

# Universal School Meals + Farm to School

A win-win for students, families, farmers, and schools



School meals for all **expands access to local food** while providing school nutrition directors the **stable revenue and streamlined administration** needed to focus on building connections with local producers.

All states that have permanently funded universal school meal policies also have policies to support Farm to School. New York has made significant investments in Farm to School because our policymakers understand the importance of school food as a bedrock for social change.

**School meals are a critical source of nutrition for kids** and can account for over half of their daily calories. Many children depend on these meals each day, including children from food-insecure households. Across all income levels, school meals are the healthiest many children eat. Farm to School increases the amount of nutritious, fresh food in our schools.

## **Healthy School Meals for All equips schools with the capacity to expand Farm to School.**

New York schools have identified two key barriers to participating in Farm to School: **lack of sufficient funds**, and **limited staff capacity** for training, relationship building with producers, and equipment.

Healthy School Meals for All:

- provides schools **stable revenue**
- increases their **buying power**
- **eliminates burdens on staff capacity**, like collecting meal debt from families

Combined, these benefits of universal school meals address key barriers to implementing Farm to School and other programs that give students access to healthy, local food.

**Farm to School in Practice in NYS:** Current participation in New York's Farm to School Incentive Program demonstrates that schools with universal meals programs are better able to spend over 30% of their food cost on local sources.

**More than 90% of schools participating in the New York's Farm to School Incentive Program already provide free meals to all students.**

A fully-funded universal school meal program would **broaden the scope of this work statewide** and position New York to lead the nation in Farm to School participation.

Together, Farm to School programs and Healthy School Meals for All will empower school nutrition professionals to prioritize local food access over cost and convenience.

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“For New York’s nearly 30,000 family farms, school meal programs are a well-established market with exciting potential...By fully funding a universal school meals program, New York can foster Farm to School relationships with farmers who are grappling with rising operational costs, labor shortages, and unpredictable weather patterns exacerbated by climate change.”

—Renée St. Jacques,  
New York Farm Bureau

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