

LOCAL FOOD IN LOCAL SCHOOLS: STORIES OF IMPACT



Many New Hampshire schools, school food service directors, and other community organizations source local food for their cafeterias and host farm to school programming for students and children.

Read stories from these farm to school heroes and find out how the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Pilot Program will further support their work.



LOCAL FOOD FOR LOCAL SCHOOLS REIMBURSEMENT PILOT PROGRAM

The Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Pilot Program bill will fund a pilot program to incentivize New Hampshire school districts and food service directors to purchase locally grown and produced food for breakfast and lunch services.

Interested schools will apply to participate in the pilot program and, if selected, will be reimbursed for all qualifying food purchases at the following rate: \$1 for every \$3 spent on New Hampshire grown, caught, or produced foods and \$1 for every \$6 spent on New England grown, caught, or produced foods up to a predetermined dollar amount based on the school's enrollment.

The NH Farm to School Network estimates the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Pilot Program will annually inject \$420,000 federal and state funds directly into New Hampshire's farm and food economy. Additionally, through the reimbursement pilot program, farm to school advocates, parents, teachers, farmers, and community members believe it will:



Foster school-farmer relationships, lessening supply chain disruptions, and increasing food security



Educate students, teachers, and school staff about local foods and the importance of supporting local agriculture



Increase profitability for New Hampshire and New England farmers, fishermen, and food producers

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Better Together: Farm Viability and Local Food in Schools

Jonathan Flocke, Sales and Operations Manager
at Robie Farm Piermont, NH

Robie Farm is a 6th, almost 7th, generation livestock farm that has been in operation since 1870. The farm is located right on the Connecticut River in Piermont, NH where the Robie family raises beef, pork, and poultry there, in addition to making cheese. All of their animals are humanely raised, part of the Robie family's commitment to and passion for the viability and sustainability of the farm, now and for future generations.



One part of Robie Farm's sustainability plan is selling their food to schools, something that Jonathan Flocke, the sales and operations manager, is in charge of in his management of wholesale and direct sales accounts. These accounts range from their two farm stores, a wholesale account through Upper Valley Produce, sales to several co-op food stores, and a few school accounts in Vermont.

Robie Farm is interested in supplying food to New Hampshire schools and is excited by the opportunity to do so through the USDA's Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement program funds that New Hampshire's schools have access to. Jonathan and the Robie staff have already been in touch with several schools. They are passionate about kids eating healthy and getting to know our local food system; the Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement program funding allows kids to get that experience through giving school food service the ability to purchase better quality foods that can be a bit more expensive than foods from far away. The farmer-school relationships that are built now, through cooperative agreement program, can be maintained with the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Pilot Program.

The Balancing Act of School Food Service

Rob Cohen, School Food Service Director, Winnisquam School District

Rob has worked in school food service for seven years, following a career in healthcare food service.

For the 2024-2025 school year, Winnisquam School District will receive over \$5,000 in federal funds through the USDA's Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement program to spend on locally grown, caught, and produced foods. This one-year influx of funds for schools is intended to help alleviate food costs and supply chain issues because of the COVID-19 pandemic.



The National School Lunch Program funds are not near enough to support all that goes into producing school meals, so Rob is constantly balancing what needs to be served on trays with what students will eat and what he can buy locally. Funds from the cooperative agreement program will make Rob's balancing act easier.

For Winnisquam's schools, Rob plans to buy local produce and protein with the cooperative agreement funds the district receives. He believes local food is of better quality because it is not grown to withstand long distance transportation, as industrially grown food often is, but is grown for flavor and nutritional quality. Rob's goal is to improve school meals, which requires better quality food, as well as good systems for communication and training for food service staff.

Rob is excited to continue the local food purchasing he will be doing with the cooperative agreement funds through the proposed Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Pilot Program. The pilot program will allow Rob to continue to improve school meals, increase the viability of the district's school meal programs, and further building his relationship with farmers.

How will the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Pilot Program make an impact?

parent voice

Taylor thinks the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Pilot Program would strengthen a student's understanding of how to fuel their bodies for success in and out of school and create healthy eating habits for long term wellness.

