

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

BY SAMANTHA LEVY AND MIKAELA RUIZ-RAMÓN



AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST

American Farmland Trust, or AFT, is the only national organization that takes a holistic approach to agriculture, focusing on the land itself, the agricultural practices used on that land, and the farmers and ranchers who do the work. AFT launched the conservation farming movement and continues to raise public awareness through the No Farms No Food® message. Since its founding in 1980, AFT has helped permanently protect more than 6.5 million acres of farmland, advanced environmentally sound farming practices on millions of additional acres, and supported thousands of farm families.

By combining on-the-ground projects with objective research and effective advocacy, AFT is the only national agricultural organization that approaches its work in such a comprehensive, holistic manner. AFT works to advance better agricultural policy within all tiers of government and continues to conduct groundbreaking research that changes America's view of farming.

AFT has a national office in Washington, D.C., and a network of field offices across the United States where farmland is under threat. The New York office was established in 1990, as the state is home to some of the most threatened farmland in the nation. This growing office coordinates programs, conducts research, and engages in advocacy to keep farmers on the land, keep land in farming, and help farmers adopt sound farming practices.

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Farm to Institution New York State, or FINYS, is a collaborative initiative led by American Farmland Trust to dramatically expand the volume of food grown on New York farms that is served in institutions across New York including schools, universities, and hospitals. FINYS works to strengthen the economic security of farmers and the health of New Yorkers by empowering institutions to spend at least 25% of their food budget on fresh and minimally processed food grown in New York. Past FINYS research has revealed over \$200 million of potential economic impact, and the opportunity to positively influence the health of over 6.6 million of our most vulnerable New Yorkers if public institutions were to meet this goal.

FINYS advances public policy campaigns, educates institutions about buying locally, and inspires commitment from institutions to expand local food purchasing. AFT staff also lead the New York Grown Food for New York Kids Coalition, a project of FINYS, advocating for state-level programs and policies that will help schools purchase and serve more New York grown food to K-12 students.

Learn more, get engaged, and find other tools and resources at finys.org.



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FALL 2020



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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 was produced by American Farmland Trust, through the collaborative initiative Farm to Institution New York State, or FINYS. Our research was enhanced through the collaboration of our supporting partners. We recognize the generosity of the New York State Health Foundation for funding this research and providing access to the Program Evaluation team at New York University School of Medicine whose technical support and data evaluation oversight was instrumental in the completion of this report. We also thank the Joyce and Irving Goldman Family Foundation for support of this report and the Farm to Institution New York State initiative.

We are grateful to the staff at the New York State Education Department, the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, Cornell University, and the New York School Nutrition Association for their help in shaping and promoting the survey that informed our findings. AFT also thanks the FINYS leadership team and members of the New York Grown Food for New York Kids Coalition for their collaboration. AFT thanks and commends the many food service directors who participated in this research and shared their experiences with us—particularly given the demands placed on them as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, we thank our AFT members, without whom our work would not be possible.

A special thanks to the many individuals who lent their time and expertise throughout the duration of our research and the creation of this report, including:

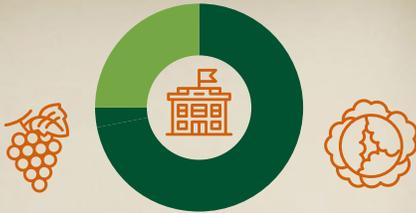
- Stephanie Hsu, FINYS Manager; Mikaela Perry, FINYS Training Coordinator; Olivia Fuller, New York Program and Outreach Coordinator; and Erica Goodman, New York Regional Director, American Farmland Trust
- Cheryl Thayer, Harvest NY and Agricultural Economic Development Specialist, Cornell University
- Mark Bordeau, Former President, and Jennifer Martin, Executive Director, New York School Nutrition Association
- Mark McMullen, Interim Director of Division of Agricultural Development, and Jacqueline Boyer, Agricultural Economic Development Specialist, New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets
- Kimberly Vumbaco, Director, Tara Webster, and Michele Beaver, School Programs Evaluation Specialists 2: Child Nutrition Program, New York State Education Department
- Carolyn Berry, Associate Professor, Department of Population Health, New York University School of Medicine
- Deborah Dewan, Agriculture Policy Advisory and Liaison, Office of Senator Jen Metzger
- Julia Van Loon, Owner, Slate Foods, Inc. New York State Beef and Provisions

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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.



Farm to School

Strengthening Regional Food System Resiliency



The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world and our individual lives rapidly and radically. It has challenged the structure and stability of the food systems we all rely on to survive, and in doing so revealed important opportunities ahead to invest in community health and resiliency. As the state pivots to rebuilding, farm to school programs can be a critical component of doing so while combatting the rising rates of food insecurity, improving student health, and building back local economies for future resilience.

Since the onset of the pandemic, unemployment and food insecurity rates in New York have risen drastically. In a July 2020 survey conducted by the New York State Health Foundation, 12.4% of New Yorkers reported facing food insecurity, with Black and Hispanic New Yorkers disproportionately impacted.¹ Further, COVID-19's more severe impacts on people with underlying diet-related conditions, like diabetes, reaffirms the importance of improving access to healthy, fresh food as a necessary public health intervention. School meals are a key source of sustenance and nutrition for all kids, who typically consume half of their daily calories at school, no matter their socioeconomic status. Improving the quality of school meals by serving farm fresh food can be an important way to improve the diet and health outcomes of all kids now and in the future.

This updated research reinforces how New York's farm to school programs can also generate millions of dollars in annual spending, which will create jobs, support farm viability, and contribute to more resilient local economies. Ensuring schools can buy food from New York farms provides farmers with a source of economic stability at a time when so many have struggled with market uncertainty, supply chain breaks, and revenue losses. Farm to school programs can help rebuild innovative and resilient farm and food economies by fueling investment in new local markets and job creation.

Farm to school efforts and programs also offer inspiration by emphasizing how nourishment is a source of connection in a community, from the farmers that grow food, to the school food service professionals preparing meals, to the homes of students across New York state. Now more than ever, school food service professionals deserve enormous praise for their dedication, ingenuity, and tireless work to feed nutritious meals to thousands of students and their families, all while still supporting local farmers as much as possible. Their efforts serve as an example of how to address the urgent needs of today while dedicating themselves to take actions to strengthen the food and farm economy now and into the future. Standing with these heroes by continuing to invest in farm to school programs will support the health of students and farm businesses while helping to build a more resilient food system for tomorrow.

¹ NYS Health Foundation. "NYS Health Testimony on the Impact of COVID-19 on Food Insecurity in New York State." September 17, 2020.



Background and Methods

Doing Our Homework to Ensure the Success of Farm to School



In its first round of Farm to School research conducted in 2019, hereafter referred to as “the 2019 survey,” American Farmland Trust sought to learn more about procurement of New York foods by K–12 schools, and whether the New York Farm to School Incentive program could revolutionize school food by successfully incentivizing more schools to buy food from New York farms. The resulting report, hereafter referred to as “the 2020 Growing Opportunity report,” was the first and only to date that illuminated the importance of farm to school coordinators to schools seeking to buy New York grown food and reach 30%, as well as the logistical challenges and other drawbacks created by focusing the New York Farm to School Incentive program only on lunch. The debate to determine how best to strengthen farm to school in New York and provide schools with the support they need following the publication of the 2020 Growing Opportunity report provided the impetus for a second round of research by AFT in 2020.

