

Take your place at the table



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

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.

As a leader in education, you may have noticed the current explosion in locally sourced foods. On social media, your students snap pictures of their meals, and repost colorful, beautifully arranged offerings by their favorite TV chefs. Local restaurants boast their selection of winter greens and farm-to-table livestock. Yet, this new wave hasn't filtered down to our schools to nourish our most precious community members, 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. What if your school fostered such culinary curiosity in kids?

Schools are a great place to 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 their local community and cultures through food? It doesn't have to be a "What if". If we can all 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 folks that make up their community get involved. Farmers, food workers, educators, parents, and more—equitable food systems that promote the health of all school children should also consider, strengthen and empower the humans who make up that system. The bonus is that 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. 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

Things you can do in the classroom

- Incorporate [Values Aligned School Meals](#) into your **school strategic plan**.
- Pledge to **support child nutrition in a values-aligned way** and give testimony at school board meeting, eventually asking your local policymakers to come for a site visit.
- Encourage students to read, write and learn about the importance of our [6 shared community values](#) in transforming the food system through school food, making connections to your own school's cafeteria. Teach about the food system in your classroom in the context of history, social studies, ELA, and/or environmental studies.
- Academic curricula for educators focused on food justice and more:

[National Farm to School Network: Farm to School 101 for Educators](#)

[Edible Schoolyard Resource Library - Food Justice](#)

[FoodCorps Lesson Plans](#)

[Center for Ecoliteracy](#)

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.

Action 2: 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.





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 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](#)

