



Nebraska Local Foods for Schools: Program Impact Report



What is Local Food for Schools?

The Local Food for Schools (LFS) Program was funding for states to assist in the supply chain disruption brought on by the pandemic. The Nebraska Department of Education received nearly \$1.5 million through the LFS program to distribute to eligible schools from July 2023 to December 2025, specifically to purchase unprocessed and minimally processed local foods for the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program. LFS strengthened Nebraska's food system by helping to build a competitive and resilient local food chain and expand local and regional markets with an emphasis on small businesses.

LFS funds at work in Nebraska

\$1.3M LFS dollars spent by
SFAs on local foods

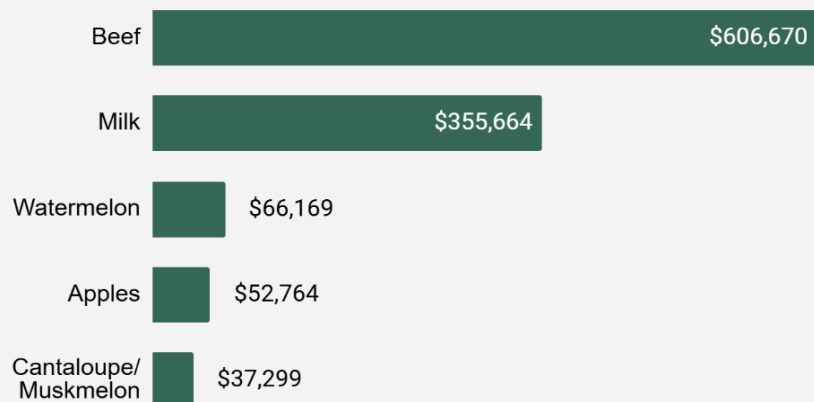
207 individual producer/
aggregation businesses supported

425 unique
SFA-producer
relationships
fueled school
meals made
with local foods

184 NEW connections made between SFAs and
local, small businesses with **80%** planning to
continue purchasing from the new connection

181 SFAs
purchased
from local
businesses
(**41 of which**
purchased in
all 3 Years)

Top 5 Local Foods Purchased: July 2023 - December 2025



Key Lessons for Future Programs

- Funding directed specifically for the purchase of local foods by schools was successful in building new and expanding existing farm-to-school relationships across numerous business types within Nebraska—food hubs, farmers markets, produce stands, apiaries, butchers, orchards, distributors, local markets, county farm bureaus, FFA & 4-H clubs, and family/small farms.
- Hands-on training to school food authorities supplemented by email reminders and procurement tip sheets promote compliance with restricted food purchasing.
- Even with funding and facilitatory support, lack of delivery infrastructure and nearby options for schools outside of the Omaha-Lincoln metropolitan area impede ability to purchase local. This difficulty can be exacerbated by staff turnover and capacity to find and build new supplier relationships.
- Processing of beef and other meat products is an essential element of local food purchasing in "The Beef State" and often a barrier when not covered by program funds.
- Ultimately, future farm-to-school purchasing programs should consider these aspects in design. Rather than allocating funds to schools which places the burden on already stretched staff, a more effective approach would be to issue a Request for Proposals to local food suppliers with the capacity to aggregate and distribute products across western and rural areas of Nebraska. In addition, guaranteeing funding well in advance of the growing season is critical to encourage participation and foster collaboration among smaller-scale producers.

Highlighted Wins Reported by Schools:

"I found out when I purchased local apples at the orchards, the price wasn't any higher than if I purchased them through a distributor. I will be purchasing the local apples in the future because of the Local Foods for Schools grant."

"I followed the Harvest of the Month for my menus. I also worked with a local producer, and he was able to let me know what he had available in the weeks ahead. This was wonderful help because I took some of the produce ideas and added them in my menu and changed the Harvest of the Month to fit what I could find locally."

"This program has been critical to OPS being able to bring in fresh, local produce to expose our kiddos to the different variety of locally grown foods that are available at local markets and grocery stores."

Our Reach

The map below shows the nearly 400 Nebraska Local Foods for Schools participants, including: (1) schools who utilized LFS funds to purchase locally, and (2) small business vendors who sold allowable local products to schools.



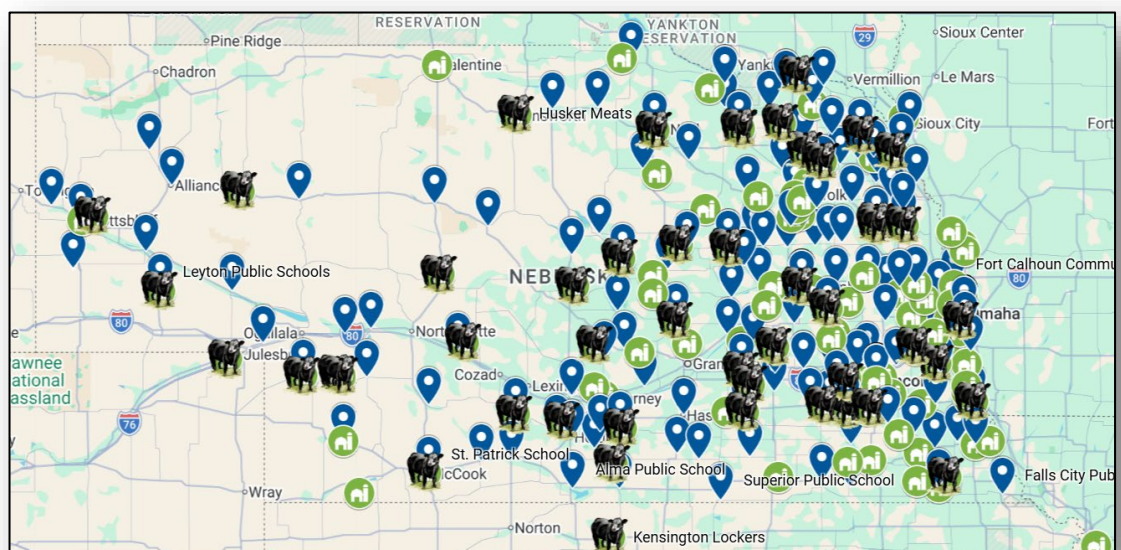
Participating School



Beef Producer/Supplier



All Other Producers/Suppliers



Contact Us

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