**A new deal for school gardening in Kyrgyzstan: developing a framework for a comprehensive policy approach**

# About this consultation

This document summarizes the online consultation *A new deal for school gardening in Kyrgyzstan: developing a framework for a comprehensive policy approach*, which was held on the FAO Forum on Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia (FSN Forum in ECA) from 26 April to 30 June 2019. The event saw the participation of experts from Colombia, Italy, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

This consultation was initiated as part of the FAO project “[Developing Capacity for Strengthening Food Security and Nutrition in Selected Countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia](http://www.fao.org/in-action/fsn-caucasus-asia/en/)”, funded by the Russian Federation and led by the FAO Agricultural Development Economics Division. The facilitators were as follows:

* **Nazgul Musaeva** – Senior Specialist of the Department of preschool, school and external education, Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic
* **Aitbek Ajibekov** – Senior Specialist of the Department of farming development, seed production and organic agriculture, Ministry of Agriculture, Food Industry and Melioration of the Kyrgyz Republic
* **Kurmanbek Turdaliev** – FAO legal expert on school gardening

# Introduction

Looking at the food security and nutrition situation in Kyrgyzstan, the country has shown significant progress over the past decade in reducing undernourishment and stunting. However, micronutrient deficiencies, overweight and obesity have increased in recent years, and non-communicable diseases are on the rise. To protect children from these different forms of malnutrition and their consequences, substantial efforts are needed. In this context, the Kyrgyz Government has recognized the important role school feeding can play in addressing children’s nutritional needs.

One way to improve school feeding programmes and to promote healthy diets among children is to further develop school gardening; in this way, food can be produced directly for school meals, and income can be generated for the programme as well (provided the produce can be at least partially marketed). More than 65 percent of Kyrgyz schools already have a school garden, and almost all rural schools have access to a plot of land (Zamira Samudinova), as local government bodies are obliged to allocate these plots (Kurmanbek Turdaliev). Furthermore, rural people often already have skills in agriculture, and the investment required to develop school gardening is relatively low (Zamira Samudinova).

During the online consultation, participants shared their views on the future roles for school gardening programmes in Kyrgyzstan, and discussed some of the challenges that hamper the effective implementation of these programmes in the country. Participants also provided information on school gardening projects that have been implemented in Kyrgyzstan, and shared recommendations for their effective implementation.

# The role of school gardening in Kyrgyzstan

In general, participants’ contributions reflected the idea that school gardening could take on two roles at the same time: a “productive” role, by supplying food for school meals and generating additional income for school feeding; and an “educational” role, by increasing children’s knowledge on sustainable agricultural production and how to grow food for healthy diets.

Multiple participants stressed the crucial role school gardening would play in terms of providing agricultural education; this was regarded to be particularly important considering that Kyrgyzstan is an agrarian country (Matraim Jusupov). In fact, one of the participants stressed that school gardening could nurture respect for agriculture (Abay Orazula Sagitov). A number of participants argued that in the context of school gardening, children should receive training in sustainable agriculture, with some of these participants referring specifically to the need to focus on organic production methods (Aitbek Ajibekov, Igorbai Taranov, Abay Orazula Sagitov, Hafiz Muminjanov). In this way, school gardening could help develop a sense of responsibility regarding sustainable natural resource management and the ecosystem in general (Igorbai Taranov, Hafiz Muminjanov), especially in the context of climate change (Matraim Jusupov).

Furthermore, participants stressed the more general pedagogical value of school gardening. It would help develop children’s social and scientific skills through participation in playful educational activities. School gardening could also benefit the broader society. For example, by getting different groups of local people, with sometimes differing interests, to engage and cooperate without the intervention of public authorities, their ability to act independently can thus be promoted, and eventually trigger a process of social transformation (Mylene Rodríguez Leyton).

