



HUNGER FREE COLORADO

Healthy School Meals for All & Colorado Agriculture

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Healthy School Meals for All

Background

- Pandemic waivers temporarily allowed schools to offer free breakfast and lunch to all students but expired in 2022
- Proposition FF established a permanent free school meals program, funded by a new tax deduction for taxpayers earning \$300,000+ annually.
- The program includes local food sourcing, wage increases for nutrition workers, and scratch-cooking support, though these investments are currently paused.
- Prop FF was designed in response to feedback on the importance of free meals and the need for continued investments in school meal quality, cultural responsiveness, and local sourcing.

HSMA Timeline

Spring 2022 – HSMA referred to ballot - HB22-1414 refers HSMA to the ballot

Fall 2022 – HSMA passes - Colorado voters pass Prop FF with 56.75% support

Fall 2023 – Free school meals - Free breakfast and lunch go into effect in SY23-24

Spring 2024 – HB24-1390 – After high participation and food costs led to higher than projected bill made program adjustments to maximize federal reimbursements, pause grants, and create technical advisory group to review the program

Current – Local food & more on pause – HSMA grant programs for purchasing fresh foods, boosting wages for school nutrition professionals, and support for equipment training and TA to increase scratch cooking and the use of local agricultural products are on pause.



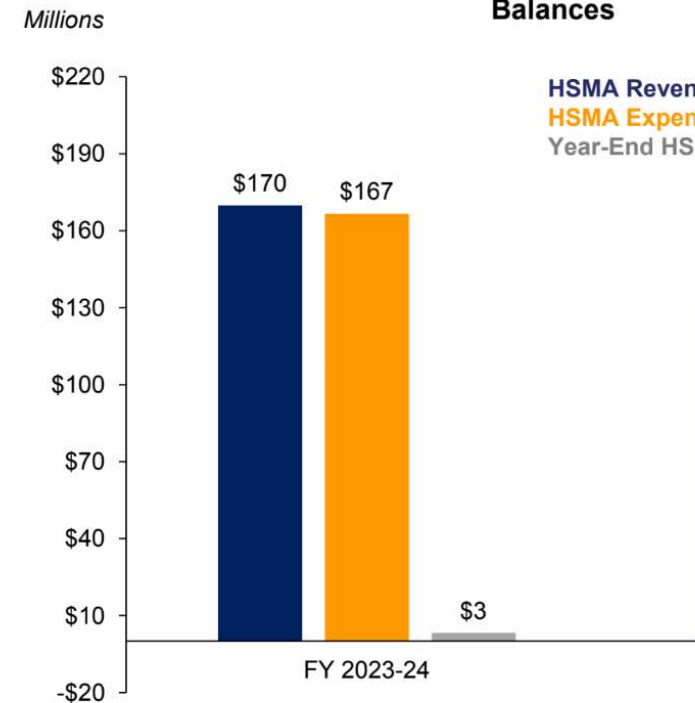
HSMA Successes & Challenges

- ✓ **Wide uptake:** 100% of eligible school districts opted in
- ✓ **Significant meal participation:** Meal participation increased by more than 30% statewide and the program served more than 600,000 meals daily to CO students
- ✓ **Benefits to kids & families:** Improved academic, mental health, and family financial support, saving families up to \$1250 per child

Challenge: High uptake + food inflation = higher than anticipated costs

However, recent forecasts show Prop FF is bringing in more revenue to cover meals

Figure 27. Healthy School Meals for All Balances



Source: [OSPB June 2024 Budget](#)

