

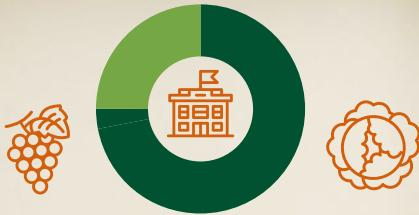
Growing Resilience

Unlocking the Potential of Farm to School to Strengthen the Economy, Support New York Farms, and Improve Student Health in the Face of New Challenges

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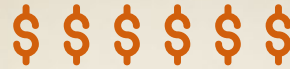


BY THE YEAR 2025...



75%
of schools

including New York City, anticipate reaching **30%** spending on **NEW YORK GROWN FOOD** for lunch with the right support



This would generate nearly
\$360 million
IN ECONOMIC IMPACT
statewide...

\$250 million

would be spent by schools at
NEW YORK FARMS



increasing access to
HIGH QUALITY, LOCAL FOOD
to over

900,000
STUDENTS



...A RETURN ON
INVESTMENT OF

\$3.50
for every taxpayer
dollar spent!

Executive Summary

In 2018, the state of New York, led by Governor Andrew Cuomo’s No Student Goes Hungry Initiative, created a major new incentive to encourage schools to buy more food from New York farms. This nation-leading farm to school program incentivized schools to increase spending on food from New York farms by promising to quadruple their per meal reimbursement from the state from 6 cents, where it has been for the past 40 years, to 25 cents, if they reached a threshold of 30% spending on food grown or produced in New York. As the average local spending at this point was between 10 and 15% per school, this program had the incredible potential to open up new markets for New York farmers while improving the quality of food children eat in schools—a real win-win.

In January 2020, American Farmland Trust, or AFT, through Farm to Institution New York State, released the “Growing Opportunity for Farm to School in New York” report, which found that with the right support, this program would successfully incentivize over 70% of schools to spend more of their food dollars on products from New York farms. This would result in considerable economic impact for the state as early as 2024, yet questions remained about the best way to support schools in increasing spending enough to reach 30%. Subsequent research, conducted by AFT during the summer of 2020, sought to collect new information from schools after year two of the incentive program, including clarifying remaining barriers schools face in purchasing New York food products and reaching 30%, as well as the impact COVID-19 may have on farm to school in New York. The following report presents these findings and encourages action by state and local governments to achieve the full potential of this and other farm to school programs in New York.

Despite the pandemic, many schools remained committed to supporting local farmers and providing students with healthy and fresh local food during the 2019–20 school year—year two of the incentive program. Eighty-six percent of schools purchased and served more New York grown and raised food, with many reporting purchasing more New York fruit, dairy, and vegetables than in previous years. The momentum that the Farm to School Incentive program has built to increase spending on New York grown food did not slow in program year two—75% of respondents including New York City



remain confident that, with the right support, they will be able to reach 30% spending of their lunch food budget on New York food products by 2025. **This would increase school spending on food from New York farms to \$250 million while increasing access to high quality, local food to over 900,000 students—more than half the students across the state. Ultimately, this achievement would generate nearly \$360 million in economic impact statewide by 2025, while costing the state just shy of \$103 million—a return on investment of \$3.50 in economic activity for every taxpayer dollar spent.**

However, more must be done to achieve this potential as schools still reported facing barriers both to buying New York grown food and to being effectively incentivized to increasing their spending enough to reach 30%. The higher cost of local food continued to be the top barrier to buying New York products generally, but fell in importance when asked how significant this would be in keeping schools from reaching 30%. Other barriers schools reported that will keep them from reaching 30% included the difficulty meeting incentive program documentation requirements, limited selection of local items vendors offer, and the challenge of separating lunch from other meals. Barriers to participating in these programs remain higher for schools that do not have access to New York produced fluid milk, and for urban schools and downstate schools, which had a statistically lower likelihood of reporting buying New York food products than their rural and non-urban counterparts. Many of New York's largest city districts, including Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and New York City, do buy New York grown food, and they serve the majority of students in those areas, but urban schools of all types and sizes still need targeted support to be able to increase local purchases. Given that higher percentages of Black and Hispanic students live and attend school in downstate and urban areas, making sure these schools are able to purchase New York grown food, and are also incentivized to work to reach 30% is critical to achieving equitable access for students to healthy, locally-sourced food through these programs

Recommendations

This report's research yielded more targeted recommendations on what can be done to unlock the considerable potential of this state program to rebuild New York's economy from the impacts of the pandemic while supporting student health. Continuing to fund the current New York Farm to School Incentive program while also incentivizing schools to increase their spending on New York food products served at breakfast will ease the administrative burden of this program, increase its economic impact, and ensuring access to healthy local food for students throughout the school day. **This research indicates that if 75% of schools were to spend 30% of breakfast food costs on New York food products, this could generate \$78 million in annual farm spending from schools with over \$112 million in statewide economic impact. Overall farm to school spending in New York could generate *half a billion dollars* in total economic impact when three quarters of schools spend 30% of their breakfast and lunch budgets on New York grown food, with much of this positive impact directed towards the dairy industry.** Implementing this and the following recommendations will unlock the farm to school movement's potential to help build back a stronger, healthier, more resilient New York through investments in student health and vibrant, innovative local farm and food economies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the right support, the majority of schools believe they can qualify for the New York Farm to School Incentive program within five years. Unlocking the program's full potential can help the state rebuild a resilient local farm and food economy after the pandemic while improving the diet and education of kids at school in the future.

Based on the research conducted for this report, recommendations for achieving the significant potential of farm to school to support New York farms and improve the health of students across the state over the next five years include:

1

EXPAND ACCESS AND IMPACT: Continue funding the New York Farm to School Incentive program and include breakfast by reimbursing schools that qualify at a higher rate for both breakfast and lunch.

2

PROVIDE SUPPORT AND TRAINING: Continue funding the New York Farm to School Grants program and ensure support reaches urban schools.

3

CREATE A STATEWIDE FARM TO SCHOOL COORDINATOR PROGRAM: Invest in a centrally coordinated network of regional Farm to School Coordinators who will help all schools across New York state build farm to school programs, increase purchasing, and reach 30%.

4

REVAMP PROCUREMENT REGULATIONS: Raise and simplify state and local small purchase thresholds and continue to train schools on how to use procurement methods to buy local.

5

IMPROVE TRACKING: Streamline program administrative requirements, and ensure the required paperwork reliably proves purchases come from New York farms by instituting spot checks.

6

STRENGTHEN THE OVERALL FARM TO SCHOOL SUPPLY CHAIN: Improve access to local food and support schools in procuring New York produced milk.

Learn more and view the full report at farmland.org/growingresilience



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