

# Food Program Managers Participating in 10 Cents a Meal

## 10 CENTS A MEAL 2023–2024 EVALUATION RESULTS: DOUBLING INVESTMENT AND GROWING IMPACT

10 Cents a Meal for Michigan’s Kids and Farms, administered by the Michigan Department of Education, supplements funding for schools and other non-school sponsors to purchase Michigan-grown fruits, vegetables, and dry beans. This section is part of the [10 Cents a Meal 2023–2024 Evaluation Results: Doubling Investment and Growing Impact](#).

Food program managers (FPMs) are key to making 10 Cents a Meal work at the local level. An FPM is an individual who manages a school, district, or center’s food or food service program.<sup>1</sup> FPMs may include food service directors or managers at schools or school districts, where meals and other foods are often, but not always, served to schoolchildren in a cafeteria, as well as directors or professionals at childcare centers who may also support food programs provided there, often in classrooms.

For the 10 Cents a Meal program, FPMs typically respond to evaluation surveys and submit invoices with purchasing information on behalf of the entity that was awarded the grant (the grantee). Some FPMs manage more than one food program and therefore may represent more than one grantee site. In those cases, they were asked to take one survey for each of their grant sites.

For the 2023–2024 program year, there were 269 participating grantees across the state, with FPMs implementing United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Child Nutrition Programs, including the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP), the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), as well as the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). One community feeding site also participated in the program this year. The breakdown of grantees by type and participation in USDA Child Nutrition Programs is shown in Table 1.

<sup>1</sup> See the [2023–2024 10 Cents a Meal Evaluation Appendix B: Key Terms and Definitions](#) for this and other terms used throughout this report package.

**Table 1. 10 Cents a Meal Grantees by Type and Their Participation in USDA Child Nutrition Programs**

Grantee Type	Number of Grants	Participation in USDA Child Nutrition Programs		
		NSLP/SBP	SFSP	CACFP
Schools	249	249	150	120
Childcare Sponsors	19	-	4	19
Community Feeding Sites	1	-	1	-
Total Number of Grantees	269	249	155	139
Percentage of Grantees	-	92.6%	57.6%	51.7%

Note: These data were compiled from 10 Cents a Meal grantee participation data for this program year, not self-reported by FPMs.

It is important to consider FPMs’ professional and respective experience with local food purchasing, as previous evaluation findings have suggested that FPMs may purchase a greater diversity of Michigan-grown fruits, vegetables, and dry beans over time as they gain more experience participating in 10 Cents a Meal and other local food procurement and farm to school program activities.<sup>2</sup> As Table 2 shows participating grantee sites had a range of years of experience in the program. Figure 1 shows that FPMs from participating grantee sites also had a range of experience, with the largest grouping having over six years of professional experience purchasing local foods for food programs.

**Table 2. Years of Experience in 10 Cents a Meal by Grantee Site**

Years of Participation in 10 Cents a Meal	Number of Grantee Sites	Percentage of Total
1	50	18.6%
2	73	27.1%
3	62	23%
4	37	13.8%
5	9	3.3%
6	19	7.1%
7	12	4.5%
8*	7	2.6%

n=269

Note: These data were not self-reported by FPMs but compiled from 10 Cents a Meal grantee participation data across all program years.

\*Eight years is the maximum number of years a grantee could have participated in 10 Cents a Meal, with the state-funded pilot program beginning in 2016-2017.

2 Refer to **“Farm to School Experience Matters: Insights From an Analysis of Food Service Director Behavior”** from *What a Dime Can Do: An Evaluation of the 10 Cents a Meal Pilot*.

*Figure 1. Years of Food Program Manager Experience Purchasing Local Foods for Food Service Programs and Managing or Directing Food Service Programs in 2023–2024*



## Motivations, Barriers, and Logistical Challenges for Purchasing and Serving Local Foods

In the first survey of the program year (January 2024), FPMs were asked about the motivators, barriers, and logistical challenges to purchasing and serving local foods in their food program.<sup>3</sup> All three questions were open-ended to allow participants to describe their feedback in their own words. For evaluation purposes, and as described to FPMs in the survey questions, barriers were considered general and big-picture obstacles that prevent or block a grantee’s ability to purchase and serve local foods. Logistical challenges were considered obstacles specific to the operations of food service programs, including how FPMs work with food vendors.

### Motivators

The 244 FPMs who responded to this question provided 475 different reports about motivators to purchasing and serving local foods in their food program. Responses were categorized into themes that are outlined in the following section.

