



# Innovative Design Elements that Stand Out Nationwide

## MICHIGAN'S 10 CENTS A MEAL PROGRAM

Cassandra Bull, National Farm to School Network

The [10 Cents a Meal for Michigan's Kids and Farms](#) (10 Cents a Meal) program was one of the first local food purchasing incentives (LFPIs) to be adopted across the nation, beginning in 2016. These types of programs provide additional funding to child nutrition program operators to directly offset or incentivize local food purchases. By 2026, around 20 states and Washington, DC have implemented LFPIs in some form, with adoption surging after 2018. Each state program is unique, reflecting distinct policy contexts, priorities, and agricultural resources.

To understand how Michigan shaped this landscape, National Farm to School Network and Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems [analyzed the ways 10 Cents a Meal influenced LFPI replication in other states](#). Drawing on this research and the Network's broader work tracking LFPI adoption and implementation nationwide, this brief highlights the unique and innovative design elements that make Michigan's program stand out.

### ● It began as a pilot and grew over time.

In 2016-2017, 10 Cents a Meal launched as a modest \$120,000 state-funded regional pilot and grew to a \$9.4 million statewide program in its highest budget year. This trajectory offers an important proof of concept for state-level advocates who may feel pressure to propose large-scale programs from the outset. Starting small, building evidence, and scaling incrementally is a viable and effective path forward.

### ● It puts students' nutrition first.

10 Cents a Meal prioritizes student health by limiting reimbursements to only fresh or minimally processed fruits, vegetables, and dry beans. This narrower scope makes 10 Cents a Meal one of the most restrictive LFPI in the nation and puts the focus on creating quality-driven, scratch-cooked, source-identified school meals, which reinforces one of the program's main goals.

## ○ It doubles its impact through a matching requirement.

As a matching grant program, grantees must spend twice their award amount on local foods to access their maximum reimbursement. This leverages state dollars alongside local school budgets and USDA Child Nutrition Program funding such as the National School Lunch Program funding for maximum benefit. While several other states, such as Maine, Minnesota, and Connecticut, have similar match-style programs, many other LFPIs provide 100% reimbursement up to the grant cap. Michigan's design stands out for the guaranteed economic development it builds directly into the program.

## ○ It funds partners to support evaluation and technical assistance.

Michigan's authorizing legislation sets aside up to 2% of program funding for project partners to support the program and its participants; core partners including Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems and Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities have been recipients. This dedicated funding supports program evaluation, legislative reporting, and technical assistance for schools and farms, work that had been previously dependent on private foundation support.

As a result, Michigan has developed one of the strongest and consistent program evaluations in the nation, allowing for an evidence base on the program's impact on children, farmers, and food service professionals. By 2024-2025, technical assistance partners traveled across the state to provide more than eight in-person training sessions per year to support grant applications.

## ○ It uniquely leverages federal entitlement dollars.

Michigan is the only state program the National Farm to School Network has identified that allows local food purchased through the Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (DoD Fresh) to count toward grantees' required 50% match. The DoD Fresh program lets schools direct part of their federal commodity entitlement toward fresh fruits and vegetables, and Michigan's incentive structure encourages schools to use even more of those federal dollars on locally grown produce.

## ○ It recently expanded reimbursement beyond food costs.

For the 2024-2025 school year, the program expanded to allow grantees to use a portion of grant funds on non-food expenses like labor and equipment in recognition that sourcing, menuing, and serving local foods takes additional time and resources beyond the cost of ingredients. This flexibility will likely increase participation among schools and demonstrates Michigan's willingness to evolve the program which offers an important model for other states

## ○ It requires reporting on farm origin.

Previous program legislation requires grantees to report on farm origin, which means 10 Cents a Meal generates detailed, farm-level data that allows evaluators and policymakers to accurately measure the program's impact on Michigan's agricultural economy. This level of traceability is rare among similar programs due to the logistical complexity of tracking local food from farm to institution.

## ○ It invested in high-quality online training.

The Michigan Department of Education, which administers the program, has developed a dedicated [online training module](#)<sup>1</sup> that ensures grantees have a clear, consistent understanding of program requirements and eligibility. Few other states have invested in this kind of grantee support, making Michigan's approach a useful model for others to replicate.

<sup>1</sup> As of the publication of this material, the 10 Cents a Meal for Michigan's Kids & Farms - Annual Training was last updated in 2025.

This resource was made possible by generous funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Cassandra Bull, Policy Specialist of the National Farm to School Network, is the lead author of this resource. For more information about national farm to school policy, visit [farmtoschool.org](http://farmtoschool.org). As evaluators of the [10 Cents a Meal](#) program, Colleen Matts, Assistant Director for Strategy, and May Tsupros, Director of Farm to Institution Programs, of Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS) offered collaboration and support on this resource. More information regarding the evaluation of the 10 Cents a Meal program from CRFS can be found at [canr.msu.edu/10-cents-a-meal/](http://canr.msu.edu/10-cents-a-meal/). Mel Hill of CRFS designed this resource.

***A special thank you to all the state-level stakeholders who have shared their work broadly so others can learn from and be inspired by local food purchasing incentive programs across the country.***

