



United States Department of Agriculture

**Food and Nutrition Service**

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# News Release

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**USDA Announces Additional Support to Help Schools Buy Local**  
*Eleven grants awarded across the Mountain Plains region in seven states*

DENVER, Nov. 19, 2013 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced grants for 71 projects spanning 42 states and the District of Columbia that support the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) efforts to connect school cafeterias with local farmers and ranchers through its Farm to School Program. Of the 71 awards, eleven were made in the Mountain Plains region across seven states.

“In rural and urban communities across the country, farm to school is teaching students where food comes from and how it gets to their plate, and encouraging them to make healthier food choices in the cafeteria and at home,” said Vilsack. “Farm to school programs are an investment in the health of our nation’s children and in the vibrancy of rural economies.”

Selected projects will serve school districts in Montana, Colorado, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, and Missouri. Some of the diverse projects in this region include:

- **Northeast Iowa Food & Fitness Initiative and Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission in Decorah, Iowa**, will work with local farmers and a newly established food hub to boost production to meet the needs of local schools. They have set a goal with four rural school districts to increase local purchases by 200 percent.
- **Center for Rural Affairs in Lyons, Nebraska**, will train farmers and school food service personnel in farm product safety and usage, provide individual farm to school facilitation for ten pilot schools, and raise awareness of farm to school to lay the foundation for future expansion in Nebraska.
- **School District of Springfield R-12 in Springfield, Missouri**, will purchase a salad bar for three elementary schools and provide education about healthy eating, create a needs assessment for farm to school in the District to serve over 24,000 students, and work with food distributors to examine supply chain opportunities.

- **The Kansas Department of Agriculture in Topeka, Kansas**, will operate a pilot project in eight school districts to develop pathways for local food procurement, embed nutrition-based education activities into the school curriculum, and provide community based partnerships, technical assistance, and capacity-building support to the eight pilot districts.

These projects highlight the critical need for a new Food, Farm and Jobs Bill now more than ever, said Vilsack. Producers need renewed and expanded access to Farm Bill programs to fuel the growing demand for local food in new markets, including school meals programs, and to increase economic opportunities for America's farmers and ranchers.

USDA Farm to School grants help schools respond to the growing demand for locally sourced foods and increase market opportunities for producers and food businesses, including food processors, manufacturers, and distributors. Grants will also be used to support agriculture and nutrition education efforts such as school gardens, field trips to local farms, and cooking classes. For a complete list of FY14 Farm to School grant recipients, please see:

[http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/FY\\_2014\\_Grant\\_Award\\_Summaries.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/FY_2014_Grant_Award_Summaries.pdf).

USDA recently released the results of the first-ever [Farm to School Census](#), which showed that in school year 2011-2012, school districts purchased and served over \$350 million in local food, with more than half of participating schools planning to purchase more local foods in the future. School districts that missed the opportunity earlier in the year to respond can submit information regarding farm to school practices through November 30, 2013.

USDA's [Farm to School Program](#) is part of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, which authorized USDA to provide grants and technical assistance to help schools gain better access to local foods. It is also a core element of the USDA's [Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Initiative](#), which coordinates the department's work on local food systems.

- America's students now have healthier and more nutritious school meals due to improved nutrition standards implemented as a result of the historic [Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010](#).
- USDA's *MyPlate* symbol and the resources at [ChooseMyPlate.gov](#) provide quick, easy reference tools for parents, teachers, healthcare professionals and communities.
- USDA [awarded](#) \$5.2 million in grants to provide training and technical assistance for child nutrition foodservice professionals and support stronger school nutrition education programs.

Collectively these policies and actions are helping to combat child hunger and obesity, while improving the health and nutrition of the nation's children. For more information on the Farm to School program, please visit [www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool](http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool).