

How Do We Feed Vermont's School Children?

AN INSIDER'S GUIDE TO VERMONT SCHOOL MEALS AND HOW TO IMPROVE THEM

A FARM2SCHOOL INITIATIVE PUBLICATION

Prepared by Vermont FEED (Food Education Every Day):
a partnership of Food Works, the Northeast Organic Farming
Association of Vermont, and Shelburne Farms



The Farm2School Initiative is a community-based effort working with schools, farmers, food producers, and communities to raise awareness about healthy food in school. Farm2School engages Vermont children in making healthy choices about the food they eat by encouraging greater use of fresh local foods, assisting those who run school food systems in local purchasing and training, promoting entrepreneurial opportunities to produce healthy school foods, involving children in growing and making food, and linking local farms and schools.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

VT FEED would like to thank the following organizations and individuals for their assistance in preparing this primer: the Argosy Foundation; Anne Winchester, *Legislative Counsel*; Rep. Mitzi Johnson, *House Committee on Agriculture*; Rep. George Cross, Rep. Rosemary McLaughlin, and Rep. Greg Clarke, *House Committee on Education*; Sen. Don Collins, *Senate Education Committee*; Josephine Busha and Andy Snyder, *VT Department of Education*; Doug Davis, *Burlington School District Food Service Director*; Betsy Rosenbluth, *Consultant*; Megan Camp and Dana Hudson, *Shelburne Farms*; Abbie Nelson, *NOFA-VT*, Joseph Kiefer, *Food Works*; John Ryan, *Consultant*.

Introduction

- ...▶ **E**very day, schools in Vermont serve breakfast and/or lunch to more than 50,000 Vermont students, an annual business of \$30 million. According to the Center for Disease Control, more than a quarter of Vermont high school students are overweight or at risk of being overweight. The national average is 20%. At the same time, Vermont agriculture is in decline. By working within Vermont's current school food programs, we can provide children with more fresh and healthy foods straight from Vermont farms. This can improve children's health and performance, and at the same time expand opportunities for local farmers.

THE PURPOSE of THIS PRIMER:

- ...▶ • To outline how Vermont schools currently provide meals to their children.
- ...▶ • To show how the Farm2School initiative is working with schools to encourage greater use of fresh local foods and helping Vermont children make wiser, healthier choices about the food they eat.



How big is Vermont's School Food Program?

SOURCES: USDA Food & Nutrition Service REPORT OF SCHOOL PROGRAM OPERATIONS, Oct 1995, 2004; VT DoE Child Nutrition Programs 2004-2005 Fact Sheet
FIGURES CITED are for 2004.

NUMBER of SCHOOLS

- **332 SCHOOLS** are covered by School Food Authorities* (312 public schools, 20 private schools) accounting for **96%** of Vermont's **98,361** public school students

NUMBER of MEALS

- **52,084 LUNCHES** are served daily (*on average*) to **55%** of all students, up from **45%** in 1995.
- **17,095 BREAKFASTS** are served daily (*on average*) to **17%** of all students, up from **9%** in 1995.

NUMBER of FREE/REDUCED-PRICE LUNCHES

- **21,354 FREE or REDUCED-PRICE LUNCHES** are served daily (*on average*) (**75% FREE; 25% REDUCED-PRICE**)

From 1995 to 2004, the number of Free or Reduced-Price Lunches served grew **16%**

75% of eligible students participated in Free Lunch Program

69% of eligible students participated in Reduced Price Lunch Program

* A **School Food Authority** is the local government body legally responsible for administering and operating school food service programs in one or more schools if they participate in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program. Usually a School Food Authority is a town school district, union school district, or private school.

How much does the School Food Program cost?

SOURCE: VT DoE Child Nutrition Programs 2004-2005 Fact Sheet. **FIGURES based on 2002-03 school year** (last year for which data is available.).

▶ **\$31,184,183**

was expended by Vermont School Food Programs in the 2002-03 school year. (last year for which information is available)

▶ The **AVERAGE LUNCH** cost **\$2.28** to provide. Students were charged an **average** of **\$1.60** *

