

Local Food for Schools Survey Report

FEBRUARY 2026

Overview

Local Food for Schools is a cost-effective, cooperative investment that improves school meals while strengthening domestic agriculture and supply chain resilience. With permanent funding and modest program refinements, LFS can deliver lasting benefits to students, farmers, and communities nationwide.

The Local Food for Schools (LFS) program, launched by USDA in 2022, provided approximately \$200 million to states to help school districts purchase locally and regionally produced foods. Created in response to COVID-era supply chain disruptions, LFS leverages school meal purchasing to support students, farmers, and local food systems simultaneously.

Why It Matters

- ✦ **Students** gain access to fresher, higher-quality foods and greater menu variety.
- ✦ **Farmers and food businesses** gain access to reliable institutional markets.
- ✦ **Communities** benefit from stronger local economies and more resilient food systems.
- ✦ **Federal investments** leverage existing school meal infrastructure for multiple public benefits.

Key Findings

This brief summarizes findings from a national survey of 112 school districts across 17 states, supplemented by a detailed case study from Oregon. For the full report scan the QR code or visit: https://bit.ly/Center_LFSReport



1. Funding enabled higher-quality, local food for students.

- 80% of districts used LFS to purchase fruits and vegetables.
- Districts also used funds for locally sourced beef, dairy, poultry, and eggs.
- 61% of districts introduced new foods, improving meal quality and student participation.

2. Temporary funding limits long-term impact.

- Districts and producers reported difficulty planning with one-time or short-term funding.
- Without sustained funding, districts struggle to maintain supplier relationships.
- Inconsistent demand makes it harder for farmers to scale production and invest confidently.

3. State implementation matters.

- Smaller districts under-utilized funds due to logistical constraints.
- Integration with existing state programs shaped what foods were purchased, eased the burden of reporting for school districts, and supported more effective programming overall.

4. Smaller and rural districts benefit most per student but face higher barriers due to supply chain gaps.

- Rural and small districts spent more per student on local food than urban districts.
- Common challenges included higher delivery costs, limited suppliers, and staffing capacity.

Recommendations

- 1. Make LFS funding permanent.** Predictable funding supports long-term planning for schools and producers.
- 2. Integrate local purchasing into existing USDA programs.** Streamline and standardize reporting and reduce administrative burden by leveraging USDA Foods and related systems.
- 3. Strengthen and expand local supply chains.** Align LFS with federal investments in food hubs, aggregation, and distribution infrastructure.
- 4. Identify and promote best practices for LFS distribution and reporting.**
- 5. Increase and better target funding.** Adjust allocations to address the distinct challenges of rural, small, and large districts.

FIGURE 1. LOCAL FOOD FOR SCHOOLS COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT FUNDING AMOUNTS BY STATE
California and Texas were the highest funded states; Wyoming was the lowest funded state.

