

State-Level Policies to Support Farm to School Local Food Purchasing Since 2020

This document is part of a resource series on Local Food Purchasing Incentives (LFPs), produced through collaboration between the Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS) and the National Farm to School Network. This project aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on LFPs and provide more information for farm to school advocates and practitioners nationwide.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the urgent need for more resilient and sustainable food systems has become increasingly apparent, particularly in the face of the public health crisis and the ensuing economic challenges.

The pandemic brought to light the pivotal role that schools worldwide play in nourishing our children, emphasizing the necessity for flexible, community-specific food procurement strategies. As school food service took center stage in community response efforts, it became evident that farm to institution programs are fundamental to ensuring resilient, healthy communities.

State-level policies play a pivotal role in bolstering local food purchasing within educational institutions, primarily K-12 school and early care and education (ECE) settings.

This brief outlines two different types of state-level policies to support farm to school local food purchasing after 2020: Local Food Purchasing Incentives (LFPs) and goals and proclamations. We explore investment in LFPs, both through the establishment of new programs and the expansion of existing ones. Additionally, we provide an overview of the intersection of farm to school efforts within the broader movement to provide healthy, nutritious no-cost meals to all students. This brief does not strive to offer an exhaustive list; it is a resource for advocates, policymakers, and stakeholders invested in advancing local food purchasing in educational institutions in a post-pandemic landscape.

Local Food Purchasing Incentives

LFPIs are programs that provide additional funding to child nutrition program (CNP) operators to directly offset or incentivize local food purchases.

Typically funded and administered at the state level, these programs intend to increase the purchasing of local foods in school and ECE settings. This section highlights state policies that:

- 1 leveraged the USDA Local Food for Schools (LFS) Cooperative Agreement program to establish or expand LFPIs;**
- 2 established new LFPIs;**
- 3 expanded existing LFPIs; and**
- 4 incorporated LFPIs with School Meals for All policies (also known as universal meals).**

These state-level policies showcase a significant dedication by states to improve school meal quality and support their local agricultural economies.

1 LEVERAGING THE USDA LOCAL FOOD FOR SCHOOLS (LFS) COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT PROGRAM TO ESTABLISH OR EXPAND LFPIs

In 2022, the USDA established the LFS Cooperative Agreement to alleviate the challenges of supply chain disruptions brought on by the pandemic (USDA, 2023).

LFS is a noncompetitive cooperative agreement program that offers up to \$200 million in funding from the Commodity Credit Corporation to state agencies that administer CNPs. It enabled these agencies to purchase local, unprocessed, or minimally processed foods from farmers and ranchers, prioritizing “**socially disadvantaged**” farmers, ranchers, and small businesses.

Advocates across the nation leveraged LFS to pilot LFPIs or expand existing LFPIs. For example, in Michigan the LFS was used to establish a “sister program” to its 10 Cents a Meal LFPI that would include products not currently covered under the original program, such as dairy, grains, and proteins. Oregon’s Farm to Child Nutrition Program grants used LFS funds to expand incentivized products, such as cartons of milk, and incentivize regionally produced foods. Advocates in Connecticut and Illinois strategically positioned their LFS programs as pilot initiatives paving the way for a permanent state-level LFPI. Both states successfully passed legislation to establish these LFPIs in 2023, which are poised to take effect once LFS funding concludes (National Farm to School Network, 2023)¹.

¹ Illinois’ program is subject to appropriations. To date, the state has not appropriated funds for this program.

2 ESTABLISHING NEW LOCAL FOOD PURCHASING INCENTIVES

The first state-level LFPI was Maine, established in 2001. By the end of 2019, at least eight states and Washington, DC, had established LFPIs (Bull, 2022). Between 2020 and 2023, at least seven more states established and funded LFPIs, with several established programs expanding in scope and size. See summaries of these programs below.

ALABAMA: Farm to School Incentive Program

During Alabama's 2020 legislative session, the general budget included \$120,000 to launch the Farm to School Incentive program. Through this program, all School Food Authorities (SFAs) are entitled to a reimbursement of \$0.20 for each meal component they serve that was grown in Alabama, up to an annual \$20,000 reimbursement. A "component" can be any of the five [required meal components](#) for a reimbursable meal through the National School Lunch Program. After the first year, this program budget was increased in 2021 to \$220,000 and again in 2022 to \$300,000.