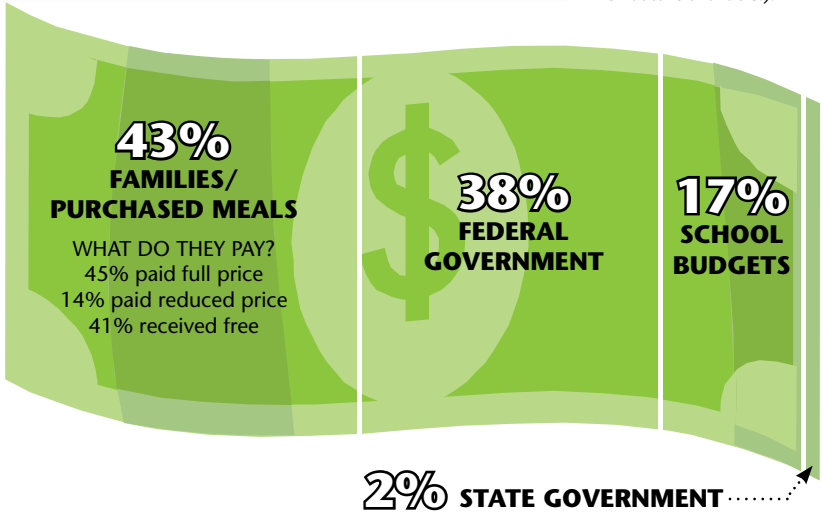
▶ The **AVERAGE BREAKFAST** cost **\$1.58** to provide. Students were charged an **average** of **\$0.86** *

**The difference between actual cost and the cost to students is made up by various government programs (see next page). The cost charged to students varies throughout the state.*



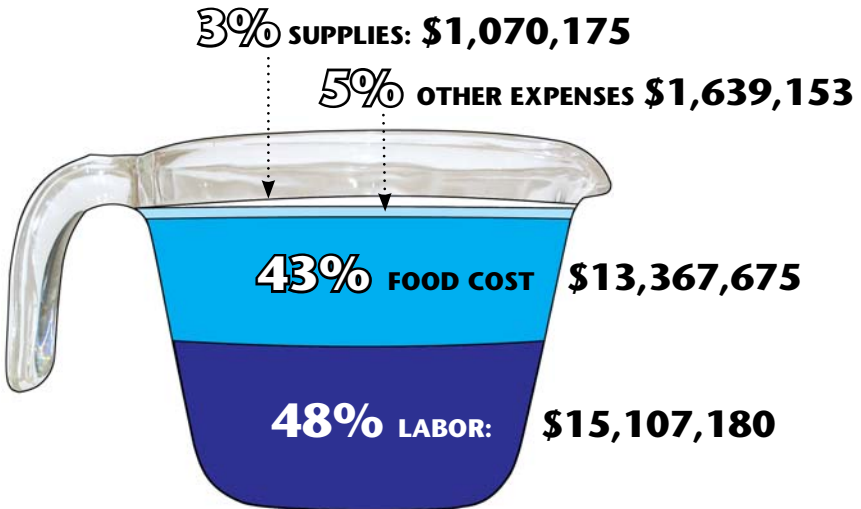
Who pays for the program?

SOURCE: Estimated from VT DoE Child Nutrition Programs 2004-2005 Fact Sheet
FIGURES based on 2002-03 school year (last year for which data is available.).



How is the money spent?

SOURCE: Estimated from VT DoE Child Nutrition Programs 2004-2005 Fact Sheet. **FIGURES based on 2002-03 school year** (last year for which data is available.).



Where does the food come from?

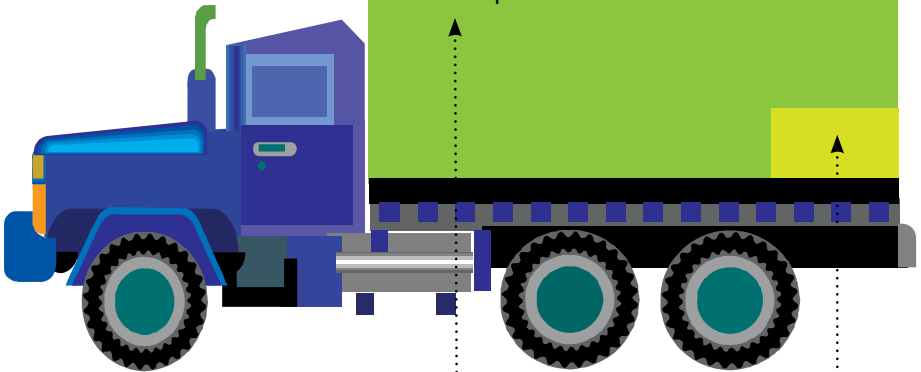
14% USDA COMMODITIES

The USDA Commodities Program donated \$1.7 million in commodity foods to VT schools as part of the National School Lunch Program in 2004. School Food Authorities “purchase” commodity foods with federal entitlement dollars paid to them at a rate of \$0.175 per lunch served the previous year.

Commodities include products like: Flour, Butter, Rice, Meat, Fruits/Vegetables (limited).

DEPT. of DEFENSE FRESH PROGRAM

Provides fresh produce to schools through USDA Commodities Program. DOD Fresh Program gave \$100,000 in fresh produce to VT School Food Authorities in 2004.



86% FOOD DISTRIBUTORS

School Food Authorities purchase most of their food from the same type of food distributors who serve restaurants and supermarkets.