During the summer of 2020, a [follow-up survey](#), hereafter referred to as “the 2020 survey,” was designed and sent to a randomly generated sample of 300 School Food Authorities, or SFAs. This sample was representative of SFAs across the state based on geography and size. This survey yielded 163 responses from food service directors at these SFAs, or a 54% response rate. The New York City Department of Education Office of Food and Nutrition Services was also asked to complete the survey separately from the random sample. Food service directors were asked to provide financial data detailing how much their SFA spent on New York food products served at breakfast and lunch, what their barriers were to purchasing New York grown food and reaching 30%, and whether their ability to purchase and serve New York food has been impacted by COVID-19.

New York Farm to School Incentive Program

Created in 2018, this program incentivizes schools to increase spending on New York grown food. SFAs that spend at least 30% of their total lunch costs on New York food products in the preceding school year are eligible to receive up to 25 cents in reimbursement per lunch meal from the state the following year, which is quadruple their current rate.

School Food Authority (SFA)

An SFA is the governing body responsible for the administration of meal programs at schools. SFAs have the legal authority to operate a nonprofit school food service therein, or otherwise approved by the Food and Nutrition Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture to operate the National School Lunch Program. SFAs may serve one school district, several school districts, or individual schools and are managed by a food service director. Additionally, one food service director can oversee multiple SFAs.



Their responses and the following recommendations, which have been informed by feedback from members of the New York Grown Food for New York Kids Coalition, are summarized through the rest of this report.

SURVEY LIMITATIONS: This survey was taken in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic just as schools were strategizing reopening plans, so reflections on how the pandemic will impact farm to school moving forward are preliminary. Responses to the survey were voluntary, and selection bias may be present as 46% of the sample did not complete the survey. Though most respondents completed the survey in full, not all questions were required and therefore the number of responses to each question vary and are labeled throughout the report.

In spite of these limitations, the survey yielded a 54% response rate, which is close to the well-recognized threshold for reliably generalizable research results. This high response rate, in combination with the representativeness of the random sample, makes it appropriate to consider the results generalizable, to a reasonable degree, to all New York state schools. Where this is not the case, it is made clear in the report.²

² More information on methods and limitations can be found in the Appendix online at farmland.org/growingresilience.

FINDINGS

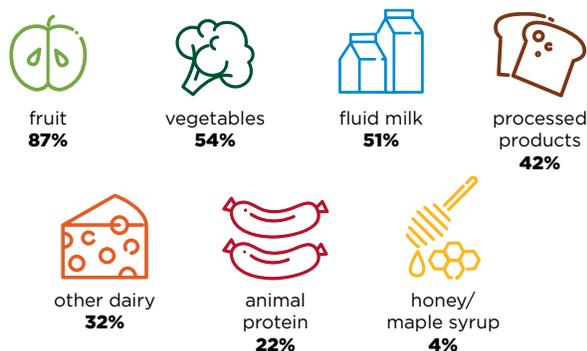
Farm to School Makes Dollars and Sense for New York's Economy



Despite considerable new challenges procuring and serving local food in 2020, School Food Authorities across the state maintained their commitment to farm to school with 86% of food service directors reporting purchasing and serving New York Food Products during the 2019-20 school year. During this period, 87% of food service directors reported buying at least one more New York fruit item and 54% reported buying at least one more New York vegetable item than in years past, increasing access to high quality, nutritious local produce for students at schools across the state (Figure 1). These are significant increases from the 2018-19 school year when only 65% of schools reported buying more New York grown fruit, and 45% of schools bought more New York grown vegetables than in years past. The most significant increase, however, came from schools buying more processed products that contain at least 50% raw ingredients from New York farms. During the 2018-19 school year only 3% of schools reported buying these products, and in just one year this grew to 42%—a 1400% increase—most likely due to new products, like New York grape juice, New York granola, New York apple sauce, and New York french fries hitting the market as a result of this program. When looking at what they bought compared to past years, 86% of food service directors reported spending more on fresh New York apples, just over half reported buying more New York produced fluid milk, and between 15% and 31% of food service directors reported buying

New York Food Products, as defined by NYSED, encompasses food items that are grown, harvested, or produced in New York State (NYS); or a food item processed inside or outside NYS comprised of over 51% agricultural raw materials grown, harvested, or produced in NYS, by weight or volume.

FIGURE 1. PERCENTAGE OF SFAs THAT BOUGHT MORE NEW YORK FOOD PRODUCTS BY VALUE DURING THE 2019-20 SCHOOL YEAR



TOP TEN NEW YORK ITEMS SCHOOLS BOUGHT MORE OF DURING THE 2019-20 SCHOOL YEAR

1. Whole Apples	6. Tomatoes
2. Fluid Milk	7. Potatoes
3. Apple Slices	8. Carrots
4. Yogurt	9. Cucumbers
5. NY Grape Juice	10. Cheese

FIGURE 2. MOST SFAS EXPECT NEW YORK GROWN FOOD PURCHASES TO STAY THE SAME OR INCREASE (2019-20)

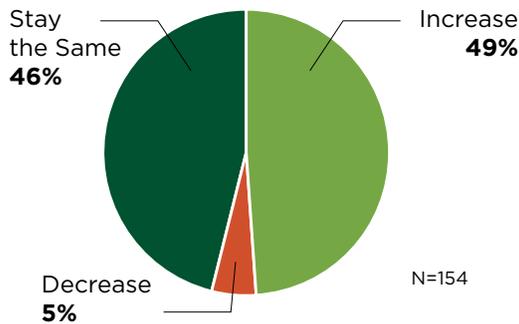
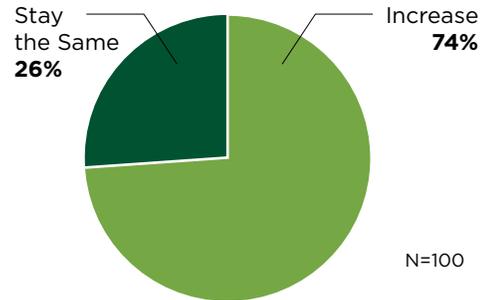


FIGURE 3. MOST SFAS EXPECTED NEW YORK GROWN FOOD PURCHASES TO INCREASE (2018-19)



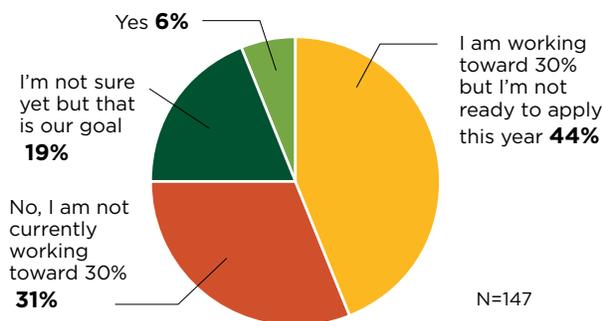
more New York yogurt, grape juice, tomatoes, potatoes, carrots, cucumbers, and cheese from farmers than in years past.

When asked about their outlook on purchasing New York foods in the future, 95% of food service directors expected their purchasing to increase or stay the same, with nearly half of food service directors (49%) reporting that they expect to increase these purchases moving forward (Figure 2). This year's expectations were less optimistic than in 2019, when nearly three quarters of food service directors expected purchasing to increase (Figure 3). There are two main potential explanations for the differences between the 2019 and 2020 projections. First, 2019 was the first year of the new Farm to School Incentive program when schools may have had more enthusiasm but less practical knowledge of their ability to buy New York food products and reach 30% in the future. Second and perhaps more importantly, the pandemic and resulting changes to meal operations and operating budgets for many SFAs likely contributed to this shift.

Outlook Remains Positive on Participation in the New York Farm to School Incentive

The 2020 Growing Opportunity report made it clear that the Farm to School Incentive program successfully provided a powerful impetus for many schools to increase their purchasing of New York grown food in Program Year One, and despite the pandemic this held true in Program Year Two. As of November 2020, the New York State Education Department, or NYSED, reported that 57 SFAs, or about 6% of the total SFAs

FIGURE 4. DO YOU PLAN TO REPORT YOU REACHED 30% AFTER PROGRAM YEAR TWO?



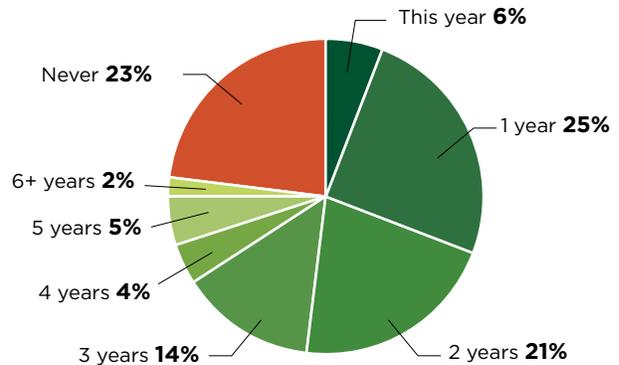
in the state, applied for this program after year two. This activity was consistent with survey findings, as 6% of sample respondents answered 'Yes' when asked whether they planned to report to NYSED that they reached 30% spending of lunch food costs on New York food products in Program Year Two (Figure 4). Compared to the 2019 survey when 14% of schools reported they would apply and only 4% did, respondents' expectations were more in line with reality in 2020. In total, 69% of food service directors reported actively working on increasing spending on New York grown food to reach 30% now or in the future.

75% of Schools Report They Will Reach 30% Spending on New York Grown Foods for Lunch by 2025

Most encouragingly, one main finding from the 2020 survey was that with the right support, 75% of schools expect to reach 30% within five years (by 2025)³ (Figure 5).

With these updated projections, we see that if 75% of schools, including New York City, reached 30% by 2025,⁴ this would increase spending by schools to \$250 million on food from New York farms and increase access to high-quality local food to over 900,000 students—over half the students eating in schools across the state. This would generate nearly \$360 million in economic impact statewide, while costing the state just shy of \$103 million;⁵ a return on investment of \$3.50 for every dollar spent by the state through 2025. Put in the context of the pandemic and the challenges schools have faced successfully applying for this program thus far, this optimistic outlook on program participation is notable—and merits both the continuation of investment into this program, and into the support system to ensure schools are able to reach 30%.

FIGURE 5. WITH THE RIGHT SUPPORT, WHEN DO YOU THINK YOUR SFA WILL REACH 30% SPENDING OF LUNCH COSTS ON NEW YORK FOOD PRODUCTS?



³ This year's results are slightly more conservative than last year's, with 70% of SFAs expecting to reach 30% by 2024 compared to 72%.

⁴ The multiplier used (1.43) is NYS specific and generated by Cornell using models originally developed to estimate the contribution of agriculture to the New York economy in 2014. Source: Schmit, T.M. (2014). Agriculture-based economic development in New York State: The contribution of agriculture to the New York economy. Ithaca, NY, Cornell University.

⁵ This includes the cost of both increased state reimbursements, and farm to school grants and coordinators.



Issues and Trends Impacting Farm to School In New York



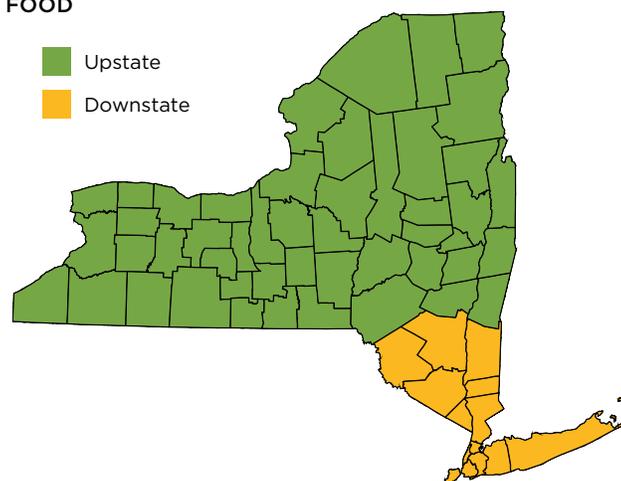
This year's research investigated possible relationships between school size, location, student racial demographics, and student economic status⁶ and whether schools currently buy New York grown food or are working to reach 30%. This provided insight into which students had access to high-quality local food at school during the 2019–20 school year.

Upstate Schools More Likely to Report Buying New York Grown Food

Statistical analysis from survey data revealed a trend whereby schools with a higher percentage of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch are less likely to report buying New York grown food ($p=0.10$).⁷ This trend became clearer when large city school districts, which all report a 100% participation rate in free and reduced-price lunch programs, were excluded from the analysis ($p=0.06$). Upstate schools—defined as all counties north and west of Ulster, Dutchess, and Sullivan counties (Figure 6)—were statistically more likely than downstate schools to report buying New York grown and raised food to serve to students ($p=0.002$). While many of New York's largest city school districts, including New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse, report purchasing New York grown food, statistical analysis revealed a trend in which urban schools were less likely to report buying New York grown foods than non-urban schools ($p=0.088$)—regardless of region. There was no statistically significant relationship between whether an urban school was public or private ($p=0.163$), or whether it was large or small ($p=0.594$) when looking at whether they reported buying New York grown food.

When considering whether access to New York grown food in schools is equitable, these geographic patterns are notable given the relationship between school location and the

FIGURE 6. UPSTATE SCHOOLS MORE LIKELY TO BUY NEW YORK GROWN FOOD



6 Whether students are eligible to receive free or reduced-price meals

7 This analysis includes data from NYC, Albany, Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse SFA.

racial demographics of the student population. Based on data supplied by the New York State Education Department, schools upstate have a disproportionately high percentage of white students ($p < 0.001$) and schools downstate have a disproportionately higher percentage of Black and Hispanic students ($p < 0.001$). Similarly, urban schools were statistically more likely to have higher percentages of Black ($p < 0.001$) and Hispanic ($p = 0.006$) student populations relative to non-urban schools, which were majority white ($p < 0.001$).