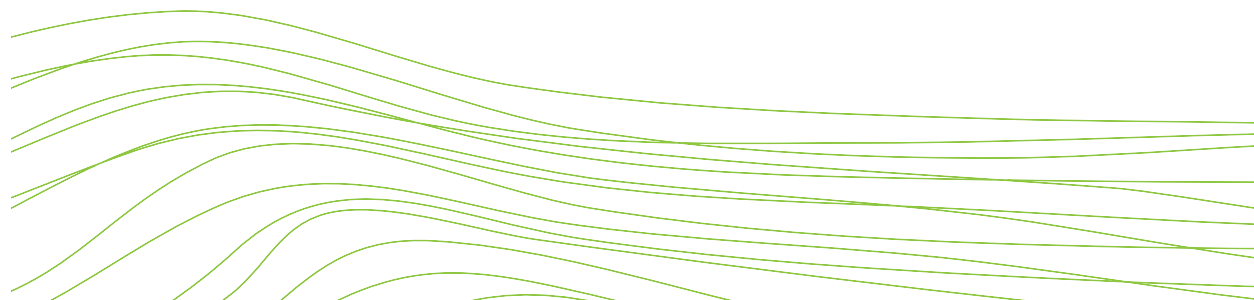
Visit the [Alabama Department of Agriculture & Industries Farm to School Incentive Program website](#) to learn more.

CALIFORNIA: Farm to School Incubator Grant

California established its Farm to School Incubator Grant program in the California Budget Act of 2020. This competitive grant program aims to promote equity, support students' well-being, enhance climate resilience, and foster scalable and sustainable change. It covers four tracks for different stakeholders (K-12 Procurement and Education, Farm to School Partnerships, Farm to ECE, and Producers), enabling a statewide approach to advance farm to school efforts (CDFA, 2022). This program received \$8.5 million for 2021, \$30 million for 2022, and \$60 million for 2023.



Visit the [CDFA Office of Farm to Fork California Farm to School Program website](#) for more information.



MINNESOTA: Farm to School Grant Program

The Minnesota Farm to School Grant Program has been operating since 2013. The program originally provided funding specifically for farm to school related equipment purchases. In 2021, the competitive grant program expanded to support local food purchases. There are two grant options: the Full Tray and First Bite Grant.

- **The Full Tray Grant** provides a 1:1 match for K-12 school districts and ECE centers to purchase local food products. Schools must apply to participate. Awards are calculated using a formula that multiplies National School Lunch Program (NSLP) meals served multiplied by 10 cents times 12 months. The funding range is \$2,000 to \$35,000. Schools may also apply for up to \$25,000 for related equipment purchases. For FY 2023, this program awarded \$3.5 million to grantees, a substantial increase from the \$570,000 awarded in FY 2022, attributed to the state’s strategic leveraging of funds from the USDA LFS program (McKee VanSlooten et al, 2023). The Department of Agriculture expects to award \$935,000 for FY 2024, with the decrease in funding due to the one-time LFS program funds being expended in FY 2023.



Visit the [Minnesota Department of Agriculture’s Full Tray Grant website](#) to learn more.

- **First Bite Grant** (\$2,500–\$5,000) is a smaller grant program designed as an on-ramp for school districts and ECE centers that have little to no experience with local food purchasing. No match is required to participate. For FY 2023, this program awarded \$763,000 to grantees, an increase from \$175,000 for FY 2022.



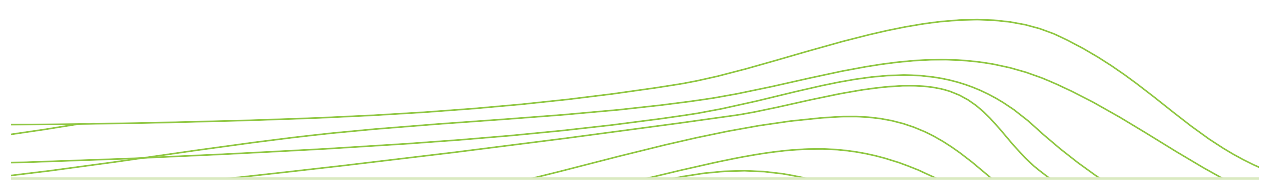
Visit the [Minnesota Department of Agriculture’s First Bite Grant website](#) to learn more.