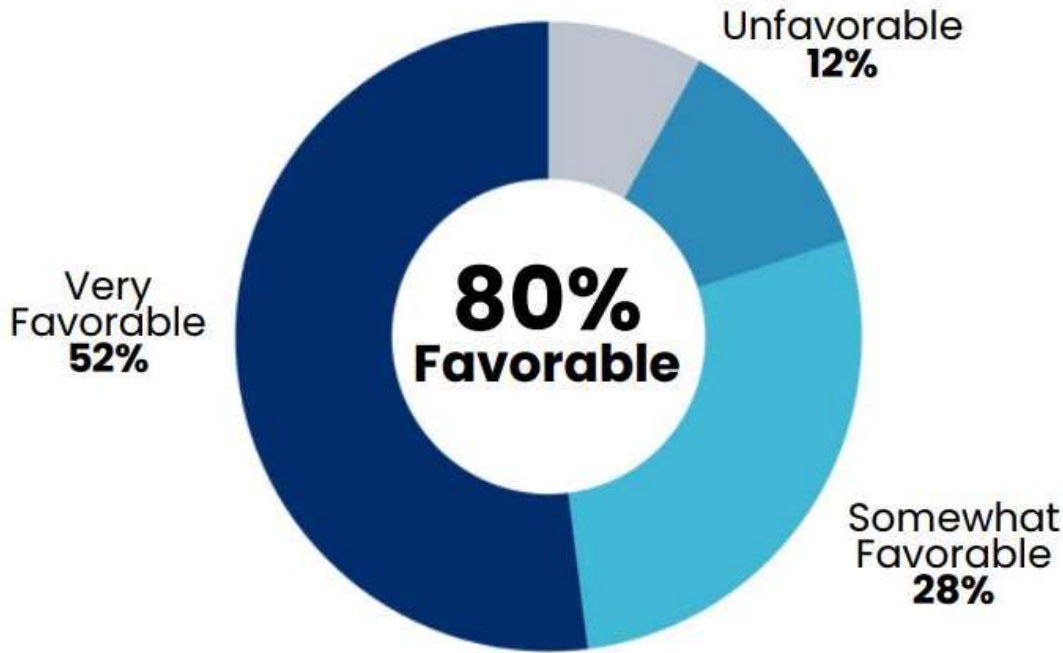
Agricultural Opportunity

- HSMA Grant Programs will provide funds for local purchasing while also providing the TA needed to transition to more scratch-cooked local sourcing
- Local purchasing boosts rural economies and provides schools reliable markets for producers
- Local food in schools draws connections between food, health, and farming for a generation of Coloradans
- Local Food Purchasing Pilot has demonstrated the success of this model



Support for HSMA is

Source: Keating Research poll, February



4 of 5 (80%) Coloradans favorable toward the Healthy School Meals for All Program, cutting across party lines


	Support	Oppose	Dem	Una
Providing state funding to purchase Colorado-grown food products from farmers and ranchers for school meals	83%	10%	89	82
Providing state funding to help schools provide more meals made with fresh ingredients, instead of processed products	81%	12%	95	81
Providing state funding to raise wages for cafeteria workers in public schools	78%	14%	90	80



Next Steps for HSMA

The HB24-1390 Technical Advisory Group report and key data for determining any budget shortfall will become available in December

How to Support

- ✓ Retain additional Prop FF revenue
 - ✓ Continue Local Food Purchasing pilot until grants can be fully implemented
 - ✓ Raise additional revenue needed to fully implement HSMA, including local sourcing
- 



Nourish Colorado
Training and Technical Assistance Program
for The Local Food Program Pilot

Chef Jessica Wright
Director of Healthy Food in Institutions

A photograph of a food service counter. In the foreground, there are several black trays containing different food items: shredded yellow cheese, a salad with green lettuce, fried chicken pieces, and a dish with yellow and orange ingredients. Behind the counter, three people are visible. On the left, a man in a red jacket is looking down. In the center, a woman with long dark hair, wearing a brown jacket, is looking towards the right. On the right, another woman in a black jacket is looking down. The background shows a bright, modern interior with large windows and a blue wall.

SI PODEMOS SERVIRLES PRODUCTOS FRESCOS DE ORIGEN LOCAL,
CADA PEQUEÑO PASO QUE DAMOS MARCA LA DIFERENCIA.

