



How Michigan Shaped the Field

THE NATIONAL IMPACT OF MICHIGAN'S 10 CENTS A MEAL PROGRAM



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UNIVERSITY

Center for
Regional Food Systems



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Visit the links below for more information about the associated programs mentioned in this report:

- **National Farm to School Network**

For more information about national farm to school policy, visit farmtoschool.org or contact Cassandra Bull at cassandra@farmtoschool.org.

- **10 Cents a Meal for Michigan's Kids and Farms**

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

- **10 Cents a Meal Evaluations**

For more information about the 10 Cents a Meal evaluation, see canr.msu.edu/10-cents-a-meal.

- **Michigan Farm to School**

To learn more about farm to school in Michigan, visit mifarmtoschool.msu.edu. Contact May Tsupros, director of farm to institution programs at CRFS, at tsupros1@msu.edu, or Julie Lehman, farm to youth network coordinator at CRFS, at lehmanju@msu.edu for more information.

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10 Cents a Meal for Michigan's Kids and Farms (10 Cents a Meal) is a state-funded local food purchasing incentive program (LFPI). The maximum award available for each grantee is the total number of federal child nutrition program meals (breakfast, lunch, supper, and snacks) served the prior year multiplied by 10 cents. The grant program reimburses 50% of the cost of fresh or minimally processed Michigan-grown fruits, vegetables, and dry beans used in meals and educational activities for children. Eligible grantees include Michigan-based schools, early care and education (ECE) centers, and other institutions that participate in USDA Child Nutrition Programs such as the National School Lunch Program and Child and Adult Care Food Program. As a matching grant program, the impact of 10 Cents a Meal on Michigan's food and agriculture industry is at least double the state-issued grant reimbursement amounts.

Arising from an agenda priority in the 2010 Michigan Good Food Charter, Michigan's 10 Cents a Meal program was one of the first LFPIs to be adopted across the nation. These LFPIs provide additional funding to child nutrition program operators to directly offset or incentivize local food purchases. Their benefits include increasing access to fresh, locally grown foods for children, improving institutional market channels for local farmers and food businesses, and strengthening local economies. Over its first decade, 10 Cents a Meal grew from a two-county regional pilot with 16 grantees reaching 48,000 K-12 students with \$120,000 in estimated local food purchases to a statewide program with 269 grantees reaching 594,000 children with nearly \$6 million in local food purchases (2023-2024). When 10 Cents a Meal launched as a regional pilot in 2016–2017, only two states and Washington, DC, had similar programs.¹ By 2026, 20 states and Washington, DC have implemented LFPIs in some form, with adoption surging after 2018.

Impact and Influence

Although 10 Cents a Meal is state-funded and focused on Michigan, this brief examines how the program informed adoption and sparked innovation beyond the state. Following the defunding of 10 Cents a Meal as part of the state K–12 education budget in October 2025, many advocates and practitioners from across the nation shared how the program had influenced their work. To systematically capture and understand this impact, the National Farm to School Network and the Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS) launched a public survey in November 2025. An electronic survey link was sent by email to the Partners listserv of the National Farm to School Network along with a curated email list of individuals whose work relates to LFPIs. Responses from individuals within individuals in 16 states representing state agencies, advocacy organizations, school nutrition departments, and national organizations revealed some of the ways that 10 Cents a Meal influenced LFPI program development and policy approaches across the country. These insights are organized into key themes in the pages that follow.

¹ This includes Oregon and New Mexico but excludes Maine, which had established but did not regularly fund an LFPI, and Alaska, which implemented an LFPI from 2012 to 2015.

DESIGN INSPIRATION

Respondents in 13 states cited 10 Cents a Meal as a primary inspiration for their state's policy work related to farm to school and local food purchasing. Michigan's program was often called a "model," as it provided a template that advocates and practitioners could adapt to their local contexts. Five of these 13 states successfully implemented an LFPI after Michigan's launch, often drawing directly from its structure.

Two states show how Michigan's program was adapted to different geopolitical contexts:

Alabama demonstrates how 10 Cents a Meal informed the design of an LFPI in a fiscally conservative context in the Southeastern United States. There, what began as a \$120,000 pilot in fiscal year 2020–2021 grew to \$600,000 in 2025.



If it were not for the Michigan incentive program, we wouldn't have an incentive program. Yes, our rules are different, but we built our idea off what Michigan was doing. After seeing Michigan's incentive program, Alabama went to our state legislature and also requested funds ... Since then, we have grown our program to incentivizing roughly half of our school systems, and we now incentivize 20 cents per meal component ... encouraging buying multiple local items.

—BETH SPRATT, ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRIES

Seeing Michigan's full program in action mobilized **Colorado** advocates to pursue ambitious state policy.