Taylor Burke
Parent in Rindge
Jaffrey-Rindge School District

school food service voice

Rob believes local food is of better quality because it is not grown to withstand long distance transportation, as industrially grown food often is. Rob's goal is to improve school meals, which requires better quality food, as well as good systems for communication and training for food service staff.

Rob Cohen
School Food Service Director
Winnisquam School District

farmer voice

Robie Farm is passionate about kids eating healthy and getting to know our local food system; the Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement program and proposed Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Pilot Program will provide kids that experience by giving school food service the ability to purchase quality foods that can be more expensive.

Jonathan Flocke
Sales and Operations Manager
Robie Farm

Fueling Students for Success in the Cafeteria

Taylor Burke, Parent, Jaffrey-Rindge School District

Taylor and her family have lived in Rindge, New Hampshire for almost 20 years. Her three children are enrolled in the Jaffrey-Rindge School District. Taylor's husband is on the school board, various sub-committees, and coaches youth and rec sports. Taylor has served as the parent representative on the district's Wellness Committee, served as a substitute teacher, and currently works as a para-educator in the Rindge Elementary School library. She has a master's degree in special education.



As part of the Wellness Committee activities, the district wanted to create a more nutritious and delicious meal program, where emphasis is placed on using local and seasonal produce. The district made the successful change last school year. Taylor thinks the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Pilot Program would further enhance and support a focus on eating well and using whole, locally grown foods in the cafeteria. She thinks that this will create enthusiasm by students for eating nutrient rich foods while also teaching about where food comes from. The pilot program would support enhanced child nutrition, local growers profitability, and local economies. Such a program would strengthen a student's understanding of how to fuel their bodies for success in and out of school and create healthy eating habits for long term wellness.

We want more nutritious school food now!

Alexandria Grappone, Concord High School Graduate

Alexandria, a former high school senior at Concord High School, has a passion to alleviate childhood hunger and increase the nutritional value of foods offered in schools. Grappone is the founder and former president of Save the Children Action Network's Nutrition Club (SCAN) at Concord High School and carried the work of the club throughout her secondary education. Alexandria's vision was to help raise money and collect food to help children who are experiencing food insecurity. She also hoped to initiate education and momentum towards providing more nutritional meals and snacks in school. She believes that when kids are hungry, they lack the ability to focus on their studies; she often says "when you're hungry, you're hangry."

"By having access to more nutritious meals, students can obtain a better education and begin to build healthier lifestyles. Many students depend on school meals as their guaranteed meal of the day, so making sure it is delicious and nutritious is crucial," said Alexandria.

The Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Pilot program will give schools increased funds to purchase fresh, local, and nutritious produce. It will also help build relationships between local farms and schools to allow students to learn about agriculture, where to find fresh produce, and the benefits of having a nutritious diet.



How will the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Pilot Program make an impact?

student voice

“By having access to more nutritious meals, students can obtain a better education and begin to build healthier lifestyles. Many students depend on school meals as their guaranteed meal of the day, so making sure it is delicious and nutritious is crucial.”

Alexandria Grappone
Concord High School Graduate

teacher voice

Through the reimbursement pilot program, Brian could connect his curriculum to the local food being served in the cafeteria and the farmers who grew it, real world connections that make lasting impact on students.

Brian Winslow
Title I Interventionist + K-4 teacher
Southwick School

food business owner voice

Melissa believes that the more experience schools gain in procuring local foods, the more normalized and easier local food purchasing will become in the future.

Melissa Grella
Founder & Executive Director
Taproot

Facilitating Farmer-School Relationships to Last

Melissa Grella, Founder & Executive Director, Taproot

Melissa Grella is the founder and executive director of Taproot, a non-profit education center and marketplace that works at the intersection of environmental education, local agriculture, and the community in the North Country. Much of Melissa's and the Taproot staff's work focuses on food access, education, and providing local food directly to the community through direct-to-consumer markets.