Local Food Program Pilot

- Passed via Legislation in 2019
 - 3 year pilot program
- Slated to Sunset in 2024 due to its inclusion in HSMA
 - JBC extended it for one year under HB-1390

2 Core Components

- \$500,000 for schools to purchase CO grown, raised or processed items per year
 - \$.05 cents per meal
- \$150,000 for Training and Technical Assistance

Local Food Program Under H

- Expanded version included in

2 Core Components

- Between \$5M - \$17M for schools to purchase CO grown, raised or processed items per year
 - \$.25 cents per meal
- \$5M for Training and Technical Assistance (TA) per year
 - Includes infrastructure \$9M for CO producers
 - Comprehensive TA and training for schools
 - Regional Investments in Value Chain Coordination

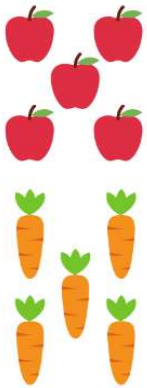
Local Food Program Pilot - Successes and Value

- \$500k per year equates to **\$864k in local economic impact**
- **44** school food authorities participating (**61% rural**), impacting over **students**
- Over **700** food service employees, producers and partners have received direct on-site TA and or a formal workshop



Local Food Program Pilot - Successes and Value

School Year '22-'23



47% of produce spending went to fruit

53% of produce spending went to vegetables

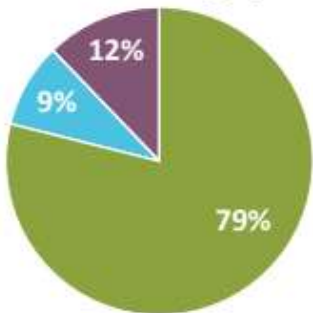
Top 5 Items

1. Apples
2. Peaches
3. Watermelon
4. Pears
5. Cantaloupe

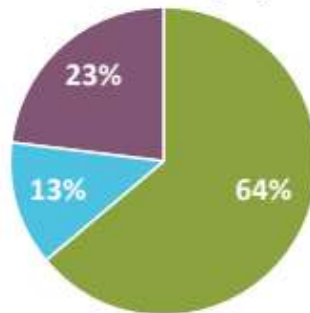


1. Carrots
2. Tomatoes
3. Cucumbers
4. Lettuce
5. Potatoes

SY 2022-23 Colorado Purchases by Product Category

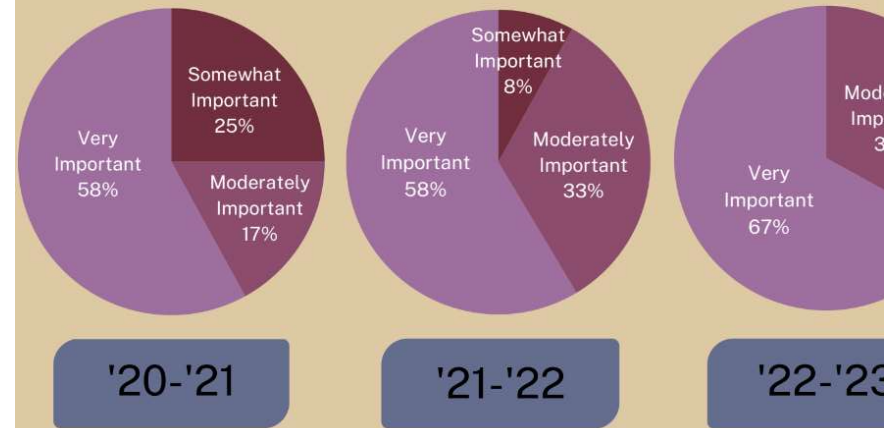


SY 2021-22 Colorado Purchases by Product Category



- Gathering an incredible amount of food purchasing trends and preferences
- Between SY 21/22 and SY 22/23 - increase in purchase of raw products (raw beef, whole carrots) due to increased producer connections and training

How Important is it to Build Awareness About Local Foods?



Local Food Program Pilot - Successes and Value

“It is really **about knowledge**. So helping our producers that we work directly with know **what institutional markets are out there, how they might access them. What the requirements for their products might be...** our producers are telling us they need this information **so desperately** and they want to be able to **sell to institutional purchasers, but they just don't know how to do it.**”