#### The top motivators for FPMs purchasing and serving local foods in their food programs were:

- **product attributes of Michigan-grown foods** (41%), including variety, freshness, flavor, quality, aroma, shelf-life, accessibility, availability, including seasonally, and unique products;
- **benefits to children** (24%) consisted of educational benefits, including information about what is grown locally or nearby, as well as nutrition and food/nutrition security, “excitement” and “having fun with students”, and trying new foods;
- **helping Michigan farms and food businesses** (20%); and
- **supporting the local economy** (11%).

Helping Michigan farms and food businesses may go hand-in-hand with supporting the local economy, but enough specific mentions in survey responses to the economy warranted its own category as a motivator this program year. Other motivators for FPMs who responded

<sup>3</sup> Refer to the [2023–2024 10 Cents a Meal Evaluation Report Appendix A: Technical Notes](#) for more details on these survey questions.

to this question included supporting the community (8%), public and community relations (5%), the benefit of additional funds from grant awards (4%), supporting the food program including student acceptability (3%), and responses categorized as “other” that did not fit into the above themes. Interestingly, this year, a few FPMs mentioned emotions like “pride,” “Michigan pride,” and “loyalty” as motivators. One FPM mentioned learning from other grantees as a motivator (which may be better categorized as a benefit of participating in 10 Cents a Meal, specifically), and another mentioned wanting to start a farm to early care and education (ECE) program.

FPMs listed an average of two motivators each, but **one FPM from a public school district provided the maximum number of 12 motivators: “local farmers need the support; the freshness of the product; this is a win-win for the farmers and school services; better quality produce; more variety for students; creating a better connection to food; contributing to the future well-being of our students; contributing to a more efficient food system; utilizing grant funds; helping farmers to have consistent income; helping local economy; more vibrant menus.”**

## Food Program Managers in Their Own Words<sup>4</sup>

### MOTIVATORS TO PURCHASE AND SERVE LOCAL FOODS IN THEIR FOOD PROGRAMS



Being reimbursed by the Michigan 10 Cents program helps lower our costs while motivating me to find more local foods.



Our district expects us to help the local economy.



We believe that exposing kids to lots of locally grown fruits and vegetables while they are young sets up healthy eating habits for their lifetime.

— ECE grantee



To share local fresh produce to children who are low-income and do not get it at home.

— Public school academy grantee



Show the variety available locally to encourage families to purchase locally also.



I am a registered dietitian, so I realize the importance of local foods for their nutritional benefits and how it helps the farmers.



...we are a rural district, and it shows that we are committed to helping out our community.



The benefit to local farmers: how excited the local farmers are when I share with them the amazing program for our children.

<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted in this and other related summaries, quotes from survey responses are from participating FPMs at public school districts because they represent the largest proportion of 10 Cents a Meal grantees.



Several local farms have students here.



Supporting local agriculture contributes to food security by diversifying the sources of food production.



The quality and flavor are unparalleled. Once students taste local foods, they notice when we fall back on non-local ones.



There is nothing better tasting, along with the texture and color, of oven-roasted fresh vegetables or cold vegetable summer salads like black beans and fresh corn, cucumbers and fennel...



I believe that it is important to not only support our local farmers and community by purchasing locally grown and produced food, but I also believe in the importance of knowing where your food comes from. There is so much to gain from making local connections and utilizing local resources.

## Barriers and Logistical Challenges

Like in previous years, FPMs were asked about barriers they face in purchasing local foods for their food programs and what logistical challenges they face when using and serving local foods in their food programs.

A total of 255 and 248 FPMs, respectively, responded to these questions in the first survey (January 2024) about barriers and logistical challenges, with a total of 399 and 279 different reports each. Twenty grantees indicated that they had no barriers to report, and 55 had no logistical challenges to share.

As noted above (and in previous years for evaluation purposes), barriers were considered “general and big-picture obstacles that prevent or block a grantee’s ability to purchase and serve local foods. Logistical challenges were considered general and big-picture obstacles specific to the operations of food service programs, including how they work with food vendors.”<sup>5</sup> However, many FPMs’ responses to these questions seem to combine or wrongly identify barriers and logistical challenges based on these definitions, which may be cause for rewording these questions or being more or less specific about the difference between these questions in evaluations of future program years. Themes for responses to both questions are outlined in the following section.

<sup>5</sup> See *Sustaining Momentum for Michigan’s Future: 10 Cents a Meal 2022–2023 Evaluation Results*.

