



# LOCAL FOOD IN LOCAL SCHOOLS: STORIES OF IMPACT

NOFA-NH is a NH Farm to School Network partner, as well as the official network sponsor of the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement program bill.



Many New Hampshire schools, school food service directors, and other community organizations source local food for their cafeterias and host farm to school programming for students and children.

Read stories from these farm to school heroes and find out how the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Program will further support their work.









# LOCAL FOOD FOR LOCAL SCHOOLS REIMBURSEMENT PROGRAM

The Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement program is an incentive purchase program for New Hampshire school districts and food service directors. If passed by the 2023 New Hampshire legislature, schools participating in the program that spend \$3,600 of their federal school lunch funds on New Hampshire grown food will receive a \$1,200 reimbursement from the state.

NH Farm to School advocates, parents, teachers, farmers, and community members believe that this through the reimbursements program having more local and nutritious fruits, vegetables, and other local foods will boosting youth health and wellness, agricultural viability, and specifically:

-  Providing New Hampshire students access to fresher, nutrient dense local foods
-  Annually injecting \$1.8mil federal and state funds directly into New Hampshire's farm and food economy.
-  Educating New Hampshire students about the variety of fruits, vegetables, and other products grown and produced both locally and regionally.
-  Showcasing to students the economic and professional opportunities available in the food system.

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## The Local Food Market Share meets School Nutrition

Evan Eppler, Operations Director, Three River Farmers Alliance

Growing up in a small farming community, agriculture and farming has always been part of Evan Eppler's life. His experience led him to work directly with local growers and producers in his role as operations director at Three River Farmers Alliance. Each season, he works to cultivate relationships between 50-80 New England farms and customers, strengthening the community's health and economy. While access to nutrient-rich produce is beneficial, Evan sees education as the key to longevity and success of local agriculture and the relationships between local farms and communities. Early nutrition education helps kids develop healthy and long-lasting habits, while opening their eyes to where their food comes from and the work that goes into growing it. The Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement program will foster better relationships and communication between farmers and schools, allowing students access to local food and a more nutritional meal at school each day.



## Student Voices: We want more Nutritious School Food now!

Alexandria Grappone, Senior, Concord High School

Alexandria, a high school senior at Concord High School, has a passion to alleviate childhood hunger and increase the nutritional value of foods offered in schools. Grappone is the Founder and President of Save the Children Action Network's Nutrition Club (SCAN) at her high school and hopes to carry the work of the club throughout her secondary education. Alexandria's vision is to help raise money and collect food to help children who are experiencing food insecurity. She also hopes to initiate education and momentum towards providing more nutritional meals and snacks in school. She believes that when kids are hungry, they lack the ability to focus on their studies; she often says "when you're hungry, you're hangry." By having access to more nutritious meals, students can obtain a better education and begin to build healthier lifestyles.

Many students depend on school meals as their guaranteed meal of the day, so making sure it is delicious and nutritious is crucial. The Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement program will give schools increased funds to purchase fresh, local, and nutritious produce. It will also help build relationships between local farms and schools to allow students to learn about agriculture, where to find fresh produce, and the benefits of having a nutritious diet.



## The STEAM Engine that Could: Farm to School Curriculum at the Southwick School

Brian Winslow, Title I interventionist & K-4 teacher  
Southwick School

Brian Winslow is a Title I interventionist who teaches K-4 grade at Southwick School in Northfield, NH. In Fall 2018, Brian created a Science Technology Engineering Mathematics (STEAM) curriculum, funded through Title I, to bridge agriculture and ecology through hands-on learning. The goal of the curriculum is to get students invested in how their food grows and gets from the farm to their plates. Although Title I allowed Brian to develop his curriculum and offer the class, the funding has not allowed him to grow the curriculum to provide the real-world connections needed to make lasting impact on students. Brian feels strongly that the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement program would give him the opportunity to show students how their learning from his class can be applied outside of