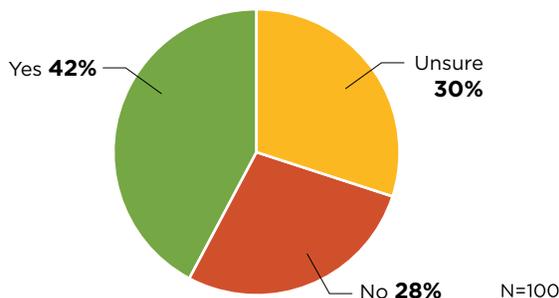
These findings provide some insights into which schools and students have access to New York grown and raised food under currently operating farm to school programs within the state, and highlight the need for greater targeted support to urban and downstate schools. New York's largest urban public school districts serve, on average, 80–85% of the student population in these cities, and therefore their efforts to purchase more New York grown food increases access to healthy, local food for a substantial number of city students. However, urban schools large and small reported significant difficulties procuring New York grown food. Downstate and urban schools may find it more challenging to connect with rural producers or efficiently aggregate and transport sufficient local products compared with upstate and non-urban schools, who are better situated geographically to develop relationships with and arrange deliveries from farmers. But this may not provide a full explanation as to why this disparity exists. Further research to illuminate what urban districts need is critical to ensuring that access to healthy, high-quality local food is equitable for all students across the state through farm to school programs.

The Impact of COVID-19 on Farm to School in 2020

In March of 2020, the state of New York was hit with one of the worst waves of coronavirus outbreaks to date in the United States, which shut down schools and all but the most essential businesses. While farm and food businesses—including school cafeterias—were labeled essential and continued operations, issues and challenges emerged. Breaks formed in well established global supply chains and many schools rapidly pivoted to serving grab and go meals transitioning into community emergency food centers, while others made the difficult decision to cease meal service altogether. The 2020 survey asked food service directors how these disruptions had impacted farm to school ‘in their cafeteria’ thus far, and how they may continue to do so while the public health and economic impacts of COVID-19 remain.

Forty-two percent of schools said they had new concerns about their ability to buy more New York food products in the future, and 30% were not sure because they did not know at the time of the survey how reopening and meal service would operate in 2020–21 (Figure 7). Food service directors were concerned that changes in meal service resulting from COVID-19 wouldn't be compatible with serving New York foods, they might not have the staff time or capacity to coordinate local purchases or prepare local foods, that budget shortfalls or uncertainty created by COVID-19 would mean less

FIGURE 7. DO YOU HAVE ANY NEW CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR ABILITY TO BUY NEW YORK FOOD PRODUCTS AND REACH 30% DUE TO COVID-19?





flexibility in spending on local foods, and that supply chain breaks would impact their ability to purchase and serve New York grown food in the future. Many food service directors expressed that they were simply “trying to keep their heads above water,” and lacked the capacity to put time towards anything beyond the challenging task of feeding children and families during a pandemic.

IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON YEAR TWO OF THE INCENTIVE PROGRAM

The 2020 survey also sought to clarify whether the onset of the pandemic in March impacted participation in the New York Farm to School Incentive program in Year Two. Of the 44% of respondents who reported working on applying for this program but who weren’t ready to do so yet:

- Nearly one third (32%) of respondents explained that the switch to summer meal programs or the cancellation of school meals in March affected their ability to reach 30%.
- Just over one fifth (21%) of these respondents reported that after March, they had no time to purchase New York grown food.
- Nine percent of respondents reported that their new meal service was incompatible with serving New York grown food.

These responses shed light on what might happen in Program Year Three, as the continuation of summer meal programs through the end of the school year and/or the switch to bagged or take-home meal service may interfere with schools’ ability to continue to support New York farmers and serve New York grown food to kids.



The Right Support

Overcoming Barriers to Achieve the Full Economic and Public Health Potential of Farm to School in New York



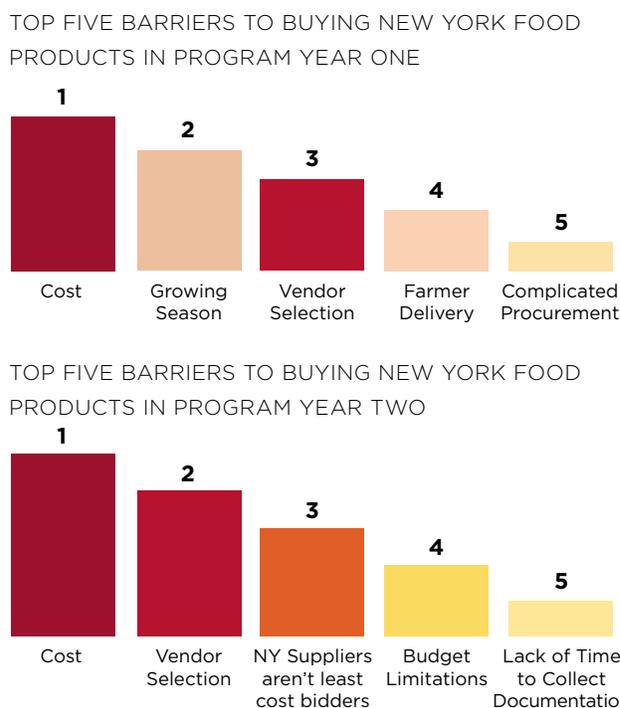
The significant potential economic impact of farm to school in New York is contingent on schools receiving “the right support,” which was not defined in the survey and left up to the interpretation of respondents. To shed light on what the right support would be to achieve this considerable economic potential, respondents were asked about the barriers they faced in buying New York grown food.

Top Barriers to Buying New York Grown and Raised Food

Consistent with results from the 2019 survey, in 2020 cost remained the number one reported barrier schools face when purchasing New York food products (Figure 8). However, the limited or lack of selection of New York grown foods offered by current vendors rose from the third most identified barrier in 2019 to the number two barrier in 2020. The remaining barriers schools reported facing that made it into the top five were new in 2020 compared to the 2019 survey. “Suppliers of New York food products are not the least cost bidders” ranked third, followed by “internal school budget limitations” and a “lack of time to collect documentation” in fourth and fifth place respectively. These barriers may reflect that SFAs have put forth more effort to procure New York food products and navigate the incentive program documentation requirements released by NYSED in December of 2018.

The top five reported barriers—cost, vendor selection, New York suppliers not being the least cost bidders, and to some extent budget limitations and documentation—all have to do with procurement laws, supply chain limitations, and staff capacity. To overcome these barriers, New York needs more farm to school coordinators to assist schools in procuring New York foods and collecting documentation, more training for schools and coordinators so that schools can successfully

FIGURE 8. COST AND VENDOR SELECTION REMAIN TOP BARRIERS IN PROGRAM YEAR TWO



navigate the patchwork of procurement regulations to successfully procure local food, and changes to federal, state, and local procurement laws so that spending food dollars locally is easier.

Top Barriers to Participating in New York Farm to School Incentive

After choosing their barriers to buying New York food products, food service directors were then asked to rate the extent to which each would impede their ability to increase

Top 10 Barriers to Participation in 30% New York State Initiative

1. Lack of administrative time to collect documentation to confirm New York sourcing
2. Lack of staff time to prepare fresh produce, raw meat, etc.
3. Current vendors sell little/no New York food products
4. New York food product suppliers are not the least cost bidders
5. I wouldn't know where to start
6. Budgetary limitations
7. New York producers or distributors who could provide New York food product aren't bidding
8. There aren't enough shelf stable New York food products available during cold weather months
9. Cost of New York food products are too high
10. Vendors cannot provide the necessary documentation to affirm product sourcing

spending enough to achieve 30%. The existence of this incentive alone will not be enough to spur behavioral changes if barriers to success are not addressed first. Helping schools overcome the barriers in the box at left will be critical to ensuring that the program successfully incentivizes schools to increase the amount they currently spend on New York grown food, otherwise, this program will not achieve its full and admirable potential.