VERMONT: Local Foods Incentive Grant Program

In 2021, [H. 106 \(Act 67\)](#) established a noncompetitive grant program to incentivize local food purchasing. In this program, [supervisory unions](#) (SUs) and school districts (SDs) are reimbursed between 15–25 cents per lunch meal they served the previous year. The reimbursement is based on their previous year’s local food purchase percentage for all NSLP meals (not including nonprogram meals or milk purchases). During the baseline year, all SU/SDs that apply qualify for the 15 cent per meal reimbursement. During the baseline and subsequent years, applicants must track local purchases and submit their local food purchase percentage to qualify for a tiered subsidy. If SUs/SDs reach 15% local purchasing, they are eligible for a 15-cent reimbursement multiplied by the number of lunches they served during that year. The incentive reimbursement can increase incrementally up to 25 cents if the SU/SD reaches 25% local purchasing. This program received \$500,000 in funding for both school years 2021–2022 and 2022–2023.



Visit [Vermont FEED’s Local Foods Incentive Grant Resources website](#) to learn more.



WASHINGTON: Farm to School Purchasing Grant

In 2021, Washington established the Farm to School Purchasing Grant Program using federal coronavirus state fiscal recovery funds and now supports the program with state appropriations. The Farm to School Purchasing Grant provides schools and ECE sites with funds to purchase foods grown, raised, caught, or foraged in Washington State. This grant's purpose is to encourage direct purchasing from small farms and food businesses, with an emphasis on producers who identify as socially disadvantaged, beginning, limited resource, women, and veterans. Eligible applicants can apply for an award based on a previous per meal count. If awarded, they are reimbursed for eligible food products as well as nonfood costs such as equipment, staff time, professional development, promotion, and travel, as long as they directly support farm to school purchasing and promotion. This grant program awarded \$3.6 million in projects for the school year 2022–2023, more than double the \$1.5 million for projects awarded from January to August 2022.



Visit the [Washington State Department of Agriculture Farm to School Toolkit website](#) to learn more.

UTAH: Farm to Fork Enhanced State Reimbursement

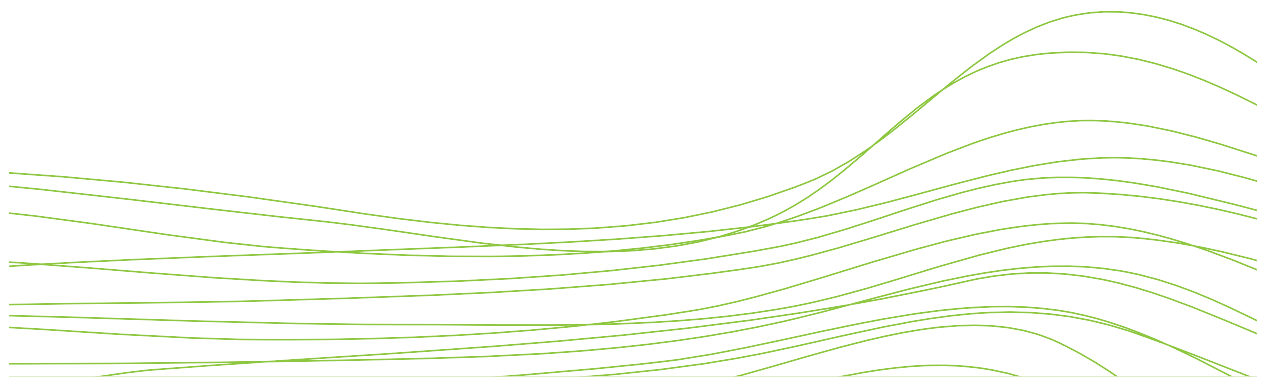
In 2021, Utah established the Farm to Fork Enhanced State Reimbursement. In 2020, the state passed a Breakfast Bill, which resulted in a rewrite of Board Rule R277-727 regarding liquor tax allocation. This change allowed liquor tax revenue to fund the enhanced state reimbursement program. This incentive program aims to support meal quality, and schools are reimbursed if they increase local purchasing of fresh and minimally processed Utah-grown fruit, vegetables, eggs, grains, and meat. Awards are based on their local food purchasing percentages, though there is no set percentage SFAs must meet to participate in the program. The education agency disburses its total program budget each year, dividing the funds proportionately to participating SFAs based on their local purchasing percentages above fluid milk. All SFAs, if they purchase even 1% of their budgets on local products, will receive some additional reimbursement for participating in the program. The program budget for 2022–2023 was \$250,000.



