



VERMONT
FARM TO SCHOOL &
EARLY CHILDHOOD
NETWORK

Local Foods for Schools: Why It Matters

Background

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 local food at no cost, delivered by a local food hub and funded by the USDA.

Through this federally funded project, every school in Vermont received local food, **benefiting 90 Vermont farms— 66 of which made their first sales to schools.** This was made possible through a partnership between VAAFM and four nonprofit food hubs—**Green Mountain Farm Direct, Food Connects, ACORN, and Vermont Farmers Food Center**—which facilitated the distribution of free local food to schools. Each food hub strengthened its capacity to serve local farm partners, fostering new purchasing relationships with schools that support the long-term viability of Vermont farms.

What's Happening Now

On March 7, 2025 the federal government abruptly canceled the Local Food for Schools and Child Care (LFSCC) program, which was intended to provide \$660 million in funding nationwide. USDA had a cooperative agreement with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets for \$1.2 million in LFSCC funding for Vermont schools and early childhood programs that was canceled. As a result, Vermont schools and early childhood programs will not receive these critical funds for the upcoming school year. This loss comes at a time when food costs are expected to rise, and funding would have expanded local purchasing, supported Vermont farmers, and strengthened farm to school programs.



"The decision to stop funding the local food to school program has significantly affected our processing facility and the local family farms we work with year-round. Specifically, we've experienced a drop in cattle throughout our facility, and the local family farms that raise cattle for us 52 weeks a year are directly impacted. Our ground beef sales have decreased, equivalent to approximately two head of beef per week, which represents a 7-10% reduction in our overall throughput."

—Kevin Hildreth, Boyden Farm

"We are devastated to lose the potential not only to feed the food-insecure families we work with, but also lose such immense support for Vermont farmers."—Emily Ruff, Afterschool in Nature at Sage Mountain (Orange)

100% of the \$1.2 million was dedicated to food purchases, the vast majority of which would have gone directly into the hands of Vermont farmers and producers.

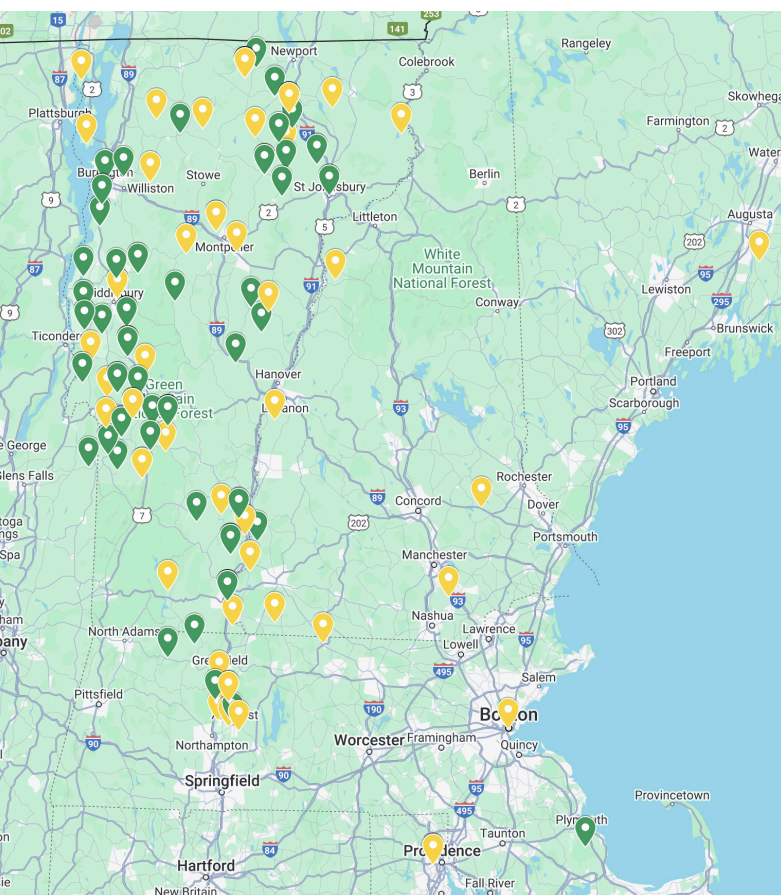
Every dollar spent on local food generates an additional \$1.60 in economic activity for Vermont. This funding would have benefited farmers, food hubs, distributors, local processors, and rural communities, keeping money circulating in our state's food economy.

What You Can Do

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. **We're asking the Vermont legislature to invest \$1.2 million in one time funding for the LFSCC program to support our farmers, producers, schools and early childhood programs at this critical time.**

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



"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)**

"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)**

"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)**

The Future of Local Food in Schools

The success of the 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 expand local food purchasing at the same scale. Investment at the state and federal levels are essential to ensuring our students have access to high-quality, locally sourced food while sustaining small farms and food businesses across the state.

Learn more @ bit.ly/VTLFSCC