Notably, cost fell from the number one barrier to *number nine* when put in the context of how much it will keep schools from reaching 30%. Like it did in the *Growing Opportunity* report, this again underscores that the program seems to make schools less cost sensitive, or that other barriers are more significant to their ability to work to participate in the New York Farm to School Incentive program and reach 30%.⁸ “Lack of time to collect documentation” unseated cost as the number one barrier to incentive program participation, highlighting the need for both administrative support to help schools track purchases and easier documentation requirements. “Lack of staff time to prepare New York food products” rose to number two—a barrier that Farm to School Coordinators and training supported through the New York Farm to School grants program can help overcome. “Limited vendor New York food product offerings” and “suppliers not

being the least cost bidders” fell only slightly in importance, from numbers two and three to numbers three and four, respectively—again underscoring the importance of external support, procurement training, and stronger farm to school supply chains to meet schools needs. Finally, “I don't know where to start [buying New York food products from local farms]” rose to round out the top five—further highlighting the need for external expert support for school food service staff, which farm to school coordinators are uniquely able to provide.

In addition to those barriers already listed, New York City public schools identified the high costs of New York food products and that “suppliers are not least cost bidders” as significant barriers to their reaching 30%. New York City public schools also shared

⁸ This is consistent with findings reported in the 2020 Growing Opportunity report.

that New York grown food often did not meet their specifications, quality standards, or food safety certification requirements, and that the school's payment system may be incompatible with farmer needs. Solving these supply chain, food safety, liability, and payment system issues within and outside of city government will be critical to putting New York City public schools on the pathway to achieve 30%.

Other Barriers to Program Participation

1. 30% is too high
2. Separating lunch from other meals
3. NYSED documentation requirements are too strict

Food service directors were also asked to rate a separate list of program-specific barriers according to how detrimental each one was to their ability to reach 30%. The current threshold level (30% of total lunch costs) being too high was ranked first, followed by the difficulty of separating out New York foods served at lunch from those served at other meals, and overly-strict NYSED documentation requirements (see box at right). Even though they are very committed to farm to school and hopeful they will be successful in reaching 30%, New York City public schools reported that the difficulty they faced separating lunch expenditures from other meals was a significant barrier to participating in the incentive program. Addressing other barriers so that 30% still feels achievable—for instance by adding other meals or easing documentation requirements to reduce administrative burdens—may be necessary, especially in the absence of a lower threshold.

Why Some Schools Report They Will Never Reach 30%

The 30 respondents who said they would never be able to reach 30% were asked to answer an open-ended question explaining why. After coding these answers, the higher cost of New York grown food rose to the top as the main barrier keeping them from ever reaching the 30% threshold (43%), while the limited availability and variety of New York foods that these schools need or are interested in buying was reported as a close second (40%). Other responses reported equally (7–10%) were:

- Tracking is too hard and time intensive.
- Vendors/distributors don't provide New York foods and/or don't demarcate them.
- The application system is too challenging.
- We need to be able to purchase NYS milk and currently can't.
- My (small) size makes it difficult.
- We are a heat and serve school and don't have much say over what our vendors provide.

The first five barriers are consistent with those many food service directors reported and therefore implementing the recommendations in this report will also help these schools, whether they currently believe they can participate or not. The state incentive program may still not work for all schools in New York however, and size and meal service style might remain formidable barriers until the support system, growth of new markets, and decreases in price make it easier for these schools to more easily procure and afford New York food products.

Lack of access to New York produced fluid milk, which may account for 10–15% of local purchasing for schools that do have access, poses a significant barrier to reaching 30%

for some schools. Support for these schools may include external support to secure their access to New York produced milk—an important outcome given the need for markets for New York dairy farmers, or creating a new lower percentage threshold for these schools to meet. This will help to ensure that all schools are motivated by the state incentive program to purchase more New York grown and raised food.

Changing Procurement Laws to Ease Cost Burdens and Unlock Schools' Ability to Buy Local

The 2020 Growing Opportunity report recommended changing procurement regulations to make it easier for schools to buy local food, and this year's reported barriers support this recommendation as a pathway to help schools achieve 30%. This year's survey sought to shed more light on this recommendation to help reveal exactly which laws and regulations need to be changed and how.

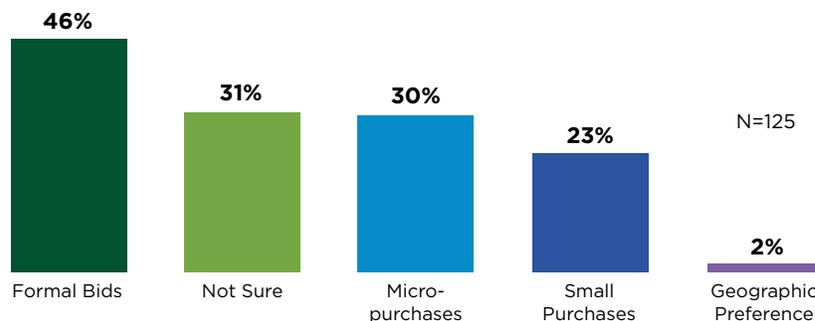
Current federal, state, and local regulations form a patchwork governing school procurement to preserve transparency, fair competition, and budgetary austerity. While these are important goals and there are tools schools can use to 'prefer' local food, these regulations have generally created a system that favors least-cost food procurement regardless of food quality or how far it travels to get to the cafeteria. For example, while a school in New York is down the road from an apple orchard, they may be spending thousands of taxpayer dollars on apples from Washington state because those apples cost a penny less than ones from their farm neighbor in New York. In this regulatory environment, schools are not only missing an opportunity to educate students on where their food comes from while improving the freshness of their food, but also missing an opportunity to support their neighbors and use taxpayer dollars to invest in and grow the local economy.

There are three methods schools use to procure food: formal bids, informal small purchases, and informal micropurchases. According to current federal regulations, formal procurements must go through a time-intensive process whereby schools publicly advertise the opportunity, obtain three bids, and then are required to award the contract to the least-cost, most responsive bidder. Small purchases present an easier way to buy New York grown food as schools are only required to call vendors directly and get three quotes before awarding the contract to the least cost, most responsive bidder. The final procurement method schools may use are micropurchases. Micropurchases are the easiest to use when buying local food because federal regulations allow schools to make small one-off purchases from vendors of \$10,000 or less without much administrative time. Nearly half of New York schools in this study

reported using formal methods (46%) to buy local food, while over half (53%) reported employing informal methods (Figure 9).

