



NEWS RELEASE

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NDE LAUNCHES NEBRASKA THURSDAYS, LOCAL FOODS FOR NEBRASKA SCHOOLS

The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) has launched Nebraska Thursdays, a program that supports schools statewide in serving and promoting locally-grown or locally-produced foods in school cafeterias on the first Thursday of each month.

October is National Farm to School Month and the perfect time for Nebraska schools to register for Nebraska Thursdays. Registration is open to all Nebraska schools participating in the National School Lunch Program. Once registered, a district will have access to Nebraska Thursdays resources, promotional items, and an interactive recipe portal.

Funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm to School Grant Program, five pilot schools participated in Nebraska Thursdays with NDE during the 2017-2018 school year:

- [Litchfield Public Schools](#)
- [Omaha Public Schools](#)
- [Overton Public Schools](#)
- [Thayer Central Community Schools](#) and
- [Wayne Community Schools](#)

"Sourcing Nebraska products encourages fresh, local, and healthy meals in the school cafeteria, educates students about Nebraska agriculture, and boosts our local economy," said Sharon Davis, Director of NDE Nutrition Services. "The program brings schools together in an effort to promote local foods and to increase purchasing from Nebraska growers and food producers."

Litchfield Public Schools receives a large variety of produce from the school greenhouse for Nebraska Thursdays, such as carrots, cucumbers, green beans, spinach, pumpkin, and watermelon, among others. A donated beef and pork program are also in place.

"We provide more scratch-cooked meals. We freeze and store extra produce to use throughout the school year such as corn on the cob, squash, beans, beets, and sweet potatoes," said Litchfield Food Service Manager Janice Reynolds. "Since the students help take care of the produce, they love the variety and are willing to try everything."

Nebraska schools serve meals to 232,941 students daily and Nebraska Thursdays benefits the community as well.

"This program encourages students to learn more about our local farms and connect with the agriculture community," said Nebraska Dry Bean Commission Executive Director Lynn Reuter. "Dry beans are a staple crop in Nebraska, especially pinto beans and great northern beans. The opportunity to expose students to these local products in the school cafeteria can have long-term health benefits that extend to the family, and long-term economic benefits for Nebraska. Nutrition education, agricultural awareness, and local economic benefits make small steps toward a big move for our students and our communities,"

Nebraska Thursdays is a program supported by the NDE and the Center for Rural Affairs, and in collaboration with schools statewide. According to the 2015 USDA Farm to School Census, schools with strong farm to school programs report higher school meal participation, reduced food waste, and increased willingness of the students to try new foods, notably fruits and vegetables. In addition, in the 2013-2014 school year alone schools purchased more than \$789 million in local food from farmers, ranchers, fishermen, food processors, and manufacturers.

To register for the Nebraska Thursdays program and learn more visit www.education.ne.gov/nethursdays.

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