



Recommendations for Future Years of 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](#).

10 Cents a Meal has continued to evolve over the years to meet the needs of grantees, but program data show where strategic refinements could make it even stronger.

As evaluators, we collect survey responses and purchasing information submitted by participating food program managers (FPMs) to understand how each aspect of 10 Cents a Meal works and how it could be improved. This summary includes recommendations for the future of 10 Cents a Meal from this viewpoint, but we acknowledge that funding and capacity may impact the feasibility of implementing some of these recommendations. At the time of this summary’s writing, 10 Cents a Meal remains unfunded through the state budget for the 2025–2026 program year—for the first time since the state-funded pilot program began in 2016–2017—so the future of this effective program remains uncertain.

As we described in the summary [The Big Picture: Outcomes, Impacts, Needs, and Feedback of Participating in 10 Cents a Meal](#), FPMs participating in 10 Cents a Meal have the unique position to perceive outcomes and impacts of the program on children they serve as well as on their relationships farmers and food vendors who supply Michigan-grown foods to them. Therefore, FPMs’ needs should be taken into account first and foremost when considering adjustments for future program years. Table 1 shows a summary of some of their reported needs to support their efforts to purchase and serve Michigan foods into the future.

Table 1. Summary of FPMs’ Needs to Support Efforts to Purchase and Serve Michigan Foods (of any kind) in the Future

Needs Categories	Types of Needs
<p>Programmatic Needs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Education, including on the following specific topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — 10 Cents a Meal for contracted food service vendors¹ — Procurement of local foods — Seasonal availability — Freezing and drying seasonal products for extended availability — Using dry beans in ways that students accept — Maximizing the percentage of labor and transportation costs that are set to be part of 10 Cents a Meal eligible costs for the next program year (2024–2025) ● Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Lists of farmers and local food vendors in grantees’ areas and/or that participate in 10 Cents a Meal sales and products they have available, including in the summer season² — Best practices from other grantees — Promotional materials — Educational activities — Recipes for Michigan-grown foods — Dry beans recipes and tips — Winter seasonal planning — Summer seasonal planning, including for using the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) — Guidance specifically for smaller schools/districts that need to purchase local foods in smaller quantities ● Administration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — More advanced notice about grant awards to aid in planning for the coming year, including related to the seasonal availability of Michigan-grown products — Improved payment processes — Simplified reporting, specifically including invoice submission and farms of origin for purchased products — Expanded eligible products to include meats — Expanded eligible costs to include equipment as well as staff training and farm field trips

1 A contracted food service management company is an external management company that is contracted by a food program to prepare the meals and/or manage the food service operation, sometimes including personnel. Refer to the [2023–2024 10 Cents a Meal Evaluation Report Appendices](#) for more Key Terms and Definitions.

2 In response to this demand from grantees, including the MDE Farm to Program team created a [Farm to Program Directory](#) of farmers and vendors to share in the 2024–2025 program year.

Needs Categories	Types of Needs
Local Food Supply Chain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● More farmers and local food vendors in their area, and/or increased access to them ● Greater availability of Michigan-grown foods generally, including those related to seasonal availability ● Greater availability of frozen local fruits and vegetables and other value-added/minimally processed Michigan-grown products ● Improved delivery and distribution, including through food hubs ● Increased supplier identification and promotion of local products and their farm sources for them
Food Program Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● More staff and staff time to prepare local foods ● More and specific types of equipment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Salad spinners — Washing stations — Mobile cooking units for a non-school sponsor that has many sites ● More funding, including through 10 Cents a Meal, and increased buying power

Note: This table also appears in [The Big Picture: Outcomes, Impacts, Needs, and Feedback of Participating in 10 Cents a Meal](#).

Next, it is important to note that one recommendation from previous years has been addressed, at least in part. The recommendation to “consider broadening types of eligible expenses for the program to better leverage 10 Cents a Meal funds” has been accomplished by allowing grantees to use 25% of their grant funds for costs to support the program beyond food, specifically for transportation and preparation (staff time) for local foods, beginning in the 2024–2025 program year. Per feedback in surveys, FPMs still seek eligible expenses to broaden even further in the future, including for other Michigan foods (meats and proteins, primarily) and food service equipment. So, the recommendation remains to consider adding more eligible Michigan foods, such as proteins, to the program.

Some recommendations from previous evaluation reports remain relevant, while others are being addressed by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) program team. For example, in response to demand from grantees, including through their survey responses, the MDE Farm to Program team created a [Farm to Program Directory](#) of farmers and vendors to share in the 2024–2025 program year. Beyond helping future grantees find sources for Michigan-grown foods, a resource such as this may also support the continuation of local food procurement as part of ongoing farm to school activities regardless of the status of state funding to support 10 Cents a Meal, but with the continuation of Michigan School Meals (also known as school meals for all) in the state budget, at least through 2025–2026 per the time of this writing. However, one challenge to this directory, per the MDE staff team, is that some farmers and vendors declined to be included in a publicly available database.

