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Congratulations to the New Farm to School Grantees

The Dirt

News and Notes from FNS's Farm to School Program

**The USDA Farm to School Program is
Excited to Announce the Fiscal Year
2022 Farm to School Grant Awards!**

The USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Farm to School Program is thrilled to announce the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Farm to School Grant awards! For the 2022-2023 school year, the Farm to School Grant Program will provide more than \$10 million in grants to 123 farm to school projects spanning 44 States and the District of Columbia with seven projects serving Native American communities. These grants will serve more than 3 million children at more than 5,000 schools, where almost two-thirds (62%) of students are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.



The FY 2022 Farm to School Grant awardees represent the resiliency and commitment to local food systems of partners involved in farm to school efforts, including agricultural producers, tribal nations, non-profit organizations, State agencies, and schools serving both rural and urban areas.

“The expansion of Farm to School is more important than ever for our kids,” said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. “When schools and local producers work together, children benefit from higher-quality foods on their plates and program operators have stable sources for the products they need.” Vilsack added farm to school is an investment in the next generation and one of many ways the department is advancing nutrition security – the consistent, equitable access to healthy and affordable foods that promote well-being.

Farm to School Grants are awarded annually to help fund projects that increase the amount of local foods served through child nutrition programs, teach children about food and agriculture through garden and classroom education, and develop schools’ and farmers’ capacities to buy and sell local foods. The USDA acknowledges that many people have been historically underserved and marginalized through unfair food systems. The projects selected by the department reflect its commitment to transforming food systems to be more equitable.



Please see the complete press release and list of grantees [here](#). Examples of funded projects include:

- **Kodiak Area Native Association (KANA)**, in Alaska, working in partnership with the Kodiak Island Borough School District (KIBSD), will develop a sustainable, school-based agriculture education program at KIBSD and work to serve produce from local farms in KIBSD's school meals program. KANA will work directly with Alutiiq Grown, a farming collective of tribally owned farms in five communities in the Kodiak Archipelago, as well as other local farms, to improve access to the local foods for their student population.
- **Humboldt County Office of Education (HCOE)**, in California, will increase agricultural education and local foods in schools in a way that honors the cultural diversity of the county, benefitting educators, students, school nutrition staff, farmers, and the overall community. HCOE will make the full suite of their Harvest of the Month (HOTM) curriculum available, to expand local procurement into the spring months by production planning with farmers, work with Stepping Stone Diversity Consulting to make sure HOTM is culturally relevant, and collaborate with the North Coast Growers Association to improve outreach to the full diversity of their farmer membership.

- **Allen Neighborhood Center**, in Michigan, will develop a farm to school curriculum, which will be used to improve their Take Root Garden Club program, a food, fitness, and gardening education program offered in partnership with City of Lansing Parks & Recreation Department's after care and summer camp programs at Foster Community Center. This curriculum will be used to create engaging programming for 5–10-year-old students in the Lansing School District, a district ranked in the bottom fifty percent of Michigan schools and with a student body made of seventy-five percent students of color.
- **Groton Public Schools**, in Connecticut, will expand its successful Farm to School Program to the new Thames River Magnet Elementary School (TRMS). TRMS is located in a USDA-designated "food desert" and serves over 500 students, 50 percent of whom are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. This project will purchase garden beds, an industrial-size greenhouse, and associated educational materials to grow foods for partnering schools.
- **Communities Unlimited, Inc.**, in Arkansas, in collaboration with Healthy Flavors and Eat Real, will develop a blueprint and a stakeholder/collaboration map for strengthening farm to school programs in the Mid-South. The project will focus on rural districts in low-income communities in the Mississippi Delta Region of Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee. This will drive greater impact for sustainable, farm to school implementations by screening for farm to school readiness and ensuring that methodologies for facilitating visions, setting measurable goals, and making actionable plans relevant to the region are practiced through this initiative and codified for replicable deployment.

Since the program's inception in 2013, USDA has awarded nearly \$75 million through Farm to School Grants, funding a total of 1019 projects across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, and Puerto Rico, reaching over 25 million students in more than 59,000 schools.

2023 Farm to School Grant Program Announcement Coming This Fall!

Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) plans to release the Request for Application (RFA) for the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Farm to School Grant Program in the fall. The annual grant opportunity will help reach more communities seeking to incorporate local products into child nutrition program meals, integrate and expand agricultural education in the classroom, and cultivate and grow farm to school efforts.

To receive latest information and updates from the Farm to School Program, subscribe to [The Dirt](#) our monthly e-letter, or visit our [Farm to School Program website](#).