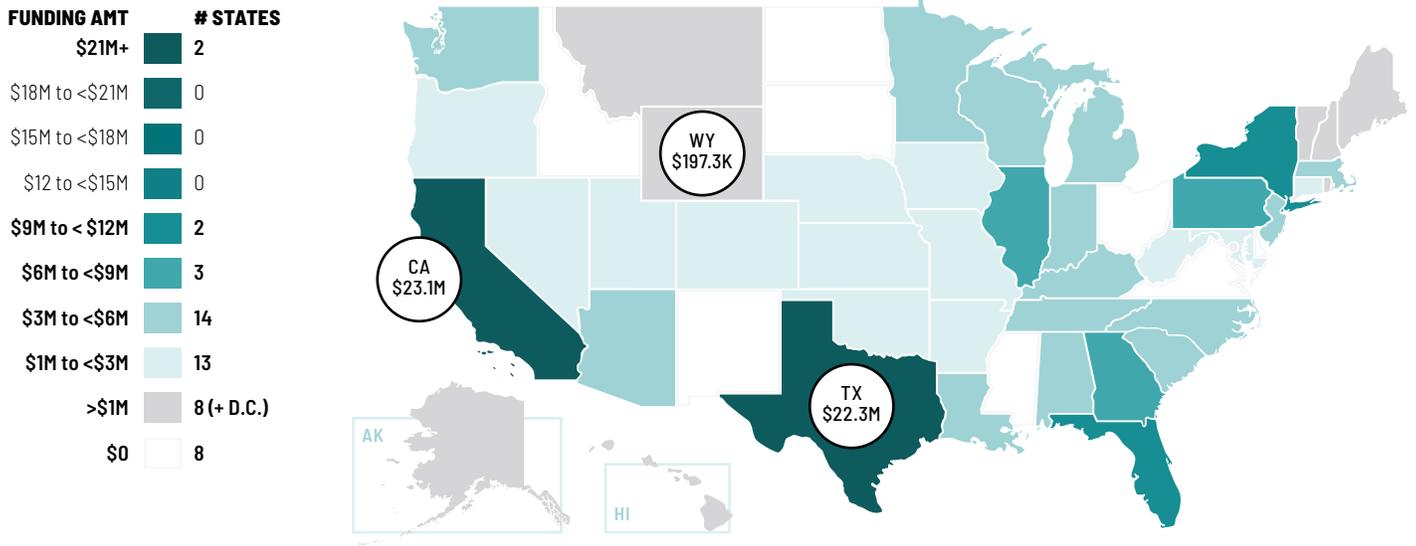


FIGURE 3. AVERAGE FOOD SPEND PER ENROLLED STUDENT BY LOCALE TYPE

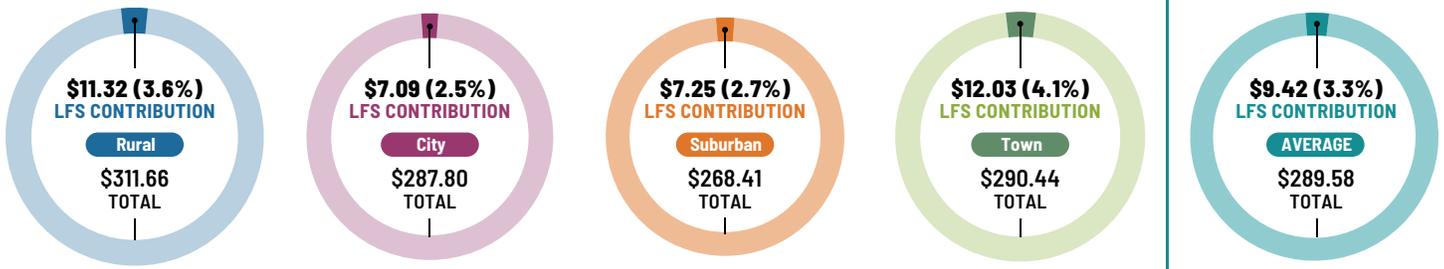


FIGURE 4. LOCAL FOOD FOR SCHOOLS SURVEY RESPONDENT GRANT AMOUNTS



FIGURE 5. FOOD PRODUCT TYPES PURCHASED BY SURVEY RESPONDENTS

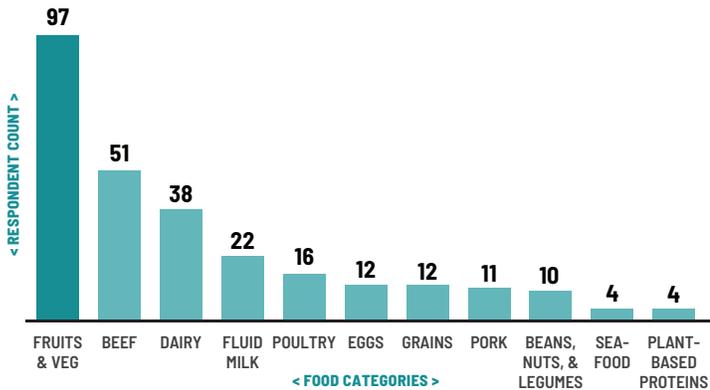


FIGURE 6. DIVERSITY OF PURCHASE WITH LFS FUNDS BY SURVEY RESPONDENTS

