



VERMONT  
FARM TO SCHOOL &  
EARLY CHILDHOOD  
NETWORK

# Farm to School Grows Healthy Vermont Kids, Farms & Families

## Vermont Leads the Way!

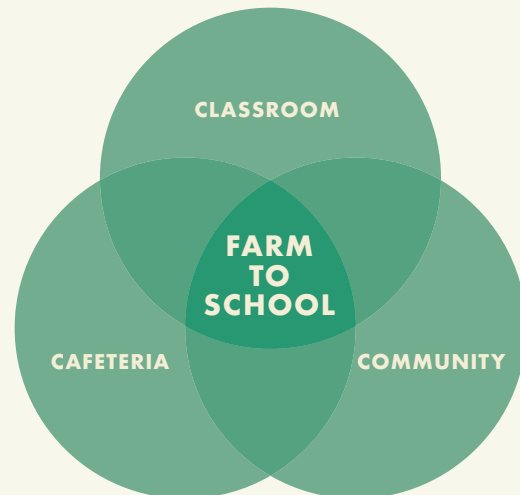
Vermont is a national leader, showing how we use farm to school and early childhood programs to take care of our children, farms, and families.

- Vermont schools have increased their purchase of local foods almost 10% in the past 10 years—now, we have an average of **14% of purchases coming from local farms and producers**. That's \$3 million a year staying in Vermont.
- **56% of early childhood providers serve local food weekly**.
- **Over 150 Vermont farms sell to Vermont schools and early childhood programs with apples, maple syrup, ground beef, and dairy products being the top products.**



**"So many kids today don't have a connection to their food. To be able to show them firsthand where their food comes from is a treat for us. We love to share what we do as dairy farmers."**

—Linda Stanley, Paul-Lin Dairy (Bakersfield)



## What is Farm to School & Early Childhood?

Farm to school and early childhood connects children with local agriculture through food, education, and community partnerships. Programs help schools and early childhood sites serve local foods, teach hands-on lessons in agriculture and nutrition, and build relationships with nearby farms.

The approach supports healthy eating habits, strengthens the local agricultural economy, and creates experiential learning opportunities that engage children in understanding where food comes from and how it can improve their bodies and their communities.

**Over 14.5 million school meals (breakfast and lunch) were served in Vermont schools last year, an increase of 2.8 million since Universal School Meals were established in 2022.**





**Classrooms** provide real-world context for learning across subjects. Hands-on activities—like planting gardens, visiting farms, and classroom cooking—extend lessons into the community and cafeteria.

“Food is a powerful connector. It brings my students together, builds curiosity, and fosters a sense of pride. I’ve seen students who struggle to engage in traditional lessons light up when they harvest potatoes, chop vegetables for a soup, or cook a meal they’ve seen in their own homes. These moments matter. They turn learning into something real and relevant.”

—Aziza Malik, Fourth Grade Teacher  
Champlain Elementary

### Return on Investment

- Since 2006, 363 grants have been awarded to 166 Vermont schools and early childhood education programs.
- 81% of Vermont schools have educational gardens serving as outdoor classrooms for learning and exploring.
- Well-fed children are ready to learn, showing improved attendance at school, increased math scores, and decreased behavioral incidents.

“We grow our own food in our school garden, and see it in the cafeteria for lunch. My class harvested potatoes and made French fries. Cooking them made me realize how simple it is to make real food, and I think it changes the way we eat. When you know where your food comes from, you think about it differently.”

—Shania, 4th student, Champlain Elementary (Burlington)



Local yogurt from Kingdom Creamery of East Hardwick is served in schools across the state. Sales grew 82% from 2023 to 2025, and are on track to grow approximately 105% more this school year.

### Return on Investment

- Our farm to school and early childhood program works in tandem with the Farm to Plate Initiative, the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative, and the Food Security Coalition to grow the economy, connect communities, and build a food secure future for Vermont.

—Jeremy Michaud  
Owner, Kingdom Creamery

“Working with the farm to school program has been a boost to our Vermont-owned farm business. This partnership allowed us to grow our yogurt business in a format that worked for our farm, and we look forward to continued growth and the opportunity to supply local dairy to schools throughout the state.”

**Cafeterias** support the local economy by buying fresh foods from nearby farms. These ingredients become healthy meals for all students. Taste tests introduce new foods and encourage healthy choices.

“Why should schools serve local food? It gives students the best possible meal because the quality of the food is better and fresher when it hasn’t had to travel far. Local food connects kids with the local agricultural economy and teaches them to become better lifelong consumers and eaters. And, purchasing local food supports our neighbors. Money is staying in Vermont and has a multiplier effect on the local economy.”

—Bob Hildebrand, Operations Manager  
Whitsons Culinary Group

### Return on Investment

- In the 2023-24 school year, 12 Vermont school food authorities (SFAs) hit a threshold level of at least 15% local purchasing under the state’s Local Food Incentive (LFI) Program, collectively spending over \$1.2 million on local food.
- From 2021 to 2024, 106 early childhood programs and after-school programs received CSAs from 59 Vermont farms through the VAAFM CSA Grant Program.
- 77% of Vermont school food service staff surveyed said local sourcing is “influential” or “highly influential” in their purchasing decisions.

## How It All Works Together

Universal School Meals for all students

Fully funded Farm to School & Early Childhood Grant Program (\$500K)

Local Purchasing Incentive for farmers and school meal programs (\$500K)



**The Outcomes:** Engaged students ready to learn • Improved student health, attendance, and behavior • Strong local farms and food businesses • Stigma and lunch shaming eliminated • More scratch cooking with nourishing local foods



The Mountain Village School, an early childhood program in Lamoille County, purchases 30% local with a full-time chef preparing food for students daily.

# What Will 2030 Look Like When Schools Reach Our 30% Local Foods Goal?

- **\$12 million** stays in the Vermont food system.
- Every **\$1.00** spent on local food for school meals **contributes \$1.60** to Vermont's economy.
- Students will be **well-fed, ready to learn, and aware of opportunities for food systems careers.**

When the national food chain was disrupted during the pandemic, Vermont schools already had the relationships to access local food and create a local food security net. With continued effort toward our 30% local goal by 2030, we will continue to strengthen the Vermont food system.

## Join Us! Expand Farm to School to All Vermont Communities

We're working to strengthen and expand Vermont farm to school and early childhood programs.

Farm-fresh school meals for all brings together the entire community. **To reach our goal, we are asking for level base funding of \$500,000 for two programs:**

**1. Farm to School & Early Childhood Grants** are a critical connector, bringing farmers and educators together so that children and youth can experience local food, have nutritious meals, and learn about where their food comes from.

**Goal:** Level base funding of \$500,000 for FY2027.

**2. Local Foods Incentive for Schools** provides districts and supervisory unions with financial support for feeding more Vermont kids fresh local food and directing more dollars to Vermont farmers.

**Goal:** Level base funding of \$500,000 for FY2027.

These programs work hand-in-hand with Universal School Meals, so every Vermont student receives the benefit of local nourishing meals.



**"We want to serve the freshest foods we can to our students. We also want to support local farmers and businesses as they support our schools. Local foods come with a higher cost, but the grant helps offset that. It's good for communities, good for kids — less processed, fewer added ingredients, just fresh local food."**

—Valerie Hussey, Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union Food Service Director



**Learn more at [vermontfarmtoschool.org](https://vermontfarmtoschool.org)**