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MINNESOTA LAWMAKERS PASS OMNIBUS AGRICULTURE BILL, INCREASING SUPPORT FOR FARM TO SCHOOL AND EARLY CARE PROGRAMS

The bill increases funding for Farm to School and Early Care and pilots a state-based local food purchasing program for food banks

MINNEAPOLIS—In a bipartisan win for Farm to School and Early Care programming and local food purchasing across Minnesota, state lawmakers in both the House and the Senate passed the [omnibus agriculture finance and policy bill](#) this week in an overwhelming majority, increasing funding for local food purchases at schools and early care settings to over \$1.5 million, an increase of \$300,000. The bill also increases baseline funding for the grant program long-term, raising it from \$1.29 million to \$1.64 million starting in 2028. In addition to support for Farm to School and Early Care, the bill also directs \$700,000 per year to make Minnesota among the first in the nation to pilot a state-based Local Food Purchase Assistance program, opening up a new market for farmers to sell locally grown products to food banks and food shelves. Both programs are housed at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA).

This is a much-needed win for local producers and Farm to School and Early Care programs — in March, the USDA abruptly [cancelled \\$18 million in federal funding](#) that had been awarded to the MDA in October 2024, meant to fund local food purchasing for school and early care meals and food shelves across the state. The funding would have been distributed over a three-year period, significantly expanding the state’s ability to connect local food producers with new markets in schools and early care settings across Minnesota.

In the face of those cancelled federal funds, state lawmakers along with grassroots organizers and coalitions like the Minnesota Farm to Kids Alliance have continued collaborating and speaking out to spotlight the importance of supporting local food purchasing for local schools and early care environments, showing the impact that these programs can have on nutrition and education for students and children while creating new markets for Minnesota farmers. Members of the Alliance identified increasing funding for the MDA Farm to School & Early Care grant program as a top priority in the [Minnesota Farm to Kids Strategic Plan](#) as part of a five-year roadmap for advancing local purchasing and agricultural education in K-12 schools and early care settings across the state.

“MDA’s Farm to School and Early Care grant program is hugely successful, connecting Minnesota kids to where their food comes from while building a new market for farmers looking to grow their businesses and boosting local economies,” notes Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) community food systems program director Erin McKee. “Demand for this program consistently outpaces the amount of funding available, and we applaud legislators for coming together to invest in our local farmers.”

“We are thrilled to see this bipartisan decision to increase investment in the Farm to School and Early Care program, especially in a year where budgets were tight and difficult decisions had to be made all around”, says Laura Schreiber, government relations director for the Land Stewardship Project (LSP). “This program creates important market access opportunities for farmers across the state raising a range of products, from proteins to produce, and makes the cafeteria a classroom and a source of community connection for Minnesota children.”

This April, LSP collaborated with [Farm to School Coordinator Aimee Haag from Hutchinson, Litchfield and Dassel-Cokato in west-central Minnesota](#), to invite legislators to witness the benefits of investment in local food programs and see Farm to School in action. View the video [here](#). LSP also coordinated a Farm to School & Early

Care petition which received nearly 500 signatures from farmers, school food service staff, partner organizations, and parents that was delivered to Agriculture Chairs.

In evaluation work examining the impact of this grant program, IATP found that the grant can act as an incentive for schools and early care settings to establish buying relationships with Minnesota farmers that often extend beyond the terms of the initial grant, with schools purchasing more than they are reimbursed for and integrating local farmers into their regular buying practices. Evaluation partners at University of Minnesota Extension found that every dollar spent on Farm to School generates an additional dollar of local economic activity. As of May 2025, grantees had used FY23 funds to purchase from over 500 producers and businesses, including meat, dairy, grain, fruit and vegetable growers around the state, and the number has continued to climb.

This funding makes it possible for schools to provide local, high-quality food to their students. Lori Hanson, the Food Service Director at Cannon Falls Public Schools, shares how her students are excited to have these offerings and notice a difference, saying, “When we have been short or had to use processed meat crumbles in a chili or hot dish, the kids have come into the kitchen and asked if something is wrong!” Hanson also notes that farmers they work with are equally grateful for this funding. “Farmers and businesses have said the partnerships with Cannon Falls have saved their businesses. During their 'off-seasons' or slower times, the cash flow from the Farm to School program keeps them going.”

To learn more about the Minnesota Farm to School and Early Care initiatives, visit www.farmtoschoolmn.org and www.farmtoearlycaremn.org.

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