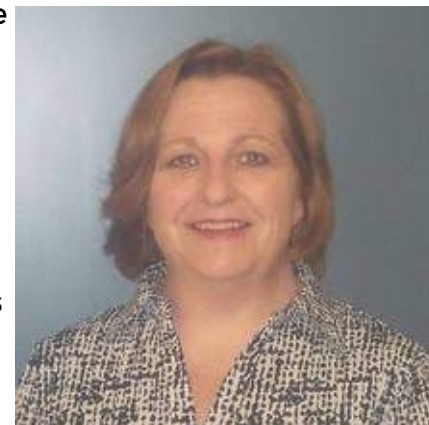
classroom, both personally and professionally. Brian and his students would benefit from the relationships school food service would build with local farmers through the reimbursement program, allowing Brian to connect his curriculum to the local food being served in the cafeteria and the farmers who grew it.



## Local Purchase Power: Building Buyer Relationships with New Hampshire's Farmers in Exeter

Jeanne Pierce, Director of Child Nutrition  
Exeter School District

Jeanne Pierce is the Director of Child Nutrition in Exeter, NH and has transformed school meals in district to become healthier, more nutritious, and locally-sourced. Jeanne has forged relationships with many local farmers by sourcing products like fish, beef, dairy, eggs, herbs, fruit, berries, and maple syrup. Since starting to source local food items for her school's cafeteria menus, Jeanne has seen Exeter students gain a better understanding of where their food comes from and how it gets from the farm to their plates.



While Jeanne has built farmer-buyer relationships throughout her 32 years of experience, she still encounters barriers that could be overcome with establishment of the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement program. She believes the program will promote the feasibility of purchasing local by decreasing cost and increasing partnerships between local farmers and schools. In support of increasing her school's purchase power, Jeanne believes the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement program can then help eliminate some of the competition school districts face between farmers' markets and local restaurants in the southern tier of New Hampshire.





## Local Food Access at School: the Abbey Group is on a Mission

Jaca Hughes, Executive Food Service Director  
Abbey Group

Jaca Hughes is the Executive Food Service Director for the Abbey Group, a food service management company that centers community by working with local farmers and businesses in the Northeast to enhance children's learning through nutrition.

Jaca has always had a passion for providing nutritious meals to kids sending them home happy and full. Through her work bringing local food into schools, she hopes to educate youth about locally-sourced food that is nutritious and highly accessible within their communities. Currently, the Abbey Group is partnered with many local farms in New Hampshire including: Alyson's Orchard, Pete's Stand, Hemingway Farms, Dustin's Sugar House, and others.

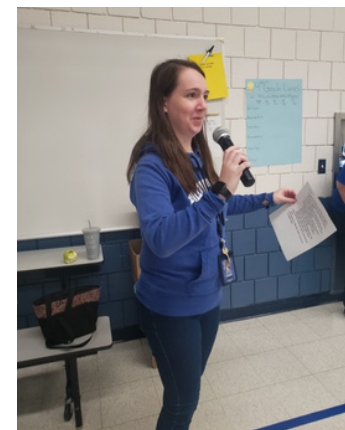
"Everywhere you look in New Hampshire, you see a plethora of farms and local farm stands. The issue is finding out who to talk to and build connections with. The Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement program will help facilitate those connections with funding to guide the relationships between local farms and school districts, allowing students to better understand where their food comes from and how they can access it within their communities," said Jaca.



## Teaching through Tasting at Maple Wood Elementary

Emily Wilson, 4th grade teacher  
Maple Wood Elementary

Emily Wilson is a 4th grade teacher at Maple Wood Elementary in Somersworth, NH. Currently, her school hosts Farm to School Fridays; the school's cafeteria provides local produce for students to taste and learn why the local product may be fresher than its store-bought counterpart, how it's grown, and how the product is distributed from farm to consumer. Students who have attended Farm to School Friday tastings have pushed their families to visit local farms that grow the new fruits and vegetables they have tasted and learned about. After the local apple tasting was held at Maple Wood Elementary, many students asked their families to go apple picking. The students expressed that the apples they picked were juicier, crispier, and more flavorful than other apples they had eaten from the store. One student even expressed that the apples were perfect and everything he wants an apple to be.