FPMs’ responses about the top barriers and logistical challenges include the following:

- **Product availability issues made up 39% of barriers and 17% of logistical challenges.**
  - The seasonality of Michigan agriculture—and that it does not synchronize with the school year—was the primary subtheme of this barrier.
  - FPMs also mentioned issues related to product quality, quantity, and varieties available, as well as wanting or needing more ready-to-eat or value-added products, including frozen local products.
- **Issues related to food program operations were noted in 26% of barriers and 34% of logistical challenges.**
  - Issues related to food preparation were named most related to logistical challenges (34% of these responses, 95 grantees).
  - The most frequently mentioned subthemes within these barriers were price/cost (27% of these responses, 28 grantees), followed by a lack of time and labor/staffing (11% of responses, 12 grantees).
  - Other responses included mentions of their lack of storage and equipment, as well as payment/billing, sourcing, and procurement issues, including through food service management or vended meals companies.
- **Access to farmers and food suppliers as well as supply chain issues were named in 14% and 13% of reported barriers, respectively. Together, they also made up 29% of reported logistical challenges.**
  - Of responses related to logistical challenges, 37 FPMs reported issues related to the delivery and transportation of local foods.
  - The closure of Cherry Capital Foods’ food hub/distributor was specifically reported by 15 grantees as part of supply chain barriers.

## Food Program Managers in Their Own Words

### BARRIERS TO PURCHASING AND SERVING LOCAL FOODS IN THEIR FOOD PROGRAMS

- “ We have served local food [in our school district] for years. We have worked through most of the barriers.
- “ ...I got a late start on this, I had a hard time finding a farmer to take me. But once I got a farmer, it was pretty smooth.
- “ Cost, procurement, Michigan seasons, supply chain issues, pricing
- “ Up north in MI we are far from many farms and stores. But we are lucky to have a few great farms down the road from our school that we can use. My only problem now is finding a chef in our area.
- “ Finding available produce that has good quality all year round in Michigan is hard. Due to the location of our district, there really isn’t any way of getting deliveries for fresh produce except from our distributor, and the quality is usually poor. [It requires a] long distance to travel to pick up fresh produce.



Definitely seasonal barriers to getting a variety of produce because we are in Michigan. Also, having the providers participate and knowing who they are. I am part of a [food service] management company, so there are further obstacles getting vendors in their system. It took me 11 months to get Cherry Capital in the system, and then they went out of business.



Winter! We do our best by using our freezer. We purchase apples from a local orchard. They supply us as long as they can.

## Training Topics and Formats

For the first survey (January 2024) this year, two new questions were added focusing on programmatic-related training for participating FPMs.

Responses to these new questions were actionable; responses were primarily used for the purposes of informing and improving programmatic operations and grantee support, but they are presented here as evaluation findings as well.

The first multiple-choice question focused on which types of training formats FPMs would prefer, asking FPMs to check all that apply, so many responded with more than one preferred format. Of the 255 FPMs who responded to this survey question, 38% of grantees chose just one training format. Of all responses, virtual live (real-time) training was the most preferred format (30%, or 147 grantees), but the other three options provided were only slightly less preferred: an online self-paced training format was preferred by 26% (130 grantees), and in person formats and virtual, pre-recorded formats were tied, preferred by 22% each (111 and 110 grantees, respectively).

The second open-ended question sought responses on training topics of interest to FPMs. Of the 188 FPMs who responded to this question, seven indicated that they had no specific training topics of interest. The remainder reported 204 types of training topics that were grouped into categories. **Learning more about local food procurement, including working with local farmers and food vendors, was the topic of greatest interest to FPMs (32%, 65 grantees), followed by recipes and culinary-related topics of interest to 24% of FPMs (24%, 49 grantees).** Local food product availability, including related to the seasonality of agricultural products, was of interest to 12% of FPMs (24 grantees), programmatic invoice submission to 10% (20 grantees), and both marketing and education activities to 7% of FPMs (15 and 14 grantees, respectively). General topics, including any unspecified training topics, were of interest to 8% of FPMs (15 grantees).

Programmatically, the MDE team made a few notable adjustments to better meet the needs of FPMs participating in 10 Cents a Meal in 2023–2024. These included: hiring a third Farm to Program team member to increase capacity for program and technical assistance/support; adding a Farm to Program team electronic bookings page for scheduling one-on-one virtual assistance to answer FPMs' specific questions and needs; and conducting one in-person and five virtual training sessions on the program and the application for it.

## Food Program Managers in Their Own Words

### PROGRAM TRAINING TOPICS OF MOST INTEREST

- “ How we can provide a platform for our growers to sell and deliver to schools directly. I think the farmers need to be more informed and involved.
- “ Learning about local farms and the relationship building between district and farmers.
- “ Maybe a better understanding on what we can expect to be able to offer on a consistent basis during the winter months.
- “ General knife skills, safe product handling, basic cooking techniques (sauté, boil, bake, puree, etc.).
- “ Legumes processing and preparing into something kids will actually eat if it has not been a staple of their cultural diet.
- “ Finding the best produce to provide to the kids so that they will try the different choices...
- “ New ways to incorporate local items into menu planning in order to utilize the program to the full potential.
- “ Ways to get families involved, and fun ways to get children to eat more vegetables.  
— ECE grantee
- “ We have a new Finance Director, so I think the payments/invoicing training topic is a good one right now.