Highlights



Farm to School Institute Grows Students' Interest in Local Agriculture

Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Farm to School Implementation grantee, the Nebraska Department of Education was able to aid the Nebraska Farm to School Program in creating their Farm to School Institute in 2021 to bring agriculture into a traditional

classroom setting.

Each school that attended the week-long virtual seminar received a \$3,000 grant, designated for establishing agricultural learning opportunities during the school year. The eight schools and school districts were Banner County School, Burwell Public Schools, Gering High School, Humboldt Table Rock Steinauer Public Schools, Overton Public School, Pius X High School, Southern Public Schools and Umo 'ho' Nation Public School.

“We want to see agricultural development in our state and we want to see that students are growing awareness and respect for what it takes to be eaters – like having a connection to that food,” Nebraska Farm to School Coordinator Sarah Smith said. “Because when there’s a connection, there’s an expansion of willingness to try new and healthy things.”

Read more about the Nebraska Farm to School Institute here:

Colorado Preschool is Building Partnerships to Grow Their Farm to Early Childcare Program

St. Vrain Valley School District in Boulder, CO, has had Farm to School programming since 2012, but had a strong resurgence after receiving a Colorado Department of Education (CDE) Student Wellness Grant in 2018. The Colorado Department of Education is a Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Farm to School State Agency grantee. They used their grant to provide sub-grant awards to eligible SFAs with priority given to SFAs where at least a 40% of children served are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Using the funds received from their grant, St. Vrain was able to build several school education gardens and outdoor classrooms, and host Colorado Proud School Meal Day celebrations, Harvest of Month local produce taste tests, and student-led farmer's markets. With funding from the USDA Farm to School Transitioning ECE and Agriculture Meal Environment (TEAM) grant has allowed St. Vrain to move into Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE) programming at Spark! Discovery Preschool.



St. Vrain has worked at establishing new partnerships and building community support which led to the installation of preschool garden beds and agriculture and nutritional education opportunities. St. Vrain's Agriscience/Future Farmers of America (FFA) mentorship program began its education and hands-on garden support within the district in 2022, and Spark! Discovery Preschool was one of the first mentorship education sites. FFA students developed and taught hands-on skills and provided engaging lesson topics on soil, pollinators and plant nutrients. Children learned about these important aspects of farming through lessons and planting their own garden beds. Farm to ECE efforts have bolstered the snack program through a 10 cent per meal local food incentive program offered through the Farm to School TEAM grant. Spark! Discovery Preschool is providing delicious, great tasting hyper-local fresh heirloom tomato salsa with colorful tomatoes from Rocky Mountain Fresh Hydroponic Farm in Longmont, Colorado.

Theresa Spires, the Wellness Coordinator stated that, "Kids are fun, naturally curious and excited to learn! They are adventurous and can problem solve even at this young age. They ask when we will be back and what they will be learning the

next time our Agriscience mentors are back in the classroom teaching lessons or digging in the gardens.”

Resources

Funding opportunities for State Agencies Local Food for Schools (LFS) Cooperative Agreement Program

USDA Agriculture Marketing Service (AMS) will award up to \$200 million to States for food assistance purchases of domestic local foods for distribution to schools. This program emphasizes purchasing from historically underserved producers and processors.

The LFS program application deadline is extended to August 31, 2022.

[Learn More Here](#)

Funding for a variety of eligible entities NIFA Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) Sustainable Agricultural Systems

The USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture's (NIFA) Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) Sustainable Agricultural Systems supports approaches that promote transformational changes in the U.S. food and agriculture system. NIFA seeks applications that take a systems approach for projects that are expected to significantly improve the supply of affordable, safe, nutritious, and accessible agricultural products while fostering economic development and rural prosperity in America.

Application Due Date: July 28, 2022

[Learn More Here](#)

Funding for qualified lenders Food Supply Chain Guaranteed Loan Program

The USDA Rural Development Food Supply Chain Guaranteed Loan Program authorized by the American Rescue Plan. This program guarantees loans of up to \$40 million for qualified lenders to finance food systems projects, specifically for the start-up or expansion of activities in the middle of the food supply chain. The program will support new investments in infrastructure for food aggregation, processing, manufacturing, storage, transportation, wholesaling, and distribution.

Application Due Date: Applications accepted until funds are exhausted

[Learn More Here](#)

[A Fair Food System: A Summit On Scalable Solutions to Creating Community Food Systems](#)

The Central Appalachian Network and the USDA is hosting this virtual summit. This day's topic covers local food value chains. Future summits will be held on August 25, September 22, October 27, and in November and December.

