

Take your place at the table



and join us
as we **reimagine the future.**



Experts agree: With **universal school meals**, your child will learn better, feel more positively about school, and pay closer attention in class. Not only that, but fresh, farm-to-school meals help level the playing field on child hunger—for all children. Nutrition providers agree. Caregivers agree. Even students agree! Now is the time to take action.

If you've seen your kids eyeing food pictures on social media or caught the latest episode of your favorite cooking show, you may have noticed the current explosion in locally sourced foods. Yet, this trend hasn't always filtered down to nourish our most precious community members and future leaders—our kids. Thankfully, this isn't just about catch phrases or foodie fads. It's about getting kids interested in solid nutrition choices, investing in their health and joy, and sparking a lifelong curiosity around the food they eat. As you know, such seeds, planted early on, bear lasting fruit.

So, if we can agree that giving our kids the best possible food in school is part of giving them a good start in life and a great future, then let's also make sure that the entire system that gets the food to them is sustainable, just, and equitable—to everyone and everything it touches.

We believe a 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 our children learn about what it means to be part of a community. What if we take that learning one step further to show them exactly how they are connected to their local community through food? How their food comes from somewhere nearby? Brought to them by someone with agency, who cares about their well-being? By supporting just communities, we empower our children to flourish today and as 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.



NATIONAL
FARM to SCHOOL
NETWORK

www.farmtoschool.org



Take action today for a better tomorrow

Action 1

Build support at your school

Whatever school your kids attend, you can start the conversation and find others who want to invest in school meals. Meet with the school principal, teachers, food service administrators or managers, and even the school board. Likewise, get fellow caregivers involved; reach out to your school's PTA or student council.

[FoodCorps' Healthy School Toolkit](#) is a great resource to help you get started.

Tips to start the conversation:

- **Approach meetings and collaborations as an opportunity to first listen to reasons farm to school is or isn't being implemented in the school.** For example, food service teams are often overwhelmed and may not have the capacity or funding to invest time into farm to school programs. Lack of staff to prepare or serve meals to students and constant disruptions in food distribution are two major problems food service directors face each week.
- **Ask how you can help** in improving or building a farm to school program at your school or in the district.
- Every district has a school wellness policy. Caregivers can **help frame the language in the policy to include values-aligned farm to school initiatives.** Using this strategy ensures that all stakeholders, including the food service team, administrators and school board are aligned.





Action 2

Reach out to your candidate

Before a candidate is in office, when they are asking for your vote, is the best time to engage them. This is often when candidates are most receptive to constituents' concerns. By reaching out to your candidate to voice your support for investment into school meals, you are priming them to take action on day 1. The good news: candidates are often very sensitive to the priorities and demands of students and their families. Reach out and start building connections with soon-to-be policymakers about the easy win and cross-sector benefits of universal meals. [Here's some language you can use when talking to your hopeful representatives, to help them understand why they should care about this issue.](#)

Action 3

Stay in the loop

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

Sign Up!





Resources

Feeding Kids Is Common Sense



Universal meals in K-12 schools 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 free meals to all kids 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 meal 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.

Lunchroom Education from The Lunch Box

Click [here](#) for ideas on engaging students with food-focused activities, to teach and demonstrate important connections to food. Children are often excited to try new foods, learn more about how food is made, and learn to cook themselves. Often, lunchroom activities directly correlate with increased participation and excitement about school food.





Resources

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](#).



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 such as 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](#)