Visit [Utah's Farm to Fork website](#) to learn more.

CONNECTICUT: Local Food for Schools Incentive Program

In June 2023, Connecticut passed [S.B. 1](#). This bill is a product of [H.B. 6842](#) and other merged bills and establishes the Local Food for Schools Incentive Program, which is set to begin in 2024. Through this program, the state will reimburse eligible USDA CNPs for one-half of its expenditures on locally sourced foods, and one-third of its expenditures on regionally sourced foods from New England and New York.



3 EXPANDING EXISTING LOCAL FOOD PURCHASING INCENTIVES

States with existing LFPs have also taken significant strides in expanding their programs, demonstrating a strong commitment to supporting local economies and fostering healthier communities. While these are not the only examples, we highlight two notable cases below.

MICHIGAN: 10 Cents a Meal Program budget multiplied by a factor of 16 between 2019 to 2023

Michigan's 10 Cents a Meal Program for Michigan's Kids and Farms is a grant program that provides a 1:1 match on what eligible CNP sponsors spend on Michigan-grown fruits, vegetables, and dry beans. Grant awards are based on a calculation of up to 10 cents multiplied by the number of meals served in the previous year. For school year 2019–2020, the program received \$575,000 in state funding. This funding increased dramatically over the past several years, receiving \$9.3 million in funding in the 2023 state budget (10 Cents, 2023).

 Visit the [10 Cents a Meal for Michigan's Kids & Farms website](#) to learn more.

NEW MEXICO: New Mexico Grown Program Expands to Senior Centers and Early Childcare and Education

In FY 2020, New Mexico expanded its existing competitive local food purchasing grant for K–12 schools, the New Mexico Grown Program, into senior centers. This program started with \$50,000 in pilot funding and grew to a budget of \$750,000 for senior centers in FY 2024 (New Mexico Grown Interagency Task Force, 2021; New Mexico Grown, n.d.). The following year, in FY 2021, the state expanded the program to ECE sites. The purpose of this funding is to provide licensed providers participating in the Child and Adult Food Program with the opportunity to be reimbursed for purchases of food grown, raised, or harvested in New Mexico. The budget for the ECE portion of the program is \$300,000 for FY 2024 (NM Grown, n.d.).

 Visit the [New Mexico Grown website](#) for more information.



Photo Credit: Sarah Rypma

3 SCHOOL MEALS FOR ALL AND LOCAL FOOD PURCHASING

As of September 2023, eight states have implemented universal free meals policies commonly referred to as “healthy school meals for all” (Bylander, 2023).

These initiatives work to ensure that every enrolled child has access to nourishing meals throughout the school day. Notably, several of these states have embedded provisions to amplify or initiate LFPIs directly within their School Meals for All policies. Vermont FEED describes this strategic integration as a “virtuous cycle” that not only improves meal quality but also benefits local producers and ensures that all students have access to high-quality, fresh local food (Bull, 2023).

COLORADO: Healthy School Meals for All Public Students and Local Food Program Grant

In 2022, Colorado passed Proposition FF, which codified the Healthy School Meals for All Public School Students bill ([H.B. 22-1414](#)). This legislation included provisions that expanded the state’s 2019 pilot LFPI and included other measures to increase wages for child nutrition staff, mandate student-parent advisory boards for participating SFAs, and establish a suite of technical assistance grants for local food purchasing.