Emily believes the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement program would allow Maple Wood Elementary and the entire district to do more with Farm to School Fridays and incorporate local produce into school meals. The reimbursement program would allow the school to provide local produce on a larger scale through increased relationships and connections with local farmers. Emily feels that this would not only benefit the students by providing them a better understanding of locally-sourced foods in their community, but could also increase New Hampshire's farmers' business and income.

## Building Healthy Habits for a Lifetime through Local Food

**Krystal Gendreau, Director of Child Nutrition  
Amherst, Mount Vernon, and Souhegan  
Cooperative School District**

Krystal is the new Director of Child Nutrition for the Amherst, Mont Vernon, and Souhegan Cooperative School District. Krystal is working hard to implement farm to school programs within her district. This year, she spearheaded her schools participation in the 2022 New Hampshire Great Apple Crunch event put on by the NH Department of Education Nutrition Services during Farm to School Month in October. Her schools featured local apples from Sunnycrest Farm, in hopes of beginning to source more locally grown products.



Krystal recognizes that school is where many children grow and learn habits they will carry into adulthood. Therefore, sourcing food locally and showing kids where their food comes is instrumental in building a child's understanding of agriculture and overall health and wellness. Currently, Krystal's school district is in the research and development phase of farm to school initiatives. She hopes that the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement program will help facilitate better connections with local farmers, in addition to freeing up funds to purchase more locally grown products.



## Building Agricultural Community in the North Country

**Tim Wennrich, Owner & Founder  
Meadowstone Farm**

Tim Wennrich, the owner and founder of Meadowstone Farm in Bethlehem, New Hampshire, has always had a passion for his community and agriculture. He and his team farm about 4 acres, raises 800-1,000 laying chickens, 20-25 goats for cheese, as well as pigs, and cows.



Tim's current focus at Meadowstone Farm is to create an agricultural community center to educate the community about where their food comes from. Part of this work is intertwined with the schools in the area; Meadowstone Farm hosts interns from the area's high schools, holds tours of the farm, hosts school groups for gardening classes, and other educational events for the community. Tim views the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement program as a way for him to further the educational work he is doing at Meadowstone Farm. He feels the program will create a stronger bridge between students and local agriculture and hopes the farmer-buyer relationships fostered by the program will bolster alternative agricultural education in school, like farm tours or farmer guest speaking opportunities, in addition to seeing his produce on a school cafeteria menu.



## The Fight to Bring Back Local Food in Milford's Schools

**Maryanne Gallagher, Director of Child Nutrition,  
Milford School District**

Maryanne Gallagher has worked in the Milford School District in New Hampshire for over 20 years and has been the Director of Child Nutrition for the past 5 years. Maryanne believes in the importance of fostering a community and building connections between farms and schools. Prior to COVID-19, Maryanne tried to purchase as much local food as she could for her school cafeterias. In recent years, she feels the state has only made it harder to purchase food items locally. Within the past few years her district no longer purchases locally and relationships with local farmers have ceased. Maryanne is hopeful the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement program will help rekindle her farmer-buyer relationships and



make it financially easier to purchase locally. She also hopes it can help the students learn about where their food comes from and how they can access it in their community.

## Local Food Awareness Starts with Education

**Donna Lake, Child Care Aware® of New Hampshire**

Donna Lake works for Child Care Aware® of New Hampshire and provides childcare resources and referral services for the state of New Hampshire. She is passionate about educating children about local agricultural practices and getting them involved in their community by emphasizing the nutritional benefits and superior taste of produce straight from the farm or garden as opposed to mass produced canned or frozen produce. In one of these educational moments, Donna shared a fresh beet with the children. For one of the children, it was her first time trying a beet; now she says beets are her favorite vegetable.

With the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement program in place, Child Care Aware of New Hampshire will have the resources to educate more children through a multitude of hands-on learning experiences, such as preparing local produce from farms or planting and growing their own produce from seed. Through this type of education, Donna knows children are not just learning but building good habits they will carry into adulthood, habits that in time, will bring more money into the local economy through these children and their families supporting local farmers and buying fresh produce.

