

Growing Opportunity *for* Farm to School

How to Revolutionize School Food, Support Local Farms,
and Improve the Health of Students in New York

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WITHIN FIVE YEARS...



72%
of schools

anticipate reaching
30% spending on
NEW YORK-GROWN FOOD
for lunch,
with the right support.



FINYS
FARM TO INSTITUTION
NEW YORK STATE

American Farmland Trust
SAVING THE LAND THAT SUSTAINS US

\$150 million

would be spent by schools at
NEW YORK FARMS



increasing access to
HEALTHY, LOCAL FOOD
to almost

700,000

K-12 STUDENTS
across New York.



This would generate over

\$210 million

IN ECONOMIC IMPACT
STATEWIDE
by 2024.



Executive Summary



In 2018, the state of New York, led by Governor Andrew Cuomo’s No Student Goes Hungry Initiative, created a major new incentive to encourage schools to buy more food from New York farms. This incentive enabled schools that spend at least 30% of their lunch food budget on food from New York farmers, growers, producers, or processors to receive 25 cents per meal in state reimbursement—quadruple the 6 cents reimbursement they had received for the past 40 years.

After the first year of this incentive, AFT surveyed over 300 school food authorities, or SFAs, at K-12 schools across the state to learn whether this program successfully stimulated more purchasing of New York grown and raised food. While many schools saw 30% as a challenge, 49 SFAs applied to the New York State Education Department for the extra reimbursement claiming they reached 30% within just one year. This includes Buffalo Public Schools, the second largest district in the state, which spent over \$2.6 million on food from New York farms during the 2018–19 school year.

AFT’s research found that 72% of schools felt optimistic that with the right support they would achieve 30% within five years. **Achieving this outcome would cause schools to spend nearly \$150 million at New York farms over the next five years while increasing access to healthy, New York grown food for almost 700,000 K–12 students by 2024. Conservatively, this would generate over \$210 million in economic impact statewide while costing the state just over \$94 million over the course of five years in reimbursement and support.**

However, schools still face barriers when attempting to buy more New York grown food and reach 30%, and more must be done to help them in order to unlock the incredible economic and public health potential of this program. Food service directors reported not having enough staff time to dedicate to Farm to School, and difficulty navigating procurement regulations that favor “least cost” options as their main barriers to buying more local food. Regarding participating in the incentive program specifically, many schools reported that 30% was too high of a threshold, and that there was a lack of clarity around program guidelines and requirements. When asked what would help them increase their purchasing of New York grown food, food service directors reported that getting their main vendor, which is often a distributor, to provide more New York food products would be most helpful in getting them to increase the amount of New York food products they purchase in order to reach 30%.



JOSH BALDO

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research conducted for *Growing Opportunity for Farm to School*, recommendations for achieving the significant potential of Farm to School to support New York farms and improve the health of students across the state over the next five years include:

1

Continuing to fund the New York Farm to School Purchasing Incentive and increasing funding for the Farm to School Grants Program in the New York State Budget;

2

Investing in regional and statewide farm to school coordinators to provide critical support to food service directors to increase their purchases of New York grown and raised food;

3

Creating consistent, stable, and clear written guidelines on how to qualify for and verify achievement of the 30% threshold so schools know what is required in order to receive the extra reimbursement;

4

Incorporating accountability mechanisms into the program for intermediaries that bring food from farms to schools to ensure the accuracy of the geographic origin information they provide, while ensuring the process of verification is clear, efficient and based on supply chain realities;

5

Providing trainings for school administrators, food service directors, and key staff to better understand the incentive program, how to procure New York grown and raised food, and strategies to replicate the success of schools that have achieved 30%;

6

Passing state and federal legislation to make it easier for food service directors to spend money on food from local farms through both formal and information procurement methods;

7

Investing in the supply chain and equipment to build processing capacity and scratch cooking at schools; and

8

Expanding the Farm to School Purchasing Incentive to all meals for schools that spend 30% of their total budget on New York food products to remove barriers to participation, increase economic impact, and improve access to local food for students.

