

How School Meals for All Can Improve Meal Quality and Put Local Food on the Menu



... Even In States Without Strong Farm to School Policies

Farm to school, values-aligned purchasing, and School Meals for All policies (a.k.a. universal meals) work together to transform school food. Notably, all states with permanent School Meals for All also have strong farm to school policies, with 88% implementing local food purchasing incentive policies.

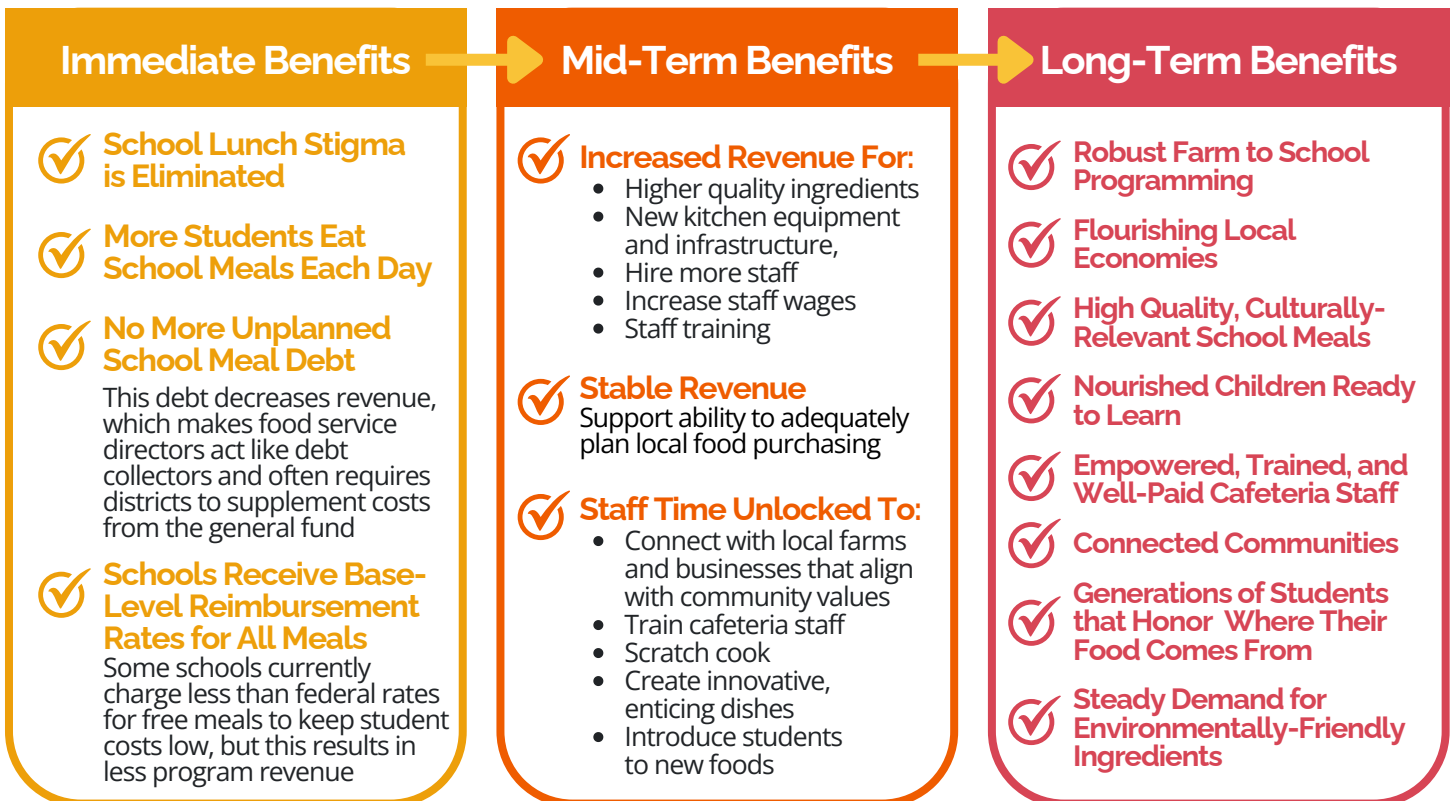
Yet, there are many states that do not have strong policies in place. While School Meals for All programs combat childhood hunger, the current school food system prioritizes cost over sourcing that aligns with community values. Even in states without farm to school purchasing preferences, incentives, or grant programs, broadening school meal access remains pivotal for fostering equitable and resilient food systems.

School Meals for All provides the much-needed stability and certainty for schools to provide the best possible meals to our kids. By freeing up time and resources, food service directors can focus on training kitchen staff, sourcing local produce, and introducing children to diverse fruits and vegetables.

School food programs have been historically underfunded, resulting in strained staff capacity and more processed ingredients in meals.

The solution? To invest in these programs and the staff that manage them. School Meals for All Policies are a critical ingredient in this effort.

How School Meals for All Can Improve Meal Quality



Stories of Transformation from School Partners

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Universal meals takes away the stigma for students to access school meals. The meals we provide are often the only ones struggling families have access to, especially for our unhoused students. We are in a wealthy, tourist area where many who live and work full time in our area can barely afford the cost of living.

Our district went from serving 300,000 to 600,000 meals in just one year after universal meals was established. **This increase in participation has allowed me to rely less on USDA commodities and increase local purchasing by 50%.** I am buying regenerative beef, chicken, and mostly organic produce for all our school sites—all thanks to universal meals.

Kat Soltanmorad

Director of Food & Nutrition Services
Tahoe Truckee Unified School District

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A School Meals for All policy in Wisconsin would **add over \$300,000 in annual revenue to my school nutrition program, which is about a 10% increase in our overall food budget.** This increase would happen because we would be reimbursed at a base-level for all meals served. The noted increase isn't taking into account a likely boost in revenue from an increase in school meal participation.

With \$300,000, I can hire and train more staff, purchase new equipment, and afford to purchase more local ingredients.

Bobby Guyette

Director of School Nutrition
New Richmond School District

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“The school budget in my community would habitually include \$80,000 per year that we plan to transfer to the Dining Services program. That's how much debt they would be in at the end of every year... During the last budget cycle, our school district reduced that debt by \$40,000. Even though the federal waivers have gone away, **because of universal meals in Maine, the nutrition program is now operating 'in the black.'** This year, we do not plan to budget any money for Dining Services because they're operating in the black. That's a predictable and realized benefit [of universal meals] that has spread across the state.”

Ryan Parker

FoodCorps (Maine)



Who's At the Table? School Meals Campaign

This resource is part of National Farm to School Network's campaign to promote School Meals for All policies that value everyone who gets food to the table. [Learn more about this campaign and find additional resources here.](#)