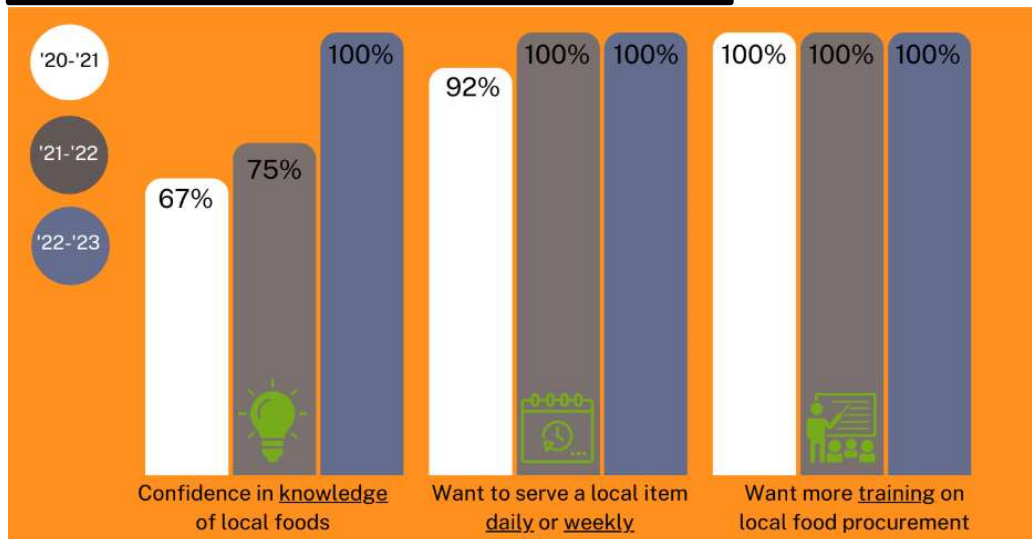
Poudre Valley Community Farms Poudre Food Partnership

What Does Success Look Like?

“**HAVING BUY IN AND SUPPORT FROM [THE] SUPERINTENDENT, PRINCIPALS, TEACHERS, COOKS, AND PARENTS IS KEY.**”

“**...MORE STUDENTS AND TEACHERS KNOW WHAT IS INVOLVED WITH INCLUDING LOCAL FOODS AND WHAT IS INVOLVED IN DAILY AND YEARLY PERPETUATION OF THE FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM.**”

“**UTILIZING AS MUCH LOCAL PRODUCT AS POSSIBLE, INCREASING AWARENESS AND SHARING THE VALUE OF SERVING LOCAL.**”



Karla Cardoza
Community Leader
Brújula Comunitaria



Brújula Comunitaria (Community Compass) promotes active participation of the Latinx community in Boulder County, leading with bold and conscious actions to address economic, and climate justice while creating diverse and inclusive spaces for the entire community.



Brújula Comunitaria impulsa participación activa y comprometida de la Comunidad Latine en el Condado de Boulder, liderando con acciones conscientes para abordar la justicia social, económica y ambiental creando espacios diversos e inclusivos para toda la comunidad.

Translation

I am very grateful that, thanks to the "Healthy School Meals for All" initiative, my children and the children and youth in Colorado, can access food without economic barriers or discrimination.

This is a significant step toward food and economic justice and provides relief to many families.

My children are part of the reduced and free lunch program, which has been a great support for my family. However, for several years, as part of Brújula Comunitaria, we have advocated for children and youth in the St. Vrain Valley School District to not only have access to food but also to less processed and more nutritious.

We know that this requires changes throughout the district's food system: better-equipped kitchens, higher wages for cafeteria workers, and, most importantly, increased collaboration with local farmers and the community.

The "Healthy School Meals for All" initiative has been a beacon of hope for our efforts, and we have worked to support it from the start.

Now more than ever, it is crucial that we work together to ensure that our children receive safe and dignified food every day at school. When we talk about dignified food, we mean a diet that includes fresh, locally produced foods prepared from scratch in school kitchens.

In many schools across the state, processed meals containing preservatives and additives harmful to children's health are served, making them more vulnerable to diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and learning problems.

Translation, continued

In Colorado, we are fortunate to have farms and farmers committed to providing local and nutritious products, which represents a fantastic opportunity to improve the quality of school meals.

Encouraging the consumption of local products not only benefits children's health but also strengthens relationships between school districts and farmers. These relationships, built on trust and mutual support, create a cycle of community support: by purchasing local products, we help farmers sustain their businesses, and in turn, they provide us with fresh, high-quality foods.

Access to fresh and quality food is a matter of equity, as it allows all students, regardless of their economic situation, to enjoy healthier meals free of preservatives and additives. Promoting this connection between local farms and school districts is crucial for creating a fairer and more sustainable food system, where all communities benefit from each other.