Currently, Melissa is helping schools in her area use their Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement funds, provided by the USDA. She is facilitating connections between farms and schools through a spreadsheet detailing local food availability, the farm name, and price point. Then, Melissa asks each school what produce or products they want and even delivers some of those orders directly to the cafeteria if she can. So far, Melissa has helped schools obtain carrots, ground beef and beef patties, apples, celery, squash, and microgreens from local farms. Melissa is passionate about this work, as it helps meet Taproot's mission of educating about where food comes from and getting farmers access to a market they might not usually have access to.

Melissa believes that the more experience schools gain in procuring local foods, the more normalized and easier local food purchasing will become in the future. She also hopes that the systems and relationships she has put in place for the cooperative agreement funds will be able to be utilized and improved if the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Pilot Program is adopted by the legislature this session.

The STEAM Engine that Could: Farm to School Curriculum at the Southwick School

Brian Winslow, Title I Interventionist + K-4 teacher, Southwick School

Brian Winslow is a Title I interventionist who teaches K-4 grade at Southwick School in Northfield, New Hampshire. In Fall 2018, Brian created a Science Technology Engineering Mathematics (STEAM) curriculum, funded through Title I, to bridge agriculture and ecology through hands-on learning. The goal of the curriculum is to get students invested in how their food grows and gets from the farm to their plates.



Although Title I allowed Brian to develop his curriculum and offer the class, the funding has not allowed him to grow the curriculum to provide the real-world connections needed to make lasting impact on students. Brian feels strongly that the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Pilot Program would give him the opportunity to show students how their learning from his class can be applied outside of classroom, both personally and professionally. Brian and his students would benefit from the relationships school food service would build with local farmers through the reimbursement pilot program, allowing Brian to connect his curriculum to the local food being served in the cafeteria and the farmers who grew it.

How will the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Pilot Program make an impact?

school food service voice

While Jeanne has built farmer-buyer relationships throughout her 32 years of experience, she still encounters barriers that could be overcome with establishment of the reimbursement pilot program. She believes the program will promote the feasibility of purchasing local by decreasing cost and increasing partnerships between local farmers and schools.

Jeanne Pierce
Director of Child Nutrition
Exeter School District

teacher voice

Emily believes the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Pilot Program would allow Maple Wood Elementary and the entire district to do more with Farm to School Fridays and incorporate local produce into school meals.

Emily Wilson
4th grade teacher
Maple Wood Elementary

Local Purchase Power: Building Buyer Relationships with New Hampshire's Farmers in Exeter

Jeanne Pierce, Director of Child Nutrition, Exeter School District

Jeanne Pierce is the Director of Child Nutrition in Exeter and has transformed school meals in the district to become healthier, more nutritious, and locally-sourced. Jeanne has forged relationships with many local farmers by sourcing products like fish, beef, dairy, eggs, herbs, fruit, berries, and maple syrup. Since starting to source local food items for her school's cafeteria menus, Jeanne has seen Exeter students gain a better understanding of where their food comes from and how it gets from the farm to their plate.



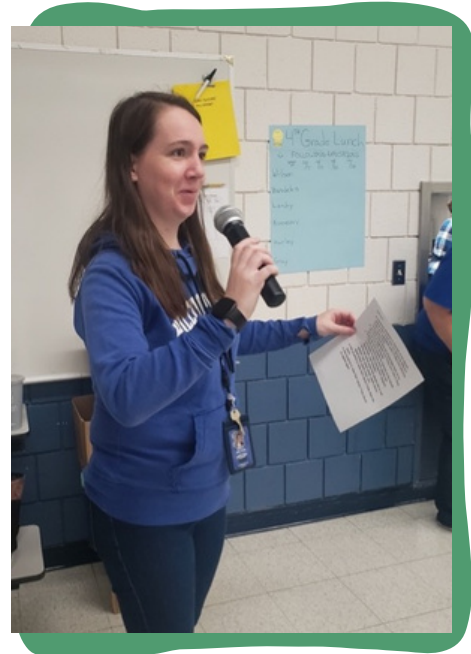
While Jeanne has built farmer-buyer relationships throughout her 32 years of experience, she still encounters barriers that could be overcome with establishment of the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Pilot program. She believes the program will promote the feasibility of purchasing local by decreasing cost and increasing partnerships between local farmers and schools. In support of increasing her school's purchase power, Jeanne believes the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Pilot program can then help eliminate some of the competition school districts face between farmers' markets and local restaurants in the southern tier of New Hampshire.

