

2021 MDA Farm to School Grants Impact Evaluation

BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture's (MDA) grants supporting Farm to School activities launched in 2013, with the intent to support Minnesota school districts that want to begin or expand purchasing and serving Minnesota agricultural products in the meals they serve to students. In a huge win for schools and farmers, grant funding was expanded to include reimbursement for actual purchases from MN farms for the first time in 2021. **MDA Farm to School Grants allocated nearly \$300,000 to Minnesota schools for local purchases in 2021-22.** These local purchases, combined with schools' match dollars and economic ripple effects, have **created an estimated nearly \$1.2 million in economic impact on Minnesota's economy** so far!



In 2021, there were 27 MDA Farm to School Grants awarded: 12 "First Bite" Grants for schools just starting out with local purchasing and 15 "Full Tray" Grants for schools with more experience. Nine 2021 grantees were located in the Twin Cities metro area, and the remaining two-thirds of grantees were distributed across the state. Grant funds were expended between May 2021 and August 2022.

Program participants, including farmers and school food service professionals, reported positive outcomes including expanded market opportunities and increased school meal participation. High demand for Farm to School grants indicates a need for increased and sustained funding for these beneficial programs.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

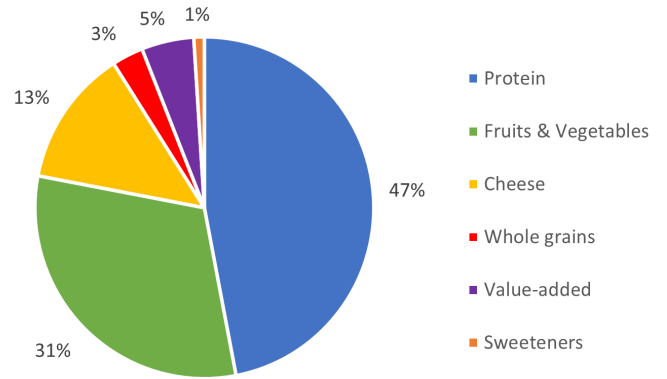
- **Demand exceeds current level of funding and continues to grow:** 2021 MDA Farm to School Grants received requests for more than \$400,000 and awarded \$292,407. In 2022, MDA received requests for more than \$4.5 million dollars.
- **Economic impact analysis found that the program generated positive ripple effects on the Minnesota state economy.** The \$595,000 of direct investment in Farm to School (the combined total of MDA's \$292,407 in grant awards and the matching funds from participating schools) through the procurement grant had a total impact of \$1.2 million on the state of Minnesota when adding the induced and indirect effects together with the grant spending. **Overall, for every one dollar spent by schools using the farm to school procurement grant, an additional dollar of impact is generated in economic activity in the state.**

Emerging Farmers: In the selection process, MDA prioritizes applicants that purchase Minnesota grown and raised foods from socially disadvantaged and "emerging farmers." This category includes farmers of color; American Indian or Alaskan Native farmers; women; veterans; farmers with disabilities; young farmers; beginning farmers; LGBTQ+ farmers; and urban farmers.

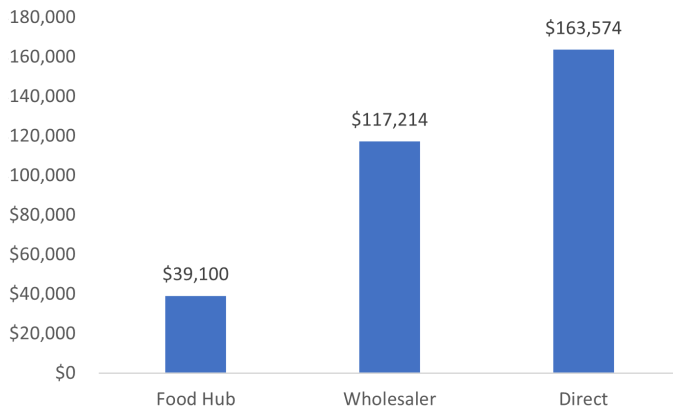


KEY TAKEAWAYS CONTINUED

- **Farm to School Grants shift school purchasing patterns!** Full Tray Grantees were required to match their grant purchase dollars but spent at least \$28,282 more than necessary or 19.1% more than their required match.



Schools purchased through a variety of methods:



Schools purchased 38 different fruits and vegetables! Apples and carrots were the most popular purchases.

The protein category consisted of turkey, beef, pork and eggs, with turkey being the most popular at 54% of all protein sales.

- **Farm to School creates new market opportunities for farmers.** There were at least 53 Farm to School vendors who sold to schools as part of the Farm to School grants. Two-thirds of producers who responded to our survey had been selling to schools for less than three years. Seventy two percent of producer respondents hope to increase their Farm to School sales in the next year.
- **Farm to School is a strategy to increase school meal participation,** which increases the school food service budget overall. One school food service grantee shared:

“I think [the grant] has really helped us to be able to get better quality food, and I think that’s part of the reason our sales [of school meals] are up considerably.”

- **Farm to School helps students get to know their food service staff.** School food service grantees noted that taste tests, special events and other local food promotional activities gave them the chance to interact more with students and build relationships.

“I think it’s good to see the lunch lady — they just see the top half of us. ‘Oh my gosh, you have legs!’ — yes, we do.”