Summit Date: July 28, 2022 9:00AM – 1:00PM EST

[Register Here](#)

USDA Invests More Than \$14M to Support Agricultural Workforce Training for Historically Underserved Communities to Bolster U.S. Meat and Poultry Sector Resilience

The USDA has announced an investment of more than \$14 million to support agricultural workforce training in historically underserved communities. This funding

will increase the resilience of the U.S. meat and poultry processing sector. This investment is part of the Biden-Harris Administration's ongoing efforts through the American Rescue Plan to strengthen the nation's food supply chain by promoting fair and competitive agricultural markets. Funding is available through the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture's (NIFA) Request for Applications process to eligible universities.

**The deadline to submit applications is 5 p.m. Eastern Time on
Monday, August 29.**

Complete information on this funding opportunity can be found on the NIFA website.

[NIFA Website](#)



USDA Advances Food System Transformation with \$24.4 Million for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production, Composting and Food Waste Reduction Grants

Deadlines are approaching for two exciting funding opportunities! The Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (UAIP) Competitive Grants Program funds are available to initiate or expand efforts of farmers, gardeners, citizens, government officials, schools, and other stakeholders in urban areas and suburbs. Composting and Food Waste Reduction (CFWR) Pilot Project funding is available to assist local and municipal governments with projects that develop and test strategies for planning and implementing municipal compost plans and food waste reduction plans.

UAIP Competitive Grants Program applications are due on August 2nd, 2022 and CFWR Pilot Project applications are due on September 1st, 2022.

[Learn More Here](#)

The 2nd USDA Food Loss and Waste Innovation Fair

USDA will hold its second virtual Food Loss and Waste Innovation Fair on September 14, 2022, from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. EDT. The event will feature some of the latest technologies, programs, innovations and solutions developed by the USDA agencies, academic institutions and businesses to address food loss and waste from farm-to-table. This year's program also includes presentations from federal and industry experts, a networking lounge to interact with presenters and other attendees, and a trivia quiz.

Registration for the event is free but required.

[Register Today!](#)

Virtual Farm Education is STEMSational!

The STEMSational Ag: The Virtual Farm curriculum is on-demand, self-paced, and can be accessed at any time. It is not led by a teacher or instructor. It is definitely student let. The content is designed for learners to 'take it and run with it'. Teachers can absolutely access it for whole group instruction and am confident they can modify, as needed. All their lessons reference either National Agricultural Literacy Outcomes or Next Generation Science Standards.



Sign up and register on the STEMSational Ag: The Virtual Farm website homepage to have access their full curriculum. On the landing page click the button the "Sign Up HERE" button - it's that easy!

[STEMSational Ag Webpage](#)

Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)

[National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program participants are eligible for the Affordable Connectivity Program](#), a discounted broadband program. This [benefit program helps ensure eligible households can afford internet service](#) for work, school, healthcare, and more.

The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) provides eligible low-income households a subsidy of up to \$30 per month on internet service plans offered by participating internet service providers and up to \$75 per month for eligible households on Tribal lands. Eligible households can also receive a one-time discount of up to \$100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from participating providers if the household contributes more than \$10 and less than \$50 toward the purchase price.

To learn more and apply online for benefits, please visit the Affordable Connectivity Program Website.

[Affordable Connectivity Program](#)

Biden Administration Takes Additional Steps to Strengthen Child Nutrition Programs

The Biden Administration announced that the USDA will provide nearly \$1 billion in additional funding to schools to support the purchase of American-grown foods for their meal programs. The \$943 million boost from the department is provided through USDA's [Commodity Credit Corporation](#). Funds will be distributed by state agencies to schools across the country, so they can purchase domestically-grown foods for their meal programs.

The Keep Kids Fed Act will also provide assistance to program operators across the country by:

- Extending nationwide flexibilities to summer meal programs through September 2022, including allowing sites to continue serving meals in all areas, at no cost to families;
- Providing schools with an additional temporary reimbursement of 40 cents per lunch and 15 cents per breakfast, and child care centers with an extra 10 cents reimbursement per meal;
- Providing all family day care homes with the higher temporary reimbursement rate for school year 2022-23;

- Equipping USDA with additional flexibilities to support schools, as needed, based on their local conditions.

[Learn More Here](#)

The Dirt is a monthly publication of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, Farm to School Program, providing news and resources for former, current, and future Farm to School grantees, and for all readers who want to know what is new and exciting in farm to school.

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Hungry for more information about the USDA Farm to School Program?

Please go to the USDA's [Farm to School Program Website](#) and discover more about our Farm to School Grant Program, Farm to School Census, and Technical Assistance and Training.

Contact us at farmtoschool@usda.gov

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