Although making these changes in food systems can be complex, it is essential for ensuring a healthy future for our children and youth.

Your support for this program is crucial to securing the necessary funding to continue advancing the program. Salary increases for cafeteria workers, technical assistance for schools, and funds to purchase local and nutritious foods are essential for providing our children with dignified and equitable nourishment, and a healthy lifestyle that will positively impact their development and the future of our community.

I deeply appreciate your attention to this matter and trust that, with your support, we can build fairer and more sustainable school food systems that not only nourish our children but also teach them the value of health, equity, and connection to our land and our farmers.

Nancy Díaz
Executive Director
Lamar Unidos



Lamar Unidos was started in 2015 as a response to the critical need to have a Lamar's Latino immigrant families to address collective challenges, have a reliable source of information and accessible services. Lamar Unidos has become a primary source of trusted information and support to the Lamar Latino Community. Since inception, Lamar Unidos has worked with the community to tackle issues that are pressing such as education, economic justice, immigration, financial and tax help, physical health and civic engagement.

While Lamar Unidos is proud of its Latino identity, culture and roots, it strives to integrate into the wider Lamar community as equals, welcomes immigrants of all backgrounds and origin, and seeks to support anyone in need of its services.

Translation

Dear Chairwoman McCormick and Members of the Committee:

My name is Nancy Díaz, and I am a community leader and Executive Director of Lamar Unidos. I live in Lamar, CO. It is an honor to be here today to discuss a topic that is fundamental to our community and to many other rural communities across our state: the Healthy School Meals for All Program.

A well-designed and implemented school meal program can transform lives. In Lamar, a rural community, we and our families face economic and logistical challenges that make access to fresh, healthy foods difficult. Although the program has just begun and healthy meals are not yet offered in our schools, we have observed in other school districts that it is entirely feasible to implement such programs effectively. This program will not only provide a nutritious meal to our children but also represents an investment in their health and future.

For me, one of the important aspects of the program is the educational component on nutrition. As a mother and grandmother, I believe it is essential for our children and grandchildren to receive proper education about healthy eating from an early age. I have seen how good nutrition positively influences their physical and academic development. Providing healthy meals in schools is an effective way to ensure that all children, regardless of their economic situation, can access the nutrition they need to grow up strong and healthy.

From a public health perspective, it is well known that healthy eating from a young age lays the foundation for a long and healthy life. Preventing chronic diseases and promoting positive eating habits begin in childhood. By ensuring that our children receive nutritious food every day, we are investing in a healthier and more productive future generation.

Access to healthy school meals goes beyond providing just a meal. In our rural communities, where resources are limited, these meals represent a vital source of nutrition. Offering free meals at school not only helps alleviate the economic burden on families but also ensures that all children, regardless of their socioeconomic status, have access to proper nutrition. This is crucial because good nutrition is directly linked to academic performance as well as physical and mental development in children.

Translation, continued

Additionally, from a community leader perspective, I also value the program's impact on our local economy. Beyond the individual benefits for students, healthy school meals also have a positive impact on our economy. Purchasing fresh and local products for school programs can help sustain the farmers and our region. By strengthening the demand for local products, we are not only supporting our farmers, but also creating a supply chain that can generate jobs and stimulate the local economy. Seeing how this program can strengthen our community and economic fabric deeply inspires me.

Representative McCormick and Members of the Committee, we need to increase resources for the School Meals for All Program. The lack of sufficient funding for this program not only affects students, but it impacts our communities as a whole. The health of our children should not depend on luck or the economic situation of their families. It is essential that all children, especially those in rural communities, have access to fresh and nutritious foods to ensure their well-being and long-term success.

Further more, we advocate for a greater incorporation of fresh and local foods in school meals. This supports the health of our students but also fosters a stronger connection with our local agricultural community. Access to fresh fruits and vegetables can make a significant difference in the quality of the meals our children receive at school.

In conclusion, the Healthy School Meals for All Program is a vital tool for improving the lives of our children, supporting our local economies, and promoting lasting health. I deeply appreciate your attention and support on this important issue. Together, we can ensure that every child in Colorado has the opportunity to thrive, be healthy, learn effectively, and have a bright future.

Thank you very much.