



Evaluation Summary

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 for Michigan's Kids and Farms (10 Cents a Meal) is a state-funded local food purchasing incentive grant program that reimburses 50% of the cost of fresh or minimally processed¹ Michigan-grown fruits, vegetables, and dry beans, used in meals and educational activities for children.

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. Eligible grantees include schools, early care and education (ECE) centers, and other institutions that participate in United State Department of Agriculture (USDA) Child Nutrition Programs in Michigan.

Operating with state-funding since a regional pilot launched in 2016–2017, 10 Cents a Meal was one of the first state-funded local food purchasing incentive (LFPI) programs in the U.S.² Through the 2023–2024 program year, the goals of the program outlined in legislation are to improve daily nutrition and eating habits for children through school and child care settings and invest in Michigan's agriculture and local food business economy.³ Two additional program goals are to build and expand farm to school partnerships, including teachers, parents, vendors, and local growers, and to provide education and marketing, including meal promotion, nutrition and agriculture education, and promotion to families and communities.

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) continues to administer the program with additional support from a core team consisting of staff members from the nonprofit Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities, the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, and

1. The USDA geographic preference definition of minimally processed includes products that “retain their inherent character” and have not been cooked, heated, canned, or do not contain any additives or fillers. Geographic Preference Option for the Procurement of Unprocessed Agricultural Products in Child Nutrition Programs, 60 Fed. Reg. 22603–22608 (April 22, 2011). <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/fr-042211>
2. Bull, C., & Matts, C. (2024) *Local Food Purchasing Incentives: An Introduction to Incentives*. Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems. <https://foodsystems.msu.edu/resources/introduction-to-incentives>
3. [State of Michigan Public Act 103 of 2023](#).

Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS). CRFS leads the evaluation of the program, with MDE's support. CRFS conducted three electronic surveys with participating food program managers (FPMs) throughout the year (in January, May, and August) and analyzed food purchase information they submitted to MDE for reimbursement.

The 2023–2024 year was another year of continued expansion for 10 Cents a Meal: 269 grantees in 66 counties reached an estimated total of 594,000 children, the greatest reach in program history.

Participating schools enrolled a larger share of students from low-income households: nearly 59% of their students were eligible for free and reduced-price meals, compared to 54% across the state the same year.



As a matching reimbursement grant, the state's investment in grant reimbursements generates at least double the impact for Michigan farms and food vendors.

For just \$3 million in state-funded grant reimbursements this year, nearly \$6 million in spending was reported by grantees on eligible Michigan-grown fruits, vegetables, and dry beans.⁴ According to the Local Food Impact Calculator,⁵ this spending yields over \$10.2 million in estimated economic impact for the state. However, only 229 grantees (85%) submitted allowable purchases per program requirements. This indicates that not only do opportunities for growth remain in total spending, but also in additional training and assistance for grantees.



Michigan's food and farm industry engaged in the program to the greatest extent this year as well, with about 320 unique food suppliers participating in sales to schools and ECE centers.

An estimated 268 farms in 58 counties across the state, and 52 other businesses—farmer cooperatives, grocery stores, food hubs and processors, and specialty and broadline (full-service) distributors—helped to get Michigan-grown food from the farm to the cafeteria or classroom.

4. Grantees pay up-front for food purchases with existing available funds for their food programs, including federal reimbursements from USDA Child Nutrition Programs, participation in which is a requirement for eligibility.

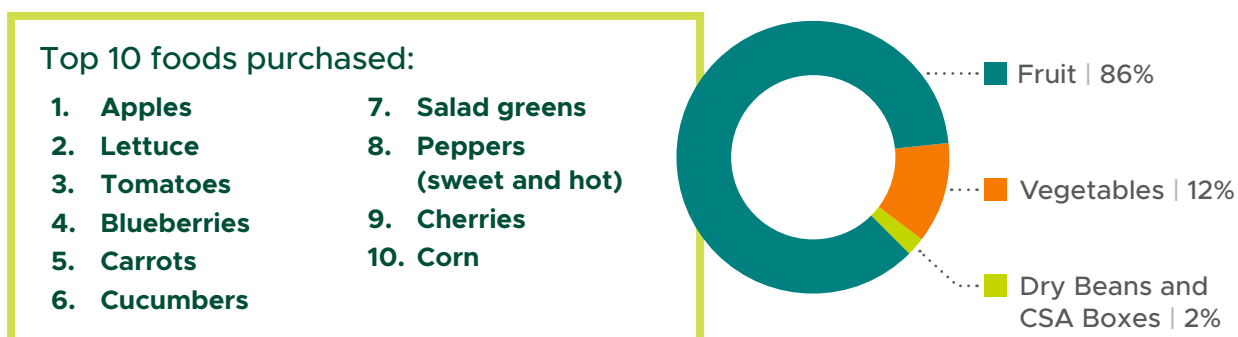
5. Developed by economists through the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service and Colorado State University, the Local Food Impact Calculator was designed to "facilitate science-based analysis of food systems projects and initiatives". Learn more at <https://calculator.localfoodeconomics.com>.

Again, these numbers represent the greatest reach and participation for Michigan’s food and farm industry in program history. A majority of responding grantees (59%) agreed that participating in 10 Cents a Meal allowed them to both make new connections with farmers and local food vendors/suppliers and to improve existing relationships.



Farmers and food vendors supplied a diverse array of fresh and minimally processed fruits, vegetables, and dry beans to participating grantees, which in turn allowed children to experience a wide variety of tastes and flavors, some that might not even be available to them at home.