# Barriers to the effective implementation of school gardening

Some comments pointed out that the implementation of school gardening may be hampered due to the lack of a clear framework. There are many unanswered questions regarding, for instance, how to manage school gardens, how school gardening can be made profitable, and how to ensure the food grown is safe (Kurmanbek Turdaliev, Aida Jamangulova). Furthermore, the traditional approach to agriculture is problematic, and the system for transferring scientific agricultural knowledge to those working in the field has proved ineffective (Aitbek Ajibekov). Participants also pointed to a number of legal and institutional issues regarding the implementation and management of school gardens:

* The absence of a legal framework in which the concept of school gardening is enshrined hampers the creation of school gardens (Kurmanbek Turdaliev).
* The weak institutional capacity of government bodies makes it difficult to establish the regulatory framework for the development of these gardens (Aitbek Ajibekov).
* School gardens are created and operated without their activities being legitimized. For instance, issues concerning registration and the definition of property rights should be streamlined in order to define the role and responsibilities of those involved in school food activities. Issues regarding children’s rights, especially in relation to child labour, need to be addressed. The key question is to what extent school gardening should be part of the educational process and to what extent its role should be “economic” in terms of providing resources to schools that do not receive adequate public funding (Kurmanbek Turdaliev).

# Recommendations for the development of school gardening

* **Encourage political dialogue and commitment.** In particular, dialogue should be initiated on the development of school gardening and its potential contribution to nutrition. Furthermore, in all programme documents relevant to agricultural development in Kyrgyzstan, the development of school gardening should be indicated as a priority (Aitbek Ajibekov).
* **Develop a set of measures and regulatory acts regarding the development and management of school gardening** (Aitbek Ajibekov, Zamira Samudinova). Rules and procedures should be established for, *inter alia*, financing of activities, income and expense accounting, and food safety standards (Zamira Samudinova).
* **Set up a public system of training and consulting.** Knowledge-sharing activities and trainings on agricultural production should be organized. In addition, trainings should be developed on healthy nutrition through the prism of school gardening, crop cultivation and animal husbandry, taking into account the agricultural specialization of the different regions (Aitbek Ajibekov).
* **Implement an approach to school feeding that suits local conditions.** School gardening is only one of the ways to supply schools with fresh produce; farmers or farmer cooperatives could also directly supply school canteens with fresh produce (Aida Jamangulova).
* **Establish favourable operating conditions for schools.** Access should be given to necessary resources such as finance, high-quality seeds and fertilizers (Aitbek Ajibekov).
* **Ensure participation of the local community.** In this way a sufficient and sustainable level of food production for school meals can be achieved, and school gardening can be linked to other strategies for family and local food security (Mylene Rodríguez Leyton).
* **Adopt organic production methods.** This is not only important for ensuring high-quality diets, but also for sufficient water retention in the soil – especially important given Kyrgyzstan’s dry summer seasons (Aitbek Ajibekov).

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| **Examples of school gardening in Kyrgyzstan**  *FAO’s centralized model for the supply of agricultural products*  The FAO project “Developing Capacity for Strengthening Food Security and Nutrition in Selected Countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia” promotes a food systems-based approach to school feeding under its pilot, “School Food and Nutrition Program linked to the Agricultural Sector”. One of the activities implemented in the context of this pilot concerns the establishment of a logistics centre in the Kemin district. With a capacity of 250 tonnes, this centre is a centralized procurement, storage, and quality control facility for agricultural products and aims to support the sustainable supply of local products for social institutions such as schools. Practically speaking, farmers first agree on a contract with the logistics centre to supply it with fresh produce. After delivery to the centre, the produce undergoes a quality check in the centre’s laboratory. Subsequently, the products are packaged in the centre and then delivered to those institutions with which the centre has a contract (Aitbek Ajibekov).  *Mercy Corps’ school orchards project*  As part of its efforts to improve nutrition among Kyrgyz schoolchildren, Mercy Corps has established orchards at 105 schools and planted about 10 000 fruit tree seedlings. The fruit produced is used for school meals and to generate income that can be invested in other activities related to school feeding. Participating schools first developed a work plan, calculated the necessary funds and identified potential funding sources. Soil analysis was carried out and the necessary infrastructure, such as irrigation systems, was established. Groups of 10–15 people, including school personnel, parents of schoolchildren, and local government representatives and citizens, received agricultural training and then planted the orchards, with technical support from agronomists during project implementation. The schools are expected to enjoy their first harvests in two to three years (Zamira Samudinova).  *WFP’s school farming pilot*  From 2014 to 2017, WFP’s pilot project on school gardening entailed various agricultural activities, such as vegetable production, poultry farming and beekeeping, which were implemented depending on the conditions and availability of resources in the area concerned. The food produced was directly used in school canteens. WFP’s approach involved the well-coordinated work of parents and school staff, and was only piloted in the schools that showed sufficient willingness to take on such a responsibility. Eventually, however, the pilot was suspended due to legal, production and management issues (Aida Jamangulova). |

# Resources shared by participants

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