

10 CENTS A MEAL PILOT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF 2016-2017 EVALUATION SURVEY RESULTS

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Results

Ten Cents a Meal for School Kids and Farms (10 Cents) is a pilot project administered by the Michigan Department of Education that provides up to 10 cents per meal in match funding from the State of Michigan for participating school districts to purchase and serve Michigan-grown fruits, vegetables, and legumes to students.

In the 2016–2017 school year, school districts in Michigan Prosperity Regions 2 and 4 (which cover Northwest and West Michigan, respectively) were eligible to participate. Out of 167 districts in the two prosperity regions, 52 applied, and 16 of those districts (with a total enrollment of approximately 48,000 students) were awarded funds to participate in the pilot.

Participating school food service directors (FSDs) completed monthly electronic evaluation surveys administered by the Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems. The results of those surveys are summarized here.

Additional evaluation methods and results can be found in the companion report, [10 Cents a Meal Pilot: Summary of 2016–2017 Evaluation Survey Results](#).

FSDs served 58 different Michigan-grown products for the first time. The most commonly served foods were asparagus, winter squash, blueberries, carrots, peaches, and sweet and tart cherries. All of these top foods are also products chosen as featured foods by Cultivate Michigan, the local purchasing campaign of the Michigan Farm to Institution Network.

FSDs conducted a variety of promotional and educational activities featuring local produce and legumes. Tasting/taste-testing activities were the most common promotional and educational activities, and these were also identified as the most successful activities implemented. Other common promotional activities were the use of Cultivate Michigan posters and window clings and Harvest of the Month menu features. Nutrition education in the classroom and the cafeteria were common educational activities.

FSDs reported on outcomes that the 10 Cents pilot helped them achieve. The top two outcomes, selected by at least three quarters of FSDs, were “The variety of produce served in school meals has increased” and “We can plan local produce and legume purchasing with greater certainty.” Very few FSDs noted any change in school meal participation (2 out of 16) or levels of food waste (3 out of 16).

Participating Food Service Directors’ Top Motivations and Challenges at the Start of the Pilot (n = 16)

What motivates you to purchase and serve local foods in your food service program?	Increase student consumption of fruits and vegetables	Higher quality food
What barriers do you face in purchasing local foods?	Lack of products available at certain times of year	Budget constraints
What logistical challenges do you face in serving local foods?	Lack of a distribution method to get local foods to my building(s)	Lack of staff labor to prepare local foods

FSDs agreed most with the following statements about their food service programs since starting the 10 Cents pilot:

- We offered more local vegetables in school meals.
- I have identified new Michigan-grown fruits, vegetables, and legumes that are accepted by our student customers.
- We offered more local fruits in school meals.

The two statements FSDs agreed with the least were “We offered more local legumes (dry beans in any form) in school meals” and “Our students are eating more legumes.” Based on this feedback, it may be helpful for 10 Cents pilot program administrators in future years to provide additional resources or support for sourcing and serving legumes.

FSDs’ responses to open-ended survey questions illustrate some key outcomes:

Food service staff responded positively to the 10 Cents pilot.

- “The staff is always excited to try new things, and I think this goes a long way with the students, seeing the staff excited, and [students] are also more willing to try new things.”
- “[Staff members] love preparing local produce for the students. It feels good to give back to our local community.”

Parents and local communities also had an overall positive response.

- “Teachers and parents are pleased to see that we are featuring local produce.”
- “Everyone has been very positive. The community wants to see more local purchasing.”
- “Everyone seems to be in agreement that this is a worthwhile program for all involved.”

FSDs indicated better connections with farmers and distributors and an increased ability to source locally.

- “We have held lots of meetings with local farmers, learned about new farmers that could supply us with produce that we didn’t know before. It opened the door for us to be able to use more local farmers in school.”
- “Being involved with the 10 Cents pilot [has] given us greater buying power, and actually [farmers] have asked me how much product I am projecting for the next school year. This helps them know how much to plant.”

Moving Forward: Resolving Challenges and Next Steps

In August 2017, the Michigan legislature approved expansion of this pilot program for the 2017–2018 school year to a third six-county region (Prosperity Region 9, in Southeast Michigan), with an increase in state funding to \$375,000. The school districts participating in the pilot will continue to work toward improving daily nutrition and eating habits for children while investing in Michigan agriculture and the related local food business economy.

Plans for the 2017–2018 program include the following:

- Start earlier. The delayed start of the pilot (due to the short turnaround time between state budget approval and the beginning of the school year) meant the peak season for local produce had passed before the program really got under way in October.
- Improve evaluation survey design to improve response rates and tracking of responses.
- Conduct some evaluation activities focusing on student consumption, selection, knowledge, and preference of Michigan-grown fruits, vegetables, and legumes served through this pilot.
- Improve the flow of funds to participating districts and reporting by the districts through the Michigan Department of Education.

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For more information about the 10 Cents a Meal pilot, visit tencentsmichigan.org.