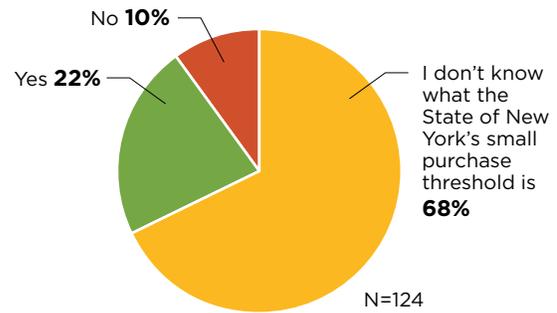
The determining factor that decides whether schools use these formal or informal processes is the amount they are spending—above the “small purchase threshold,”

FIGURE 9. PROCUREMENT METHODS SFAS USE TO BUY NEW YORK FOOD PRODUCTS



schools must use a formal process, and below they may use informal. New York state laws, and often local laws, are more constricting than the federal small purchase threshold of \$250,000 and schools are required to adhere to the most restrictive threshold. The state small purchase threshold amount laid forth in General Municipal Law Section 103 is determined by a complicated formula unique to each school, and local thresholds vary by municipality or district. Figuring how to navigate this patchwork of regulations to buy local food requires extra time and effort, and is intimidating, and these limitations plus the requirement to award contracts to the least cost, most responsive bidder may explain why schools continue to report “the cost of New York food products” and vendor selection—which ultimately is dictated by what they ask for in procurements—as their biggest barriers to buying local.

FIGURE 10. IS YOUR LOCAL SMALL PURCHASE THRESHOLD LOWER THAN THE STATE'S?



Since schools must follow the most restrictive regulations, part of this survey was designed to quantify local small purchase thresholds to see if they were significantly lower than the state’s. This would clarify whether raising the state small purchase threshold would be an effective pathway to help schools increase local purchasing and reach 30% by enabling them to use easier informal methods with larger sums of money. When asked whether their local small purchase threshold is lower than the state’s, 22% of schools responded yes, with the most commonly reported threshold being \$10,000 (n=43). Of the remaining responses, a shocking two-thirds of respondents (68%) said *they don't know what the state small purchase threshold is and were unable to comment*. It is clear from this research that food service directors find state procurement laws confusing, and the need to calculate your own threshold and apply for a waiver is administratively burdensome. The state needs to simplify these procurement laws and increase the amount schools can spend using more flexible, informal methods, while also providing more training, and provide more training on how to navigate these laws so schools can more easily increase spending on local food.



Addressing School Needs

Expanding the Incentive Program Beyond Lunch



In both the 2020 Growing Opportunity report and the 2020 survey, separating out lunch was identified as one of the main barriers keeping schools from being motivated to work towards reaching 30% due to the administrative challenges entailed. **Keeping the program focused solely on lunch limits school participation, the economic impact of this program, and student access to local food by encouraging schools to shift spending on New York food products currently served at other meals solely to lunch.** In order to strengthen the economic and health impacts of the incentive program and make it more accessible to schools, the 2020 survey worked to illuminate how other school meals could be included in the New York Farm to School Incentive program.

This survey found that the majority of food dollars (97%) at K–12 schools was spent on breakfast (28%) and lunch (69%). The New York City public school SFA was an outlier, reporting 91% of meal costs spent between breakfast and lunch, of which breakfast comprised the majority at 53%. Of schools that buy New York food products, 78% reported serving one or more New York items to students during breakfast. Sixty percent of respondents reported serving meals in addition to breakfast and lunch, with 40% serving summer meals, 37% serving snacks, and 6%, 5%, and 1% of schools serving supper, weekend, and holiday meals respectively. Forty-five percent of food service directors who reported serving summer meals said they currently serve New York food products during these meals, and 27% of food service directors reported doing so during snack, with much smaller percentages for other meals. New York City reported serving New York food products during all school meal programs.

On average, 97% of K–12 meal spending is on food served during breakfast and lunch.

Given all of this, this report focuses on how to incorporate breakfast into the New York Farm to School Incentive.

Eighty-three percent of schools reported serving New York food products at breakfast, with the most reported items being fluid milk (84%), apples (78%), and yogurt (49%) (Figure 12). It is critical to note that the share of costs schools reported spending

FIGURE 11. DO YOU SERVE OTHER SCHOOL MEALS IN ADDITION TO BREAKFAST AND LUNCH?

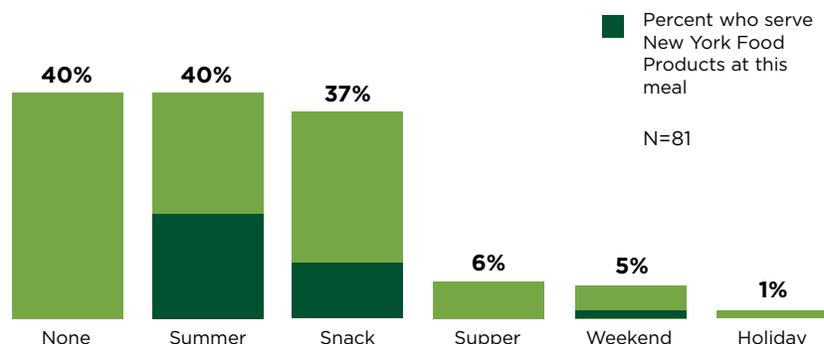
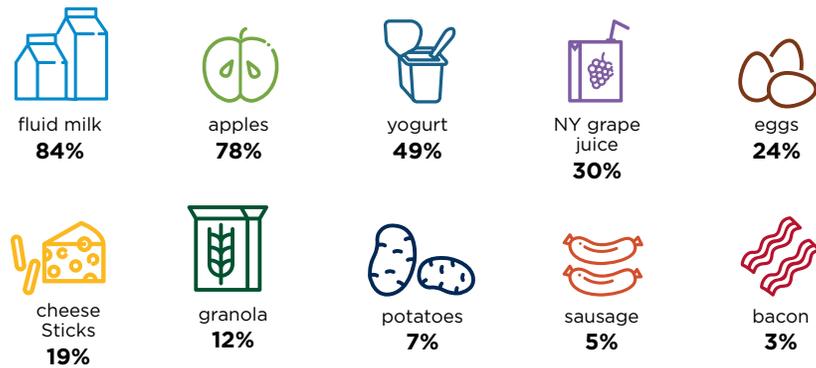


FIGURE 12. WHICH NEW YORK FOOD PRODUCTS DID YOU SERVE DURING BREAKFAST?



N=91



on New York grown food was considerably higher for breakfast than lunch—with food service directors reporting currently spending on average 23% of breakfast costs on New York food products and 13%–17% for lunch. Nearly half of spending on New York food products served at breakfast is attributed to New York produced fluid milk purchases alone (48%). Using financial data reported during the 2020 survey, this report considers the following different scenarios for how to incorporate breakfast into this program, with an example on page 25 for how each scenario could play out for a hypothetical “School A.”⁹

⁹ School A is a hypothetical example. Financial numbers in this example are drawn from but not reflective of actual numbers submitted through the 2020 survey.

Making Breakfast Count

How Different Scenarios of Adding Breakfast Play Out for 'School A'

The following is a hypothetical example of incorporating breakfast into the New York Farm to School Incentive program. Financial information is drawn on, but not reflective of, actual numbers submitted by New York schools in the 2020 survey.



