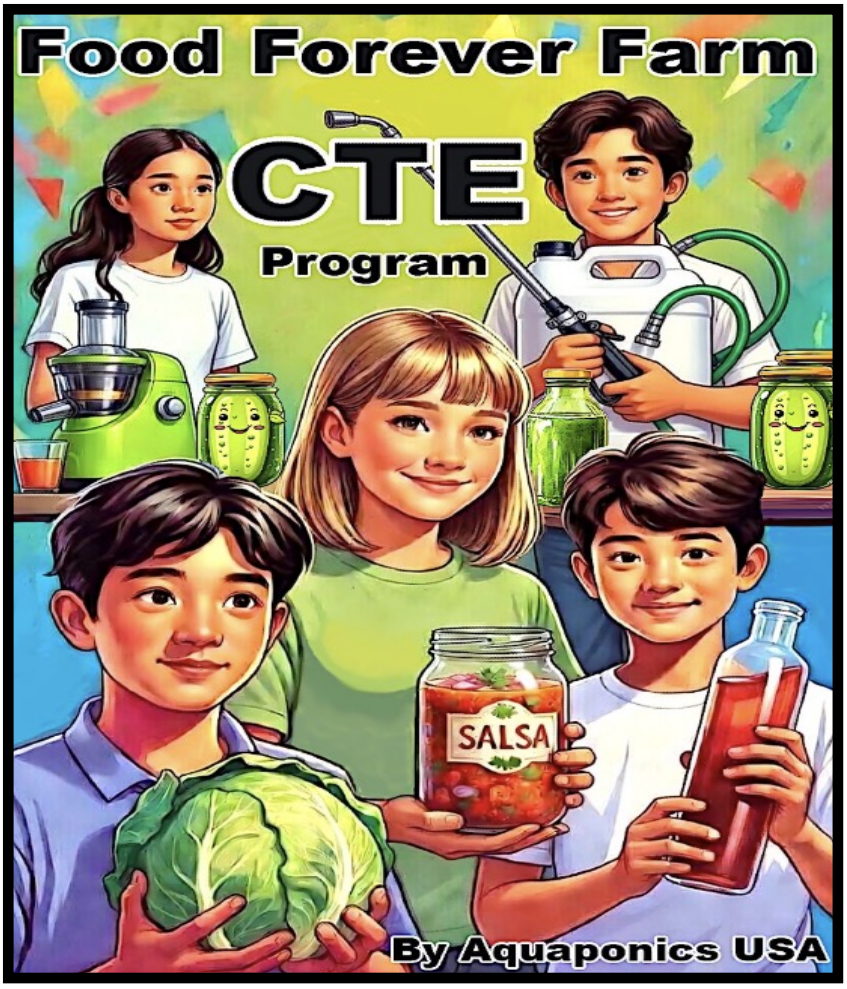


Click the Image to see a Short, Fun Video

If you've made it this far, and have decided to compete for a **Farm To School Grantt**, you will want to carefully read the next Document (See "Food Forever Farm CTE Program"), which describes:

7 Activities AUSA has developed for a follow up Food Forever Farm™ CTE Program including:

1. Operating & Maintaining a **Food Forever Farm™**
2. Dealing with the Harvested Veggies & Fish and Creating an on-campus Store
3. Branding & Packaging the Vegetables the Store plans to sell
4. Processing the Veggies that are going to become Products like juices, Salsas, Pestos & Chips
5. Pricing and Inventorying the Products in the Store
6. Tracking Sales compared to Expenses for P&L Figures
7. Learning about the differences between USDA Organic food, food grown using Pesticides, GMO Food, Hydroponically grown Food and food grown in a **Food Forever Farm™**. **Click the image to see a short Video**



Thank You for Viewing

The Farm To School Grants

Food Forever Farm™ Proposal

Go To The Food Forever Farm™ CTE Program Doc

Created by Aquaponics USA

And Distributed to District Superintendents, Principals and Teachers

For More Information or To Schedule a Tour,

Email: urbanfarmer@aquaponicsusa.com or

Call: 760-671-3053