Teaching through Tasting at Maple Wood Elementary

Emily Wilson, 4th grade teacher, Maple Wood Elementary

Emily Wilson is a 4th grade teacher at Maple Wood Elementary in Somersworth, New Hampshire. Currently, her school hosts Farm to School Fridays; the school's cafeteria provides local produce for students to taste and learn why the local product may be fresher than its store-bought counterpart, how its grown, and how the product is distributed from farm to consumer. Students who have attended Farm to School Friday tastings have pushed their families to visit local farms that grow the new fruits and vegetables they have tasted and learned about.

After the local apple tasting was held at Maple Wood Elementary, many students asked their families to go apple picking. The students expressed that the apples they picked were juicier, crispier, and more flavorful than other apples they had eaten from the store. One student even expressed that the apples were perfect and everything he wants an apple to be.



Emily believes the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Pilot Program would allow Maple Wood Elementary and the entire district to do more with Farm to School Fridays and incorporate local produce into school meals. The reimbursement pilot program would allow the school to provide local produce on a larger scale through increased relationships and connections with local farmers. Emily feels that this would not only benefit the students by providing them a better understanding of locally-sourced foods in their community, but could also increase New Hampshire's farmers' business and income.

How will the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Pilot Program make an impact?

farmer voice

Tim feels the pilot program will foster farmer-buyer relationships that will bolster alternative agricultural education in school, like farm tours or farmer guest speaking opportunities, in addition to seeing his produce on a school cafeteria menu.

Tim Wennrich
Owner & Founder
Meadowstone Farm

school food service voice

Krystal recognizes that school is where many children grow and learn habits they will carry into adulthood. Sourcing food locally and showing kids where their food comes is instrumental in building a child's understanding of agriculture and creating those health and wellness habits.

Krystal Gendreau
Director of Child Nutrition
Amherst, Mount Vernon, and
Souhegan Cooperative School District

Building Healthy Habits for a Lifetime through Local Food

Krystal Gendreau, Director of Child Nutrition
Amherst, Mount Vernon, and Souhegan Cooperative School District

Krystal is the Director of Child Nutrition for the Amherst, Mont Vernon, and Souhegan Cooperative School District. Krystal is working hard to implement farm to school programs within her district.

In Fall 2022, she spearheaded her school's participation in the New Hampshire Great Apple Crunch event put on by the NH Department of Education's Nutrition Services during Farm to School Month in October. Her schools featured local apples from Sunnycrest Farm, in hopes of beginning to source more locally grown products. Krystal recognizes that school is where many children grow and learn habits they will carry into adulthood. Therefore, sourcing food locally and showing kids where their food comes is instrumental in building a child's understanding of agriculture and overall health and wellness. Currently, Krystal's school district is in the research and development phase of farm to school initiatives. She hopes that the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Pilot program will help facilitate better connections with local farmers, in addition to freeing up funds to purchase more locally grown products.



Building Agricultural Community in the North Country

Tim Wennrich, Owner & Founder, Meadowstone Farm

Tim Wennrich, the owner and founder of Meadowstone Farm in Bethlehem, New Hampshire, has always had a passion for his community and agriculture. He and his team farm about 4 acres, raise 800-1,000 laying chickens, as well as pigs and cows. Tim's current focus at Meadowstone Farm is to create an agricultural community center to educate the community about where their food comes from.



Part of this work is intertwined with the schools in the area; Meadowstone Farm hosts interns from the area's high schools, holds tours of the farm, hosts school groups for gardening classes, and other educational events for the community. Tim views the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Pilot Program as a way for him to further the educational work he is doing at Meadowstone Farm. He feels the pilot program will create a stronger bridge between students and local agriculture and hopes the farmer-buyer relationships fostered by the pilot program will bolster alternative agricultural education in school, like farm tours or farmer guest speaking opportunities, in addition to seeing his produce on a school cafeteria menu.





NOFA-NH is a NH Farm to School Network partner, as well as the official network sponsor of the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Pilot Program bill.