The Local Food Program is a noncompetitive grant that offers selected SFAs a reimbursement for the purchase of Colorado-grown, raised, or processed products. There are two options to determine the award amount that each participating SFA receives: either a flat rate of \$5,000 or an amount calculated by multiplying 25 cents by the number of reimbursable lunches served by the school in the previous school year. The SFA receives whichever amount is greater. Having a minimum award size can encourage participation by small districts that may not otherwise view the program as worthwhile. This program encourages SFAs to procure local products, foster nutrition education, bolster farm to child nutrition activities, and support Colorado producers and farmers.



Visit the [Colorado Department of Education’s Source Local Food website](#) for more information.

NEW MEXICO: Healthy Universal Meals and the New Mexico Grown Program

Enacted in 2023, New Mexico’s Healthy Hunger-Free Students Bill of Rights Act ([S.B. 4](#)) established statewide universal meals and expanded the state’s LFPI, the New Mexico Grown Program. Originally established in 2013, the New Mexico Grown Program is a competitive grant program in which applicants are awarded lump-sum amounts that they can spend on local fresh and minimally processed fruits, vegetables, grains, and herbs (Bull, 2022b). Grant award amounts varied and were based on criteria that take into account a school’s need for additional funding support as well as their plans to incorporate local food into school meals.

The Healthy Hunger-Free Students Bill of Rights Act expanded the New Mexico Grown Program by making it a noncompetitive grant opportunity and expanding the kinds of foods reimbursed by the program. However, the incentive grant is now available only to SFAs that meet “meal quality improvement requirements,” which include featuring New Mexico-produced food, scratch-cooked foods, culturally relevant meals, and engaging student and family voices and choices in menu development. This Act also requires that schools reduce

food waste to the greatest extent possible by creating a standard minimum meal duration for grades K-5 (20 minutes of seated lunch time) and requiring a “share table” for excess food, which can be donated to students, food banks, or other nonprofit charitable organizations. The program budget for schools in FY 24 is \$2 million (NM Grown, n.d.).

 Visit the [New Mexico Grown website](#) for more information.

ILLINOIS: Healthy School Meals for All and Local Food

Illinois, though not officially among the eight states with established School Meals for All policies, took a significant step forward in August 2023 with the passage of [H.B. 2471](#). The bill states that no Illinois child should experience hunger and that every student should benefit from access to healthy, locally procured, and freshly prepared meals during the school day. The bill also stated that if the State Board of Education no longer receives federal funding for the USDA LFS program, the State Board of Education shall sustain the program, subject to appropriation. The State Board of Education shall use the infrastructure, systems, and eligibility criteria created through LFS to sustain SFAs’ ability to purchase and serve local foods.

This legislation laid the groundwork for a Healthy School Meals for All program, contingent on appropriations. At the time of this writing, however, the state government has not allocated funds for the implementation of this program.



Photo Credit: Sarah Rypma

Goals and Proclamations

Another strategy to support local food purchasing is through state goals and proclamations. These policy-driven initiatives are another approach to increase local food purchasing without providing funds to offset the cost of these purchases.

By setting ambitious goals, states pave the way for a future in which a substantial portion of state-funded food service program ingredients could be sourced from local producers. Establishing state goals is important, but it is crucial to acknowledge that successful implementation relies on additional supportive policies, benchmarks, systems in place, and adequate funding. Five examples are below.

1 HAWAII: Act 175 and 176, Establishing Local Purchasing Goals

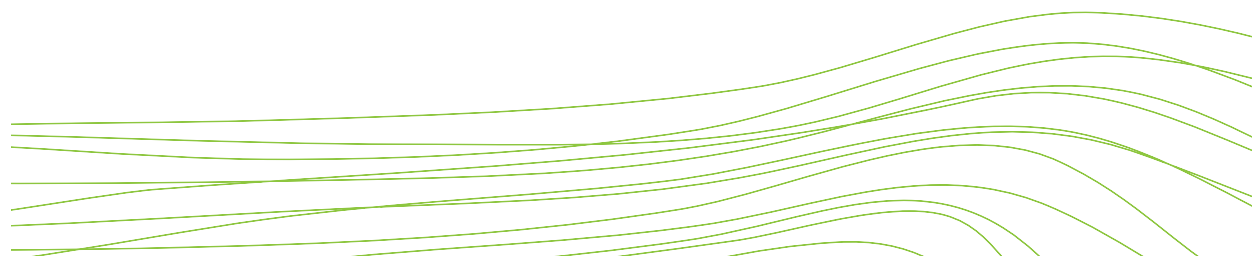
Passed in 2021, [Act 175](#) establishes a Department of Education goal for public schools to source 30% of ingredients from local producers by 2030. The Act also moved Hawai'i's Farm to School program from the Department of Agriculture to the Department of Education. According to the State of Hawai'i Department of Education (2022), the Annual Report on Farm to School Meals highlighted that schools sourced 6.2% of ingredients locally in 2022.

