

Michelle Markesteyn Ratcliffe

Michelle Markesteyn Ratcliffe is the manager of the Oregon Department of Agriculture Farm to School Program, which seeks to increase the use of fresh and processed Oregon foods by the state's school food programs. Ratcliffe, who replaces Cory Schreiber at ODA, will continue working with farmers, food processors, distributors, and school district food service staff as well as existing farm to school groups and programs to help get more locally-produced foods into Oregon schools.

"Michelle comes to us with a unique set of skills that will be particularly useful at this point in time of the Farm to School Program's evolution," says ODA Director Katy Coba. "Cory Schreiber established a solid foundation. Michelle will build upon the momentum of this important statewide effort."

Ratcliffe brings 16 years of experience working with diverse sectors of the food system, including a variety of agricultural operations. Most recently, she was the Farm to School Director for Ecotrust, where she played a key role in stimulating demand within school food service for local products. As a consultant to the Oregon Department of Education, Ratcliffe conducted a statewide needs assessment of school food service providers, and an inventory of school gardens in Oregon. She also has experience in direct marketing of agricultural products, teaching youth and adults about agriculture, and advocating for farm to school policies at the state level.

Since ODA's Farm to School Program was initiated two years ago, there has been unprecedented growth in interest by schools who want to source food locally. There are now 69 Oregon school districts operating a program to purchase locally-grown foods.

"We've come a long way in a short time," says Ratcliffe. "That speaks to the saliency of this approach. It's a systemic response to every child's health while celebrating Oregon's agricultural bounty. I am committed to ensuring that as markets develop for farm to school programs, they are for all types and scales of agricultural operations."