Total Food Costs: \$100,000

Total Lunch Costs: \$69,000

Current New York Food Product Spending for Lunch: \$15,000

Total Breakfast Costs: \$28,000

Current New York Food Product Spending for Breakfast: \$7,000

Extra Reimbursement School A will receive when successful: \$21,000

CURRENT INCENTIVE PROGRAM			
Threshold School A Needs to Meet to Qualify for Extra Reimbursement	\$20,700	30% of Lunch Food Costs	RESULT: Under the current program, School A must spend \$5,700 more on food from NY farms for a total of \$20,700 to receive \$21,000 in reimbursement from the state. School A needs to spend more to support farmers in order to be successful, but still has an administratively tough time separating lunch.
Total New York Food Product Spending that Qualifies	\$15,000	Spending on New York Food Products Served at Lunch	
Increase in Amount School A Needs to Spend on Food from New York Farms to Qualify	\$5,700		
SCENARIO 1			
Threshold School A Needs to Meet to Qualify for Extra Reimbursement	\$20,700	30% of Lunch Food Costs	RESULT: Under Scenario 1, School A qualifies without 0 extra spending, receives \$21,000 in reimbursement from the state. School A has an administratively easier time, but farmers are shortchanged out of additional support.
Total New York Food Product Spending that Qualifies	\$22,000	Spending on New York Food Products Served at Lunch and Breakfast	
Increase in Amount School A Needs to Spend on Food from New York Farms to Qualify	\$0		
SCENARIO 2			
Threshold School A Needs to Meet to Qualify for Extra Reimbursement	\$29,100	30% of Breakfast and Lunch Food Costs	RESULT: Under Scenario 2, School A must spend \$7,100 more on food from New York farms for a total of \$29,100 to receive \$21,000 in reimbursement from the state. School A has an administratively easier time but needs to spend more and doesn't get enough to cover their costs. They would, however, need to keep increasing support to farmers.
Total New York Food Product Spending that Qualifies	\$22,000	Spending on New York Food Products Served at Lunch and Breakfast	
Increase in Amount School A Needs to Spend on Food from New York Farms to Qualify	\$7,100		

SCENARIO 1: KEEP THE THRESHOLD AT 30% OF LUNCH COSTS AND ALLOW SCHOOLS TO COUNT BREAKFAST PURCHASES TO ACHIEVE 30%, REIMBURSEMENT IS UP TO 25 CENTS PER LUNCH MEAL

Thirty-nine percent of schools, including New York City, said this change would help them participate in this program while 33% of schools said no, this would not help, and 21% were unsure. Data suggests that, on average, this program change would decrease the amount of time it takes schools to get to 30% by one year—with 82% of schools reporting they would achieve 30% by 2025.

However, there is reason to be cautious about changing the program in this way. Given the high percentage of New York food products already served at breakfast—and in particular fluid milk, which comprises about half of that spending—it is possible that too many schools would become automatically eligible for this program without having to increase their spending on fruit, vegetables, meat, and other dairy from New York farms. Based on 75 usable responses supplying specific financial information, a group comparable to the sample in size and location, there is evidence that under this scenario **16% of SFAs would qualify for the program without any extra effort, and 58% of this automatic eligibility would be due to current fluid milk purchases alone.** This could cost the state over \$8.7 million in financial reimbursements annually to schools that wouldn't have to spend any more on food from New York farms to receive it. **This scenario would improve access to the program for schools but shortchange farmers in the process.**

SCENARIO 2: CHANGE THE THRESHOLD TO 30% OF LUNCH AND BREAKFAST COSTS AND ALLOW SCHOOLS TO COUNT BREAKFAST AND LUNCH PURCHASES TO ACHIEVE 30%. REIMBURSEMENT REMAINS UP TO 25 CENTS PER LUNCH MEAL

The benefit of this scenario is that it would ease the administrative burden of separating lunch for schools, potentially enabling more schools to be motivated to work towards 30% and increasing student access to healthy, local food at both breakfast and lunch. However, since schools already report that 30% of lunch is too high of a threshold to reach, it is hard to make the case for increasing the threshold further, especially without further compensation or a lower overall threshold than 30%.

Based on the same 75 responses as above, under this scenario only 3% of schools would automatically qualify for the extra reimbursement—but roughly 3% of schools who currently qualify for the incentive would fall short of the new threshold and need to increase spending to re-qualify. For schools that are not currently able to procure New York milk, this option would likely raise the threshold beyond what they could ever hope to achieve, and, if chosen, this pathway may necessitate devising a different program structure for these schools so that the goalpost they need to reach is not moved further away without providing additional support. It is also inadvisable for the state to increase the amount schools need to spend to qualify without reimbursing successful schools at a higher rate for both lunch and breakfast or lowering the overall total threshold to qualify. **Adding breakfast while failing to adjust the reimbursements or threshold in these ways would likely disincentivize many schools from participating in the program altogether.**

Recommendations



Both this report and the 2020 Growing Opportunity report revealed that, with the right support, a 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. Achieving this requires providing “the right support” now by addressing program concerns and lowering barriers for schools to participate. If taken, the following recommendations will set New York on the right path to getting there.

1 Expand Access and Impact: Continue Funding the Farm to School Incentive Program and Include Breakfast by Reimbursing Schools that Qualify at a Higher Rate for both Breakfast and Lunch, or Lowering the Overall Threshold to Qualify

Separating lunch from other meals was identified as a main barrier to participating in the incentive program in both survey years for many schools. New York City public schools echoed this, saying this barrier will severely hamper their ability to participate in the incentive program if left unaddressed. The significant administrative burden of separating lunch renders the motivating element of the “incentive” for these schools ineffective. It is critical to incorporate other meals not only to ease the administrative burden of this program, but also to ensure students have access to healthy, local food throughout the school day. Without this change, the program could also cause a perceived but not actual increase in total spending on New York farm food if schools divert New York food purchases currently made for other meals to lunch in order to qualify.

Given that 97% of school meal costs are spent on breakfast and lunch, it makes sense to begin by adding breakfast. When considering this change, it is also important to keep in mind that the barrier “30% is too high for us to achieve” was ranked highly in both survey years, so moving the financial goalpost further away by adding breakfast without lowering the overall threshold to qualify or providing more compensation and support will further disincentivize schools from participating in the program. The state should either add breakfast to the current program while *also increasing the reimbursement for breakfast for schools that meet the threshold*, or create a parallel program for breakfast whereby schools that reach 30% spending of breakfast costs receive a higher reimbursement. There is a strong economic case to be made for this change as survey

data suggests that over **\$78 million in annual spending, resulting in nearly \$112 million in total statewide economic impact**, could be generated if schools not already spending 30% or more of breakfast costs on New York food products reached that level of spending.

Another option to lower administrative barriers to participate while retaining the incentive to increase K–12 spending on food from New York farms would be to add breakfast, retain the same reimbursement structure, and lower the overall threshold schools need to meet, perhaps to 20 or 25% of breakfast and lunch. More research is needed to determine the right pathways forward for the state to enable more schools to qualify while also continuing to spur increased school spending on food from New York farms.