I came home from the [2018] spring [National Farm to Cafeteria] conference with every handout I could get from Michigan and placed it on the desk of our policy director the next week and said 'we are going to do this, this year!' By June 2018, we had convened the CO Department of Education, multiple school districts, farmers, and other advocates to learn about Michigan's model ... The governor signed it into law in June 2019 ... The 10 Cents a Meal program is literally the inspiration for Nourish Colorado's policy platform for farm to school and for our local food program pilot.

—WENDY MOSCHETTI, NOURISH COLORADO

Colorado's pilot has since been integrated into the state's universal Healthy School Meals for All program, with successful legislation making the local food program available to all schools statewide starting in summer 2026.

Michigan also influenced improvements to existing LFPIs. **Washington, DC**, established its Local5 program in 2010. However, in 2025, program administrators used Michigan's program design to explore changes to their program.



Michigan's 10 Cents a Meal program served as a model for our increased LFPI pilot program and helped to show the importance of a higher LFPI [rate] in DC.

—MELISSA GUREVITCH, DC OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION

Beyond shaping state-level LFPI development, Michigan's approach also informed state-level implementation of federal programs. Some states kept 10 Cents a Meal in mind when they designed their approaches to the [USDA Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program](#), a COVID-19 relief initiative that functioned as a federal-level LFPI through state agency cooperative agreements. Respondents from two states (Rhode Island and Illinois) noted they drew on Michigan's model when implementing this federal program.

ADVOCACY

After inspiration, the most common response about 10 Cents a Meal's national impact centered on advocacy. Several advocates mentioned the Michigan program within policy platforms, white papers, and briefs. Most importantly, respondents described how pointing to Michigan's successful program strengthened their case with local legislators for state-based funding and programs.



Michigan's 10 Cents a Meal serves as a strong peer model in the national farm to school ecosystem. Its success helps validate the strategy of state-funded local food purchasing incentives, and that validation likely strengthens Washington's case (politically and practically) for continued or expanded purchasing grants.

—ANONYMOUS

Michigan's value as a peer model may be especially important for advocates to see the program as proof that LFPIs could work in their region.



... Oftentimes the examples of excellent or innovative farm to school programming that get highlighted are from states like Vermont or California. Those examples do not resonate with Utah lawmakers. Being able to highlight the economic successes of a local food purchase incentive in a relatively conservative state was incredibly valuable in getting our own policy passed.

—KATE WHEELER, FORMER USDA SOUTHWEST REGIONAL FARM TO SCHOOL SPECIALIST AND UTAH STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION AGENT



The Michigan 10 Cents per Meal program has been a shining example of the type of policy that our members (farmers and eaters) are interested in pursuing in Illinois.

—MOLLY PICKERING, ILLINOIS STEWARDSHIP ALLIANCE



As our neighboring state, Michigan has shown what's possible through its 10 Cents a Meal program. Michigan's leadership proves that local food incentive programs can thrive, not just on the coasts but right here in the Midwest.

—ALLISON PFAFF HARRIS, REAP FOOD GROUP, WISCONSIN

The program's track record also helped advocates pivot when federal funding became uncertain in 2025. After the USDA canceled several local food programs in March 2025, one Virginia advocate drew on Michigan's case studies to seek support from their state's Farm Bureau as part of building a coalition for LFPI advocacy. The credibility of 10 Cents a Meal helped advocates broaden their reach beyond the child nutrition community and demonstrate feasibility to legislators.

EVALUATION

Michigan invested in evaluation to track its own progress, which in turn built the evidence base that helped make LFPI adoption possible nationwide. Michigan's evaluation stands out nationally, in part because its state legislation came to include a small percentage of program funding (1% initially, up to 2% by the 2024–2025 program year) allocated for project partners. This funding supported robust data collection and training for grantees by partners for program participants. As the lead evaluator, CRFS relied on funding from private foundations to conduct evaluation activities before this allocation was installed. These funding streams helped CRFS develop annual evaluations and contribute to legislative reports (led by the Michigan Department of Education and the Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities) since the program's inception.

Survey respondents across the country cited the impact of these evaluations as critical resources for design, advocacy, and implementation.



When I first began trying to create a local food purchasing incentive program in Utah, Michigan's 10 Cents a Meal was one of only a few programs already in existence and had by far the most comprehensive evaluation data. It was easy to see which aspects of the program might work in Utah ...

—KATE WHEELER, FORMER USDA SOUTHWEST REGIONAL FARM TO SCHOOL SPECIALIST AND UTAH STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION AGENT



... It has always been a program that we strove to replicate because it had such strong evidence of its effectiveness. Having a solid evaluation of this program helped us to see the impacts and lends credit to our argument for creating a similar program in our state to support farmers and feed kids healthy meals.

—ANONYMOUS



Their reporting has been such a helpful resource, and we've often drawn on it as a model when conducting [Vermont's] evaluation on local purchasing.