Grantees used funds to purchase a total of 19 types of Michigan-grown fruits and 40 types of vegetables across the program year. In dollars, fruits made up the vast majority of purchases (86%), with just over a tenth of purchases (12%) for vegetables. The top 10 foods purchased (in rank order of dollars spent) were apples, lettuce, tomatoes, blueberries, carrots, cucumbers, salad greens, peppers (sweet and hot), cherries, and corn. Some food program managers (FPMs) served foods that may be uncommon in food programs, such as kiwi berries, pawpaws, saskatoon berries, leeks, parsnips, and Jerusalem artichokes.



Participating FPMs were still not able to find and buy all of the Michigan-grown foods they sought, pointing to a clear market opportunity for farmers and food vendors.

The top 10 Michigan-grown foods grantees reported wanting to try in the future (in rank order, $n=100$) included strawberries, blueberries, cherries, peaches, lettuce, dry beans, asparagus, tomatoes, pears, and cucumbers. Dry beans still represent a significant potential for increased spending by grantees; Michigan is a leading national producer, but less than 1% of 10 Cents a Meal purchases (in dollars) were for dry beans by 5% of all grantees.

Top 10 Michigan-grown foods grantees want to try in the future:

1. Strawberries
2. Blueberries
3. Cherries
4. Peaches
5. Lettuce
6. Dry Beans
7. Asparagus
8. Tomatoes
9. Pears
10. Cucumbers

Beyond local food purchasing, many schools and ECE centers that participate in 10 Cents a Meal are conducting activities that promote and educate about the program, some while also leveraging broader learning opportunities for children.

Through surveys, FPMs shared the top types of supportive promotion and educational activities (not instances) were promotional posters (44%), taste testing (40%), and nutrition education in the cafeteria (28%), with taste testing remaining the most successful activity type from previous years' survey results. Watermelon radish, zephyr squash, purple cauliflower, and foot-long purple beans were some of the unique foods promoted through activities.

FPMs were also asked about barriers, logistical challenges, and motivators for purchasing and serving local foods in their food programs.

Product availability issues comprised about 39% of barriers and 17% of logistical challenges, with the seasonality of Michigan agricultural production as the primary subtheme.

The top motivators reported by responding FPMs ($n=244$, 475 different reports) were:

- **product attributes of Michigan-grown foods** (41%), including variety, freshness, flavor, and unique products;
- **benefits to children** (24%), comprised of educational benefits, 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%).

While 39% of FPMs responding reported that they had no unmet needs to support their efforts to purchase and serve Michigan foods (of any kind) in the future, other responses were categorized into programmatic support (30%, 70 grantees), local food supply chain related needs (23%, 53 grantees), and food program operation needs (10%, 23 grantees).

Some grantees pointed to needs related to two distinguishing factors of this program year:

- **the closure of Cherry Capital Foods**, the long-time Michigan-based food hub, and
- **the forthcoming programmatic change** for the 2024–2025 year that would allow up to 25% of 10 Cents a Meal grant funds to be used on staffing and transportation costs related to local foods.⁶

Notably, 2023–2024 was also the first year of the state-funded Michigan School Meals⁷ program that provides free breakfast and lunch for all schoolchildren.

Increasing the variety of produce served in food programs remained the top outcome of participating in 10 Cents a Meal selected by FPMs for the fourth year in a row (since 2020–2021).

6. See Section 31j of the [FY25 Education Omnibus Bill, Public Act 120 of 2024](#) for these updates to the allowable expenses.

7. Learn more at [MDE's Michigan School Meals website](#).

Over half of grantees also agreed (either strongly or somewhat agreed, n=231) that their food program was positively impacted through participating, including that:

- **they offered more local fruits** (86% of grantees, an increase of 4 percent from 2022–2023 survey results);
- **their students/children are eating more fruits** (81%, an increase of 8 percent);
- **they offered more local vegetables** (79%, an increase of 7 percent);
- **their students/children are eating more vegetables** (70%, an increase of 4 percent); and
- **they have identified new Michigan-grown fruits, vegetables, and dry beans** that are accepted/eaten by the children they serve (65%, an increase of 12 percent from the previous program year).

Indicated by these positive impacts and their growth from previous years, 10 Cents a Meal is working toward its goals.

Some programmatic needs clearly remain—from continuing to simplify how grantees submit purchase information to more education and training about local food procurement. At the same time, barriers and challenges persist that are inherent to serving quality, nutritious food to children through USDA Child Nutrition Programs, such as tight budgets, limited time and capacity for food program staff (to prepare and serve local foods and work with farmers and local food vendors), and lack of equipment. In Michigan’s agriculture and food system, barriers and challenges include seasonal availability of many fruits and vegetables and limited local and regional distribution and delivery.

Since 10 Cents a Meal began operating as a regional pilot in 2016–2017, the program has continued to evolve and adjust in ways that positively impact the experiences of participating FPMs. This responsiveness has contributed to its growth in participation, reach, and impact over the years, often despite the broader challenges in child nutrition programs and the food and agriculture sectors. Although the 2023–2024 program marked record reach to children and participation by schools and ECE centers as well as farmers, the future of 10 Cents a Meal is uncertain at the time of this writing, as it remains unfunded at the state level for the 2025–2026 program year.

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, foodsystems.msu.edu, 10-cents-a-meal.msu.edu, and mifarmtoschool.msu.edu.