Act 175 is closely associated with [Act 176](#), The Farm to State Act, which directs other state departments to source 50% of local products by 2050. In 2022, [Act 144](#) narrowed which departments are impacted by the local procurement goal. Currently, this goal includes the Departments of Education, Public Safety, Health, and Defense, and the University of Hawai'i System. It also set benchmarks for these departments: 18% local food sourcing by 2030, 34% by 2040, and 50% by 2050.

 [Read the National Farm to School Network's resource *Culture and Values in Hawai'i Farm to School Policy* to learn more.](#)

2 VERMONT: 20% Local Purchasing by 2023

Passed in 2021, [H. 106 \(Act 67\)](#) establishes a state goal of 20% local purchasing by SUs and SDs by 2023. This bill also established Vermont's LFPI program, mentioned above. This policy gives CNP managers the discretion to define what foods are included in their definition of "local." As of Spring 2024, it is unclear whether this goal was achieved.



State Local Purchasing Goals That Do Not Directly Apply to Schools

3 CALIFORNIA: 60% Local Purchasing Goals for California-Grown Agricultural Products

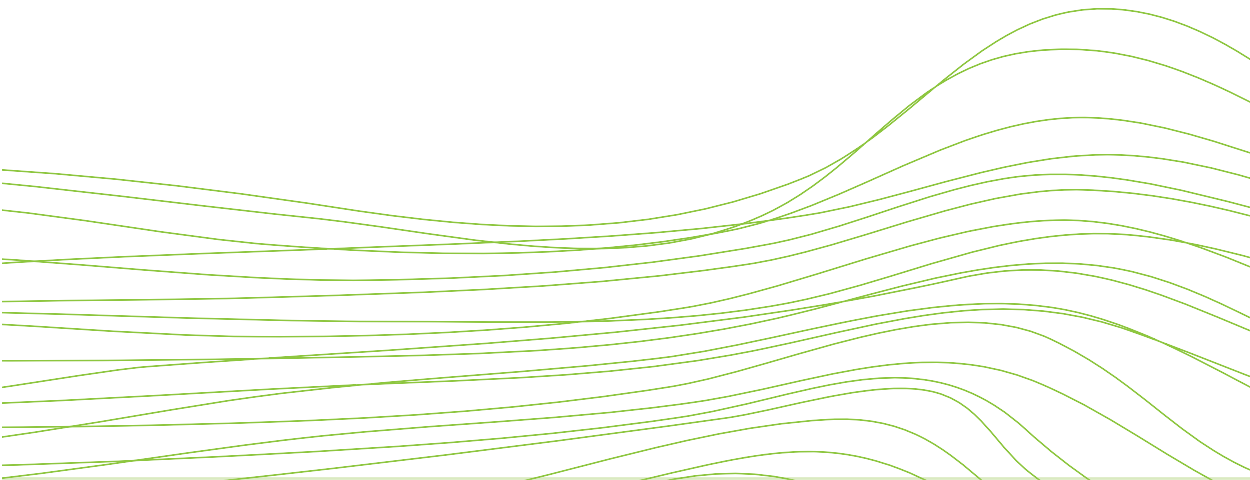
In 2022, the California Legislature enacted [A.B. 778](#) that declared the state goal of having publicly owned and funded institutions purchase 60% California-grown agricultural products in a given calendar year by 2025. This bill does not pertain to local educational agencies (often referred to as school districts) and some postsecondary institutions.

