



VERMONT
FARM TO SCHOOL &
EARLY CHILDHOOD
NETWORK

Local Foods for Schools: What It Is, and Why It Matters

Program History

In September 2022, VAAFM received a \$333,763 Local Food for Schools (LFS) cooperative agreement from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to purchase local and regional food and distribute it to Vermont schools. With this grant, the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFM) launched an opportunity for Vermont schools to receive free local food, delivered by a local food hub and funded by the USDA.

From September 2023 to June 2024, each School Food Authority (SFA) in Vermont was assigned a nearby food hub and allocated a budget for local food purchases from that food hub. The amount of funding allocated to each SFA was based on enrollment data from the Vermont Agency of Education. The SFA's assigned food hub made the allocated amount available as a credit in the SFA's account with the food hub, which could be used to purchase local food.

Through this federally funded project, every SFA in Vermont received free local food. This project was made possible by a partnership among VAAFM and four non-profit food hubs—**Green Mountain Farm Direct, Food Connects, ACORN, and Vermont Farmers Food Center**—to facilitate getting free local food to schools. Each of the food hubs expanded their capacity to serve their local farm partners through this program, creating valuable new purchasing relationships with schools that support long-term viability for Vermont farms.



"With LFS funds, students tried Vermont-produced kimchi, pickled carrots, and local hot sauce. The vibrant fruit and veggie bars left a lasting impression, even on elementary students."
—**Megan Lavalley**, Maple Run Unified School District

"We saw a substantial jump in schools ordering our products for use in their meal programs last year. The LFS program bridged the gap between school food budgets and the real cost of local food. Cutting it doesn't make sense, it supported farmers, schools, and rural economies." —**Julia Irish**, Pitchfork Pickle (South Burlington, VT)

"These funds allowed us to diversify our salad bar with colorful options like watermelon radishes and magenta slaw. Students asked about them and really liked the radishes." —**Jesse Lucas**, North Country HS (Newport, VT)

What's Happening Now

The Local Food for Schools and Child Care (LFSCC) program, the second round of the LFS program, which would have provided \$1.2 million in funding for Vermont over the next two years, was recently canceled. While the LFS program helped establish important connections between schools and local farms, the loss of LFSCC funding creates a critical gap, especially for early childhood programs and rural schools that continue to face challenges in accessing fresh, nutritious foods.

Continued investment in LFSCC funding is essential to ensure these programs can thrive, strengthen local food systems, and support our agricultural economy.

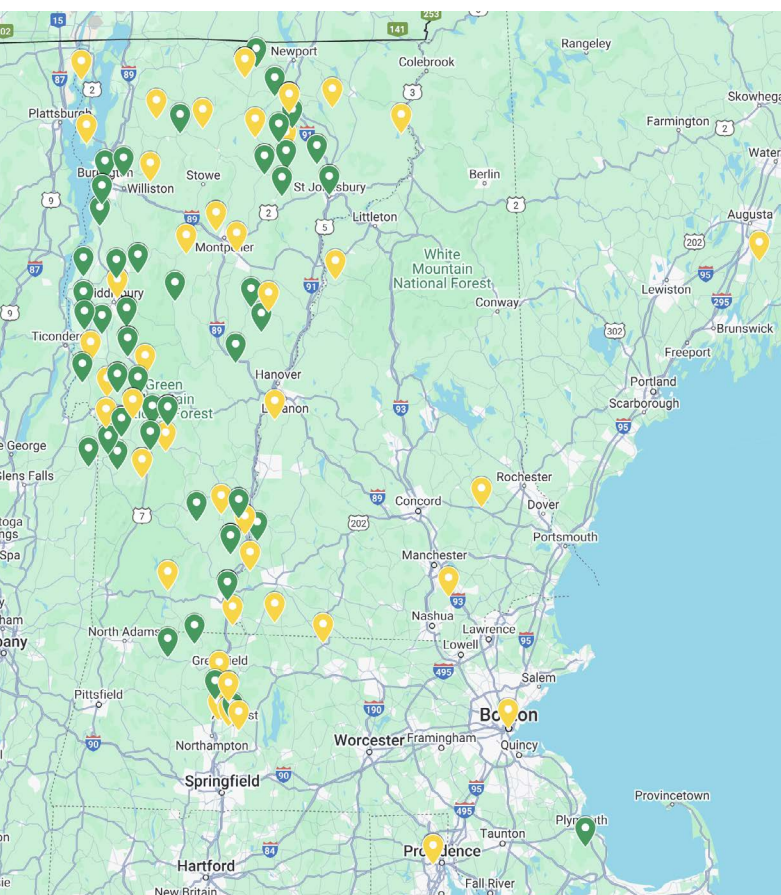
Local Food for Schools Program Impacts & Stats (SY 2023-24):

- **All 69 School Food Authorities (SFAs)** in Vermont received free local food, delivered through their assigned local food hub.
- **\$1,000 to \$13,400** in LFS funds were allocated to each SFA based on student enrollment
- **98% of food service directors** surveyed reported a positive experience working with their local food hub
- **66 local farms** had first-time sales to schools
- **90 schools** became new buyers
- Top local purchases included **apples, maple, ground beef and cheese curds**
- **97% of participating farms** are small businesses
- **147 local farms** benefited, which included 90 Vermont farms and 57 farms from neighboring states (NH, MA, ME, RI) See map below



"LFS funds allowed us to put fresh, local food on every lunch tray. Students noticed the difference—local carrots were sweeter, and apples, eggs, and dairy were appreciated. We saw less food waste as a result." –**Karyl Kent**, Lamoille North SU (2023-24 school year)

"Thanks to LFS funds, we grew our business and provided food to local schools. Losing this funding affects our ability to hire staff and expand production. It was a source of pride to supply fresh organic food to our children's schools." –**Mary Skovsted**, Joe's Brook Farm (Barnet, VT)



The Future of Local Food in Schools

The success of the LFS program demonstrated the importance of investing in local food systems, providing nutritious meals to students, and strengthening Vermont's agricultural economy.

However, with the recent cut to LFSCC funding, schools and child care programs are left without the resources to continue local food purchasing at the same scale. Continued advocacy and investment at the state and federal levels are essential to ensuring Vermont students have access to high-quality, locally sourced food while sustaining small farms and food businesses across the state.

Learn more @ bit.ly/VTLFSCC