Provide Support and Training: Continue Funding the New York Farm to School Grants Program and Ensure Support Reaches All Urban Schools

Since 2015, the investments made through the Farm to School grant program have helped to lay the foundation for the success of the farm to school incentive in New York. Continuing these investments is essential to its future success, as without this critical support schools have little hope of increasing purchases enough to reach 30%. Since 2015, these grants have helped schools hire farm to school coordinators, train staff, purchase equipment, educate students, set up school gardens, and have successfully paved the way for schools to increase spending and reach 30%. The state must continue to invest in these grants and pay special attention to ensuring these investments are meeting the needs of all urban schools and downstate schools, who were less likely to report buying New York grown food than their upstate and non-urban counterparts.



Create a Statewide Farm to School Coordinator Program: Invest in a Network of Regional Farm to School Coordinators

The 2020 Growing Opportunity report found that farm to school coordinators—dedicated staff at schools, Cornell Cooperative Extension, BOCES, and nonprofits—are a key component to making Farm to School purchasing programs work. The 2020 survey results further support this claim as many of the main barriers schools reported continuing facing in purchasing local food and qualifying for the New York Farm to School Incentive program are related to a lack of time or expertise to make local purchases and prepare and serve farm fresh food. Coordinators are consummate professionals who help schools connect with farmers, create menus featuring local products, run taste tests so kids eat new foods, prepare bids, procure local foods, collect documentation, and in some cases even process local food into usable forms for school kitchens. Thus far, farm to school coordinator positions have been funded on an ad hoc basis through the state and federal farm to school grants programs without support for any coordination among them—requiring each new school and farm to school coordinator to develop plans and support for the community they serve from scratch. **In order to fully unlock the potential of the incentive program, the state of New York should create a centrally coordinated Farm to School Coordinator program, written into the state budget, that funds a statewide**

facilitator and coordinators in every region of the state. Alongside continuing the incentive program, this investment will be critical to ensuring schools receive the right support to increase procurement and unlock the considerable potential economic and public health impact of farm to school programs in New York.



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

The 2020 survey shows that schools would benefit from clearer and more permissive state procurement law and more training on when and how they can use informal purchasing methods to buy local. The actual state small purchase threshold for school food purchases continues to confuse many in New York, including those who need to use it. It is highly recommended that the state adopt a simplified small purchase threshold matching the current federal threshold of \$250,000 so schools can more easily spend higher amounts of money on food purchases from New York state. In addition, any administrative burden currently required in the law—such as calculating formulas unique to each district or applying for waivers to make small purchases—must be removed. Practical and accessible training on how to use each procurement method to buy New York grown food should be provided by the New York State Education Department to all schools, and updated any time changes in the law occur. Finally, municipalities should raise their local small purchase thresholds if they are more restrictive than the state’s to give schools more flexibility to spend food dollars on purchases from farms to benefit their communities.



Improve Tracking: Streamline Program Administrative Requirements, and Continue to Ensure this Paperwork Reliably Proves Purchases come from New York Farms

The number one barrier reported by schools that will keep them from being able to participate in the incentive program was a lack of administrative time to prepare documentation to qualify. While farm to school coordinators can assist with this task, collecting the right documentation from vendors and farmers, and creating paperwork to prove these items are served at lunch has proven a considerable burden for many schools in their quest to participate in the incentive program. The New York State Education Department has worked hard to ensure there is now a clear and universally applied standard for what paperwork schools must supply to prove they qualify for the incentive program. However, schools, vendors, processors, and distributors will continue to struggle to meet these standards without ongoing support or a greater effort to streamline requirements so they are less burdensome, such as through technology.

In addition, as identified in the 2020 Growing Opportunity report, it is critical that the documentation and state review mechanisms ensure traceability of the purchases back to New York farmers so that the intended beneficiaries receive the positive economic impact. It is recommended that the state take steps to streamline program requirements or provide ongoing support in order to strike a balance between collecting the proper documentation and not making this process so cumbersome that the cost of applying outweighs the financial benefit schools will receive. In addition, the state



must build in source-verification protocols, such as spot checks, to ensure that the paperwork being supplied proves the traceability of the food purchased to the farm it came from, and therefore its eligibility for inclusion towards reaching 30%. Finally, it is recommended that schools and everyone along the supply chain—with support from the state—consider choosing and adopting technology that will simplify this tracking and verification process, such as blockchain.

6

Strengthen Overall Farm to School Supply Chain:

Improve Access to Local Food and Support Schools in Procuring New York Produced Milk

Schools reported that supply chain limitations, like lack of selection especially in winter, or lack of access to New York produced milk, hampered their ability to buy New York food and reach 30%. Additionally, downstate and urban schools were disproportionately less likely to report buying New York grown food. Further research and then investment to address gaps in the farm to school supply chain—particularly in New York City and other large city schools—will be critical to ensure success and equitable access to this program, and therefore healthy local food for all students. To begin this process, the state should convene a Supply Chain Working Group, as was put forward in the recent bill introduced by Senator Jen Metzger and Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo (S.8561A/A.10607). This group, which should include farmers, vendors, institutional food buyers, processors, and distributors, would identify gaps in supply chains and make recommendations addressing them. This group could also help the state choose the right tracking technology to streamline the current documentation requirements and prove products came from New York farms. This working group should also explore where investments need to be made into the local and regional supply chain to increase the ability of schools and other institutions to purchase and serve New York grown food. These recommendations should then be incorporated into the state’s farm and food policies to help build a resilient local food system for the future.

Conclusion



New York's farm to school programs are extremely innovative and have the potential to greatly contribute to the state's economic recovery if further actions are taken now to support school effort to purchase more food from New York farmers in the coming years. These actions should include:

- Continuing to fund the New York Farm to School Incentive program while incorporating breakfast.
- Continuing to invest in farm to school grants.
- Creating a statewide network of regional farm to school coordinators.
- Simplifying and raising state and local small purchase thresholds.
- Streamlining documentation requirements.
- Spot checking documentation accuracy.
- Investing in building the state's local food supply chains.

Building the right support system for schools now could unlock the considerable economic and public health potential of the state incentive program when New Yorkers need it most by increasing school spending on healthy food from New York farms to \$250 million by 2025 and generating nearly \$360 million in economic impact while costing the state less than \$103 million—a return of \$3.50 on every dollar invested by the state. **If schools were properly incentivized to achieve 30% spending of breakfast costs on New York grown food, they could increase the total amount spent on food from New York farms to over \$328 million and generate nearly an additional half of a billion dollars in economic impact statewide—with much of this positive benefit directed towards the dairy industry.**

Following a public health crisis and economic fallout, these programs have the ability to build back the state's economy, and support the health of children while creating a more resilient local supply chain capable of weathering future disruptions. We know what we must do. Now is the time to act.



Further Research

This report found a disparity between upstate and downstate, and non-urban and urban schools in their likelihood to report making farm to school purchases, revealing potential inequities in access to local foods in schools across geographic, which includes racial, lines. Further research is necessary to better understand what urban and downstate schools that do not currently purchase local food need so that students at these schools have equitable access to healthy, local food. This critical research, and the adoption of any resulting recommendations, will ensure that farm to school programs provide equitable access to high-quality, New York grown food.

This report also presented findings on how to incorporate breakfast without making specific recommendations about how to structure this new program or what a potential breakfast reimbursement incentive should cost. Further research and decision making on how to design this program will be necessary to ensure that the incentive serves as intended, and that state investment in such a program would be appropriate and effective.