4 MARYLAND: Certified Local Farm Enterprise Program and Certified Local Farm Enterprise Food Aggregation Grant Fund

In February 2021, the Maryland Legislature passed [H.B. 1488](#) / [S.B. 0985](#) which established the Certified Local Farm Enterprise Program and Certified Local Farm Enterprise Food Aggregation Grant Fund. This bill also codified the state goal of government agencies (including four-year universities) purchasing 20% local food. Public schools are not included in the 20% goal, though they can apply for grant funding established by this bill.

5 NEW YORK: 30% Local Purchasing Goals for New York State Agricultural Products

In August 2023, Governor Kathy Hochul signed [Executive Order 32](#) directing state agencies to increase the percentage of food sourced from New York farmers and producers to 30% of their total purchases within five years. This Order gives greater discretion to school districts but does explicitly encourage them to join the statewide efforts. The 30% goal may be reached incrementally, with agencies purchasing 5% of their food products from New York by the end of 2023; 15% by the end of 2024; 20% by the end of 2025; 25% by the end of 2026; and 30% by the end of 2027.



Additional Policies and Efforts

Many other state efforts to support local food purchasing have been underway since 2020:

- **Maryland:** In 2022, legislators in Maryland passed [S.B. 121](#). This bill established the Maryland Farm-to-School Meal Grant Pilot Program but did not appropriate funds for this program.
- **Pennsylvania:** In 2022, the Pennsylvania Department of Education received a USDA Farm to School grant to research the feasibility and potential requirements for an LFPI in the state (McDonnell & Hess, 2023).
- **New Hampshire:** New Hampshire legislators introduced [H.B. 1657](#) in 2022, [H.B. 487](#) in 2023, and [H.B. 1678](#) in 2024 to establish the New Hampshire Farm-to-School Reimbursement Program.
- **Rhode Island:** In April 2023, Rhode Island legislators introduced [H. 6007](#), which would have established a School Meals for All policy while requiring public schools to track local food and serve it to the greatest extent possible, if passed.
- **Massachusetts:** In January 2023, Massachusetts legislators filed [H. 3993](#) that would have established a pilot LFPI, if passed.
- **New Jersey:** New Jersey legislators introduced [S. 4045](#) in June 2023 and [S. 1637](#) in 2024, which would establish the Farm to School Local Food Procurement Reimbursement Grant Program, if passed.

Several states have introduced policies that will allow CNPs to make values-based purchases, meaning that they can make purchasing decisions based on factors in addition to price:

- **Illinois:** In June 2022, Illinois passed [H.B. 4813 \(Public Act 102-1101\)](#) that amended the school contract code to allow for a preference for locally sourced food, scratch-cooked and minimally processed food, businesses owned by minorities, women, and persons with disabilities, and food suppliers that engage in environmentally friendly growing practices and promote animal welfare.
- **New York:** In June 2023, policymakers introduced [S. 06955](#) and [A. 07264](#) which, if passed, would allow state food contracts to give a 10% preference to food purchases that support local economies, avoid the use of animal hormones or antibiotics, and promote environmental sustainability, nutrition, racial equity, and a valued workforce.

CONCLUSION

This resource highlights some of the significant steps states have taken to establish policies supporting local food purchasing within educational institutions. We have outlined more than a dozen states that demonstrated this commitment in different ways. Although the goals are similar, the approaches vary, ranging from the establishment of new LFPs to the expansion of existing ones. Some states have seamlessly integrated LFPs with broader School Meals for All policies, recognizing the natural link between nutritious, appealing meals and local sourcing. States have also strategically leveraged the USDA LFS Cooperative Agreement program as a cornerstone for establishing or expanding LFPs. Lastly, other states have set ambitious goals and proclamations, providing a clear roadmap toward enhanced local food procurement. These strategies collectively serve as a blueprint, exemplifying the potential for policy-driven solutions in the farm to school movement that aim to foster resilient and sustainable local and regional food systems and ensure that our children are well-nourished into the future.

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To find more resources on LFPIs, go to foodsystems.msu.edu/local-food-purchasing-incentives and farmtoschool.org/resources. Contact Cassandra Bull at cassandra@farmtoschool.org or Colleen Matts at matts@msu.edu for more information.

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