The following bulleted recommendations below from previous evaluation reports (2021–2022 and 2022–2023) are still relevant and carried forward here:

- Continue providing targeted technical assistance to individual grantees over the program year.
- Continue advocating for farm of origin information for Michigan-grown foods from food suppliers.
- Continue to collect data and track participation of early care and education (ECE) grantees as a group.³

3 See more information about a family day care pilot in the [2023–2024 10 Cents a Meal Evaluation Report Appendices](#).

- Further analyze the impact of the 10 Cents a Meal program on children—including the program goal on nutrition and health-related factors—and communities.
- Beyond food service, track other farm to school efforts (e.g., school gardens and education) that can impact 10 Cents a Meal participation.

Lastly, new recommendations listed below are informed or inspired by the 2023–2024 program evaluation.

Evaluation recommendations

- **Investigate the relationship between 10 Cents a Meal and Michigan School Meals.** The State of Michigan began funding free breakfast and lunch for schoolchildren through the Michigan School Meals⁴ program in 2023–2024. The interaction between 10 Cents a Meal and Michigan School Meals, including its potential relationship with food quality and/or how grantees maximize federal reimbursements, would be of great interest for evaluation purposes.
- **Examine program data with a longitudinal view and share findings, including for the purposes of program improvement.** Now that 10 Cents a Meal has been a statewide program, included ECE sites as eligible participants, and maintained fairly consistent requirements and reporting for several years, program staff members and evaluators may explore any number of angles that benefit from a view over time or across program years. Some of these topics may include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - How experience influences program participation and implementation by grantees (i.e., how new grantee sites and/or FPMs new to the program and/or to local food purchasing may implement the program differently than those with more experience).
 - How the program impacts participating farmers and food vendors.
 - How the closure of long-time food hub and local food vendor, Cherry Capital Foods, may cause participating FPMs to adjust their vendors and/or food products purchased, and may influence other responses or changes in the 10 Cents a Meal food supply chain.
 - How participation in USDA Child Nutrition Programs and other supportive programs and/or activities in school and ECE settings may interact with or influence program participation or implementation, or even culture shifts within grantees’ sites or local communities.
 - Network and geographic analyses of grantee sites, farmers and food vendors, and support organizations, including identifying gaps and important nodes that could be further supported or cultivated to improve the program. Gaps could show locations where farmers, food hubs/distributors, and/or available transportation may have particularly low concentrations, while important nodes could include connections for further assistance, support, or mentorship for grantees.

Programmatic recommendations

- **Further invest in, develop, and support opportunities for increased collaboration, mentorship, communication, and/or skill sharing between participating food program managers (FPMs).** As requested by many FPMs, this support could be offered to groups of grantees, including by grantee type (ECE, school, or school district), size based on children reached/served (e.g., small school districts seeking guidance specific to them), and/or by

⁴ Learn more on the [Michigan School Meals website](#).

location (rural, urban, peri-urban) of their sites. It could also include mentorship opportunities to provide more support to FPMs new to the program and/or new to local food purchasing, or to increase scratch cooking skills. This type of peer support, learning, and investment in food service professionals could address some of the specific assistance needs of grantees while also sharing best practices and strengthening relationships within the 10 Cents a Meal program network.

- **Through reporting of food purchases, add a way for grantees to indicate whether a purchase was made directly from the reported farm of origin.** This would need to be possible through the reporting platform developed and managed by MDE for this process to be feasible. But this simple addition could add more clarity and certainty to how foods move through the 10 Cents a Meal supply chain, including for sharing evaluation results and insights. It would also be useful information to add to a list of farms and vendors that supply to 10 Cents a Meal grantees, as noted above. In future years, MDE staff members may also be able to contact some of the key farmers and vendors for whom market channel questions arise in the purchase data to gather direct information or confirmation to better complete the picture of how food moves through the 10 Cents a Meal supply chain. Of note, MDE staff began offering training for grantees on purchase information submission in the following program year (2024–2025).
- **Consider farmer-focused incentives or supports to strengthen and/or broaden the 10 Cents a Meal supply chain.** Providing more direct support to farmers and food vendors may increase FPMs' options for local food purchases through 10 Cents a Meal, while also offering more ways to incorporate values-based purchasing or marketing. The [USDA Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program](#) was used by some state, tribal, and territorial governments to purchase local food for use in institutions, in addition to food banks and community feeding programs. Several local food purchasing incentive (LFPI) programs similar to 10 Cents a Meal across the country also offer specific tracks to fund producers. To learn more, see “What if States Fund Farmers to Sell to Schools”⁵ as part of a resource series focused on LFPIs. Lastly, a collaborative or supportive effort could be further explored within the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD), including the Farm to Family and/or Regenerative Agriculture teams.

5 To learn more, see [Farmer-focused Local Food Purchasing Incentives: What if States Funded Farmers to Sell to Schools?](#) Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems (2024).

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To learn more, visit tencentsmichigan.org, foodsystems.msu.edu, 10-cents-a-meal.msu.edu, and mifarmtoschool.msu.edu.