## Promotional and Educational Activities Supporting 10 Cents a Meal

In the last survey of the program year (August 2024), participating FPMs were asked about any supportive promotional and educational activities that were conducted with children at their site(s) to support local foods.

It is important to note that these results may be more likely to include activities related to the food program and/or cafeteria and less likely to capture all related activities conducted within the broader operating environment (i.e., classrooms or on-site gardens), as some FPMs may not know about all activities being conducted during the year. Additionally, the supportive activities were reported by type and not by the number of instances per type, so a total count of instances of educational activities is not available.

Across the year, 232 participating FPMs submitted 623 reports of types of activities conducted in support of 10 Cents a Meal throughout the program year. The key results are summarized below.

- The average number of types of activities reported throughout the year was three (one less than the previous program year), but 43 grantees reported that no supportive activities were conducted.

- The top activities reported by a total percent of FPMs were promotional posters (44%, 102 grantees), taste testing (40%, 93 grantees), and nutrition education in the cafeteria (28%, 64 grantees). These are the same top three activities from the previous year, except that taste testing moved from third last year to the second spot this year.
- Similar to previous years, taste testing was reported as the most successful activity by far (41%, 62 grantees). Promotional posters were the next most successful activity type (13%, 20 grantees).

### At least 49 Michigan-grown foods were tried through all activities in the 2023–2024 year, as reported by 176 grantees.

- Unique foods or preparations that were promoted through activities included watermelon radish, zephyr squash, purple cauliflower, radish straws, and foot-long purple beans.
- One public school grantee promoted 13 Michigan-grown foods through activities: strawberries, blueberries, apples, plums, watermelon, cantaloupe, cucumbers, peppers, jalapeños, pears, cabbage, tomatoes, and onions.
- One non-school sponsor grantee reported that black bean and corn salsa was added to their menu, made with “dry black beans and Michigan-grown sweet corn.”
- One public school grantee reported “*spinach artichoke dip, pot roast garnished with micro-greens, maple-glazed rainbow carrots, and kale and butternut squash salad tastings were conducted during the school year.*”
- With 68% of grantees reporting foods promoted, apples were the most frequently reported Michigan-grown food promoted. The top 10 fruits and the top 10 vegetables and dry beans that were promoted through activities by grantees are outlined in Table 3.

**Table 3. Top 10 fruits and top 10 vegetables and dry beans promoted through supportive promotional and educational activities**

Fruits	Total Grantees Reporting	Vegetables and Dry Beans	Total Grantees Reporting
Apples	119	Cucumbers	35
Blueberries	33	Tomatoes (cherry, grape, and slicing)	25
Strawberries	23	Dry Beans	23
Cherries	20	Lettuce	21
Peaches	15	Asparagus	20
Pears	10	Corn	20
Melons	5	Carrots	17
Berries (other or unidentifiable)	4	Potatoes	16
Watermelon	4	Summer Squash	10
Blackberries	3	Kale	9

n=176

## Food Program Managers in Their Own Words

### ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED TO SUPPORT LOCAL FOODS SERVED IN FOOD PROGRAMS THROUGH 10 CENTS A MEAL



Our vendor is extremely passionate about educating students on Apple Crunch Day and does a great job of getting kids excited about eating fresh fruit.



We love bringing food prep to the classroom, and the kids loved making cookies at the end of the year. We also had an ice cream party with fresh strawberries—they loved that!

— ECE grantee



All of our students eat in the classroom, so any signage is used in the hallway for students to see.

— Private School Grantee



...our registered dietitian conducted three nutrition activities featuring local produce: crazy fruit cones (waffle cones with strawberry yogurt, blueberries, bananas, and strawberries), Cowboy Caviar with tortilla chips, and sweet and spicy cucumbers. All activities included MI Harvest of the Month handouts and fun facts about the food being featured, as well as recipe cards.

Evaluation of 10 Cents a Meal for Michigan's Kids and Farms is led by the Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS). The work presented here is part of the [10 Cents a Meal 2023–2024 Evaluation Results: Doubling Investment and Growing Impact](#) by Colleen Matts, May Tsupros, Eva Nyerges, and Megan McManus, and was generously funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and 10 Cents administrative funds for partner organizations.

To learn more, visit [tencentsmichigan.org](https://tencentsmichigan.org), [foodsystems.msu.edu](https://foodsystems.msu.edu), [10-cents-a-meal.msu.edu](https://10-cents-a-meal.msu.edu), and [mifarmtoschool.msu.edu](https://mifarmtoschool.msu.edu).