
State of Vermont Recognizes Local Foods Incentive Grantees

For Immediate Release: June 7, 2023

Contact: Lindsey Hedges, aoe.publicinformation@vermont.gov

Montpelier, Vt.- The Agency of Education in partnership with The Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets recognized five supervisory unions (SU/SDs) that have achieved the highest percentage levels of local purchasing through The Local Foods Incentive Grant program established in 2021. The efforts of schools, farms, community partners, and the state continue to create new and exciting partnerships that are boosting both the economy and food access across the state.

In its first year, the grant program provided \$489,838.20 to 23 SU/SDs during the 2021-2022 school year to help increase the amount of local food purchased. Eligible schools received a grant equal to \$0.15 per meal to assist schools with purchasing and sourcing locally produced foods and agricultural products.

“It’s really special to have a program that improves students’ access to fresh, nutritious food while also boosting the local economy” said Interim Secretary of Education **Heather Bouchey**. Collaboration like this doesn’t always happen. These five SU/SDs are setting an important example.”

From maple syrup, to beef, to fresh vegetables, the program supported a variety of agricultural sectors and introduced students to foods that they may not have access to otherwise. The program not only provided fresh and healthy meals to students, but it also helped create a new market for many Vermont farmers.

“Providing healthy local food to our communities and students is important for many reasons” said Vermont Agriculture Secretary **Anson Tebbetts**. “Vermont kids are getting a healthy local choice while supporting hard working Vermont farmers. We are grateful for our education partners that are supporting our local food system.”

SU/SDs who purchase or grow at least 15% of the food they use locally are eligible for a second year of grants. The second year grants provide between \$0.15 to \$0.25 cents per lunch served depending on how much food the SU/SD purchases locally. The five SU/SDs with the highest local purchasing percentage who qualified for second year grant awards are:

1. Windham Northeast - 27%
2. Windsor Central - 26%
3. Mount Abraham – 18%
4. Central Vermont – 16%
5. Burlington - 15%



Together these five schools received \$148,536.75 in grant funding and purchased \$462,734.39 worth of local foods with Windham Northeast Supervisory Union (WNESU) at the highest local purchasing percentage of 27%.

“The Local Foods Incentive Grant has totally changed the game for local food in schools said WNESU’s School Nutrition Director, **Harley Sterling**. It has inspired so many more schools to begin developing a local purchasing plan to get on board with the farm to cafeteria movement. Everything from logistics and storage to recipes and kitchen equipment. The grant has sparked creativity and teamwork across the state, and this is just the beginning.”

Nonprofit partners including NOFA-VT, Shelburne Farms, Green Mountain Farm Direct, Food Connects, and Hunger Free Vermont, among others, have acted as liaisons between the farm and school communities. They’ve worked to support Vermont’s farm to school efforts while building connections with local farmers and the vendors that deliver their products.

These partnerships have resulted in "over [100 farms](#) across the state that now sell to schools and early childhood programs” said Local Food Access & Farm to Institution Program Director at NOFA-VT and Co-Director of Vermont FEED **Lauren Griswold**, collectively, “schools spend \$20 million per year on food, so there's tremendous potential in localizing that spending.”

Since the program was established in 2021 by the Vermont Legislature the grant has set in motion multi-level community partnerships that are addressing hunger, health, and the economy.

"Hunger Free Vermont joins with our State Agencies in celebrating these five school districts--and all Vermont schools--in their commitment to nourishing students well so they can learn well," says Executive Director **Anore Horton**. "The Local Foods Incentive Grant Program is helping to ensure that all students in Vermont can access healthy school meals, and that Vermont farmers can access schools as stable markets so our local agricultural economy can continue to nourish us all."

About the Local Foods Incentive Grant

This grant program was rolled out in 2021 as part of a broader legislative effort to increase equitable access to high quality education for all students. High quality meals are an essential part of a high-quality education, and purchasing local foods supports the Vermont economy. The first year of the grant program supports schools as they set up their local purchasing process. After receiving a first year grant, schools are then eligible for subsequent year grants that are based on the percentage of local foods purchased. Schools that purchase 15% of their foods locally qualify for an additional 15 cents per meal, while schools that purchase 20% qualify for an additional 20 cents, and schools that purchase 25% qualify for an additional 25 cents. Other SU/SDs are learning from the successes of the first awardees and will use what they have learned to increase local purchasing using this grant in years to come.

About the Vermont Agency of Education

The Agency of Education implements state and federal laws, policies, and regulations to ensure all Vermont learners have equitable access to high-quality learning opportunities. The Agency accomplishes this mission through the provision of its leadership, support, and oversight of Vermont's public education system.

Connect with the Vermont Agency of Education education.vermont.gov.

About the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets

The Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFAM) facilitates, supports and encourages the growth and viability of agriculture in Vermont while protecting the working landscape, human health, animal health, plant health, consumers and the environment.

For more, please visit the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets website at agriculture.vermont.gov.