—VERMONT ADVOCATE

Michigan's strategic investment in evaluation meant that other states had a documented model to point to and from which to adapt and learn.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Michigan's decade of experience demonstrated how to make LFPIs work. Respondents described using lessons learned from 10 Cents a Meal as a blueprint for their own implementation.



[It] opened the door to us figuring out how to provide an incentive to Vermont schools ... Michigan joined a group of Northeast practitioners to talk about best practices and lessons learned and how to implement [the program].

—BETSY ROSENBLUTH, VERMONT FEED



Michigan was one of a few states that had already implemented a local foods incentive when Vermont was starting to advocate for our program ... Colleagues at Michigan State University also shared with us the importance of there being someone available to provide technical assistance to schools navigating the incentive, which is a similar role we later adopted in our state.

—VERMONT ADVOCATE

The ripple effects of this program also support the implementation of complementary programs within Michigan. Chef Ann Foundation, which provides salad bars to schools nationwide, shared how 10 Cents a Meal strengthens its work:



We have granted many salad bars to Michigan school districts who have leveraged the 10 Cents program to purchase local fruits and vegetables for their salad bars. 10 Cents has allowed the school districts we work with to purchase local produce for salad bars and other parts of their school meal operation.

—LAURA SMITH, CHEF ANN FOUNDATION

These quotes illustrate how 10 Cents a Meal shaped LFPI design in other states by centering implementation needs while reducing barriers for school food professionals.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Early childhood is a critical window for shaping lifelong eating habits and supporting healthy development. Yet despite serving millions of young children daily through USDA Child Nutrition Programs, ECE sites are often overlooked in farm to school policy. 10 Cents a Meal stands apart by including ECE sites since 2020–2021 and [recently piloting incentives for home-based care providers](#).



By demonstrating that LFPIs could work effectively in ECE settings, Michigan expanded the scope of what advocates in other states considered possible for their own programs.

—EMIA OPPENHEIM, ASSOCIATION OF STATE PUBLIC HEALTH NUTRITIONISTS

The ECE component generated significant national interest. When the Michigan Department of Education 10 Cents a Meal program staff presented in a 2024 Farm to ECE national webinar series that typically drew 100 participants, attendance doubled to 200 participants from 39 states, with more than 500 individuals accessing the recording afterward.

Interest in ECE-focused LFPIs surged after the USDA announced a second round of the USDA Local Food for Schools Program and its expansion to ECE sites in late 2024. That federal program was terminated before implementation in March 2025, however, making Michigan's state-funded 10 Cents a Meal program even more valuable to children in the state. Michigan's early commitment to ECE helped establish young children as a priority population in the national farm to school movement and provided a proven framework for states building their own ECE-based local food procurement programs.

CONCLUSION

Michigan's 10 Cents a Meal program has made an impact beyond its state borders thanks to the hardworking professionals who not only administered and supported the program but also made time to share its results. They did this by serving on advisory panels, presenting at national conferences and webinars, participating in technical assistance calls with other states, authoring widely used implementation guides, and sharing evaluation results through reports and briefs. As one respondent noted, the Michigan core team's willingness to share program experiences openly and generously enabled advocates across the country to build their own programs with proven strategies, tools, and resources rather than starting from scratch.

Our survey identified at **least five states** that reported successfully launching LFPIs by leveraging Michigan's LFPI, along with others that used it to inform federal program implementation. The consistency of responses across diverse contexts points to a broader finding: LFPIs work. They create markets for local farmers and improve children's access to high-quality food through modest program budgets. Michigan's 10 Cents a Meal program, by design, leverages state funds to double its impact. As advocates described:



“It allows for creating a market for small local farmers [and] adds dollars to the local agriculture economy.”

—BETTI WIGGINS, HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT, TEXAS



“Michigan's 10 Cents a Meal program is exactly the kind of high-impact, bipartisan solution that pays for itself.”

—ANONYMOUS



“It's a small investment for changing the school food system long term.”

—BETSY ROSENBLUTH, VERMONT FEED

10 Cents a Meal was consistently called a “model” that other states could follow and adapt. Critically, the program was not simply a template; it offered implementation frameworks and years of evidence demonstrating that LFPIs are effective, helping drive adoption nationwide. It demonstrated that state-funded LFPIs could work across different political and geographic contexts while serving both K–12 and ECE populations. Its structured approach to evaluation and technical assistance led to the creation of resources that reduced barriers to entry for other states pursuing similar policies. The story of Michigan's 10 Cents a Meal shows how early adoption and policy innovation from one state can fuel a national movement.



Center for Regional Food Systems

CRFS envisions a thriving economy, equity, and sustainability for Michigan, the country, and the planet through food systems rooted in local regions and centered on Good Food: food that is healthy, green, fair, and affordable.

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National Farm to School Network

National Farm to School Network envisions a nation in which farm to school programs are an essential component of strong and just local and regional food systems, ensuring the health of all school children, farms, environment, economy and communities.

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