

Take your place at the table



and join us as we reimagine the future.

Experts agree: With universal school meals, kids learn better, stay in school longer, and pay closer attention in class. Fresh, farm-to-school meals for all helps level the playing field on child hunger. Many child nutrition providers, parents, and students agree. Now, it's time to take action.

The current explosion in locally sourced foods hasn't filtered down to our most precious community members and future leaders, our kids. Thankfully, this isn't just about catch phrases or foodie trends. It's about getting kids interested early in solid nutrition choices, their health, their joy, and sparking a lifelong curiosity around the food they eat.

If we can agree that giving kids the best possible food in school is part of giving them a good start in life, then let's also make sure that the entire system that gets the food to them is just and equitable—to everyone and everything it touches. We believe an equitable food system that promotes the health of all school children should also strengthen and empower the producers, workers, educators, and their communities who make up that system. Schools are one of the first places we learn about what it means to be part of a community. What if we take that learning one step further to show kids how they are connected to that local community through food? By supporting just communities, we empower our children to flourish as equitable future leaders.

It's time to reimagine the system that feeds our students—but we have to do it together.

From schools to policymakers to parents to farmers, and more, it takes a community to ensure wholesome, economically and environmentally sustainable foods fuel our students. We need everyone's help, so pull up a chair, and let's get started.



Take action today for a healthy tomorrow



Reach out to your candidate

Before a candidate is in office and when they are asking for your vote is the best time to engage them, when the candidate is most receptive. This helps ensure that on day one of when they step into office, they will be most likely to take action. It is an important opportunity to voice your priorities and make sure candidates are primed to take action, know why it's important to you, one of their constituents. Contact your candidate for candidate education (building connections with policymakers about the cross-sector benefits of universal meals. Check out our background information about why your representative should care about this issue.

[Connect!](#)

Learn more

NFSN has a vision of a strong and just food system for all, and we seek deep transformation toward this vision through farm to school—the ways kids eat, grow, and learn about food in schools and early care and education settings. Farm to school is a win for kids when they eat nourishing food in meals and snacks, participate in hands-on activities and learn about the importance of where our food comes from; a win for farmers when school market opportunities provide reliable and consistent sales and fair pay; and a win for communities when food is grown, distributed, prepared and consumed for the benefit of every community member. Read all about the systems, values and people that make everything work, and see how you can get involved.

[Dive in!](#)

Stay in the loop

Things are changing in school meals—sign up to our newsletter to stay in the loop!

[Sign Up!](#)



Resources

Feeding Kids Is Common Sense



Universal meals in K-12 school and early care and education (ECE) settings have proven common sense benefits. The Community Eligibility Provision policy (CEP) allowed a small number of eligible school districts to serve meals to all kids since 2011, and studies on this policy show that serving all kids meals allows schools to maintain nutrition quality while actually *reducing* costs per meal.

[Read more here.](#)



In schools without universal meal service, students who do not have paperwork to verify their income are often singled out for unpaid meal debt or skip meals due to stigma. [Read more here.](#)

"Cafeterias should be positive experiences for all kids."

-Crystal FitzSimons, FRAC



Thanks to the gains made since the 2010 Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, school meals –pre-pandemic– were likely to be the healthiest kids eat all day. CNN summary [here](#) and the original JAMA article [here](#). Rigorous examination of 47 peer-reviewed studies found benefits to kids, including improved diet quality, food security, and academic performance.

Leverage the Power of School Food Purchasing

Child nutrition programs across the country exercise collective purchasing power on a massive scale. Pre-pandemic, the National School Lunch Program alone served 29.6 million lunches every school day. K-12 school meals, early care and education (ECE) nutrition, after-school snacks, and summer meals are an opportunity for every community to express their values through purchasing priorities and to shift power in the food system as a whole – and that opportunity becomes even more powerful when we fully invest in meals for all kids. During our NFSN Community Gathering: Shifting Power, Cultivating Justice in June 2021, we hosted a panel of experts and practitioners to discuss the opportunities and power in values-aligned procurement—check out the full session [here](#).





Resources

Real Food, Real Ingredients, Real Careers



When nutrition professionals have the resources they need to cook from scratch, they can provide nourishing meals with more fresh, unprocessed ingredients. Universal meal programs eliminate the need for child nutrition providers to check paperwork and let them focus on feeding kids.

Being able to cook from scratch gives school food programs more choice to source from producers and vendors that fit their local community needs rather than relying on heat-and-serve products – resulting in

more power to support local farmers, ranchers, and fishers, or find products with certifications like fair-labor standards that support their values. Quality scratch cooking depends on a skilled food service workforce. Scratch cooking training and fair compensation invest in careers for food service professionals. Find out more about all the [benefits of scratch cooking](#) from The Lunch Box, from the Chef Ann Foundation.

"Student health, academic achievement, career development, planetary health—all those things could come from healthy school meals for all if it's paired with scratch cooking and it's really healthy."

-Chef Ann Cooper