Major distributors to Vermont schools:

- Burlington Food Service Co.
- U.S. Food Service Co.
- Sysco

Major distributors of fresh produce to Vermont schools:

- Burlington Food Service Co., Colchester
- Black River Produce, Proctorsville
- Squash Valley Produce, Waterbury

DIRECT PURCHASES

Schools make fewer than 5% of purchases directly with local farms, food-makers, and retailers

Who prepares the school food?

FOOD SERVICE STAFF

▶ **Cooking in a school kitchen**

Just over half of Vermont students eat in schools with independent meal sites staffed by school district employees.



FOOD SERVICE CONTRACTS

- ▶ One-third of all Vermont students receive meals from companies contracted to manage the school food service program on behalf of the district. The three largest firms are So-dexho-Marriott, Gaithersburg, MD (31% of service contracts based on student enrollment), The Abbey Group, Enosburg Falls, VT (30%), and Café Services, Londonderry, NH (27%).



CENTRALIZED FOOD SERVICE STAFF

▶ **Delivered to schools**

About 12 percent of students, mostly those attending school in larger school districts, eat food prepared in a centralized facility in the district and delivered to individual schools.

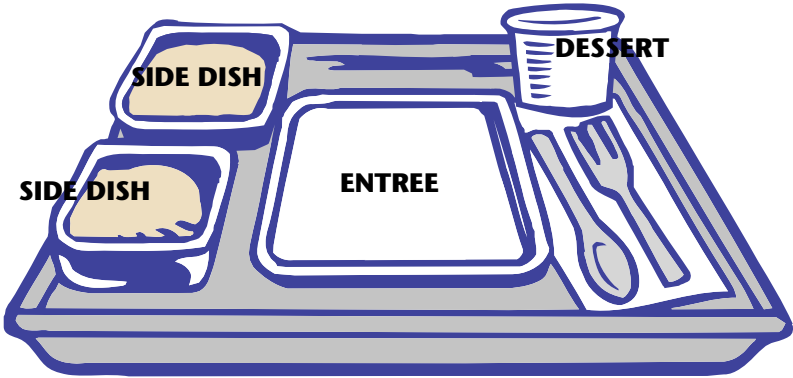


SCHOOLS CONTRACTING WITH OTHER SCHOOL FOOD AUTHORITIES

- ▶ Perhaps as many as 10 small school systems contract with nearby schools to prepare and deliver meals to students. This arrangement serves less than two percent of the students enrolled in the state.



What are students being served?



ACTUAL:

POSSIBLE:

ENTREE

hamburger patty from▶
USDA commodities on
purchased white bun

hamburger patty on purchased
whole wheat roll with Vermont
grown tomatoes and lettuce

SIDE DISH

instant mashed potatoes▶
purchased through
distributor

roasted red potatoes grown
locally and acquired through
DOD Fresh Program

SIDE DISH

purchased NJ grown cherry▶
tomatoes as finger food

purchased Vermont-grown
cherry sun gold tomatoes

DESSERT

Chocolate cake▶
from purchased mix

zucchini bread with CSA local
zucchini, purchased Vermont
maple syrup and USDA com-
modity eggs and flour

NON-CAFETERIA FOOD

88% of Vermont students can purchase snack foods, soft drinks, sports drinks or fruit drinks (not 100% juice) from vending machines or school stores.

Non-cafeteria food sold through vending machines, school food stores, and bake sales often competes with school meal programs. Funds from these foods may help balance the school meal program or support athletic programs, PTOs, school clubs and/or events.

SOURCE: 2003 VT School Health Education & Policy Profile



How are government entities involved?

U.S. DEPARTMENT of AGRICULTURE

► **Food and Nutrition Service**

Sets standards, promulgates rules, and administers pass through funds to the states. Oversees the following programs:

- **National School Lunch Program & School Breakfast Program**

Provides about 38% of the total cost of VT school meal programs through reimbursements for free and reduced-cost meals and snacks for low-income students.

- **Schools/Child Nutrition Commodity Programs**

Provides \$1.7 million in free commodities to VT schools from the USDA Farm Service Agency for price-supported items and from the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service for seasonal and perishable commodities.

- **Foods and Markets Division**

Offers various grants in support of Farm2School initiatives.

U.S. DEPARTMENT of DEFENSE

► **Fresh Program**

Provides roughly \$100,000 in fresh produce to VT under special arrangement with the USDA Commodity Programs. In nine pilot states (not including Vermont) the DoD Farm to School Program focuses on linking local farms to schools for produce sales.

FEDERAL MANDATES & SUPPORTING POLICIES

► **Child Nutrition & WIC Reauthorization Act**

Provides a wide range of initiatives and granting opportunities in support of Farm2School efforts and requires that schools have Wellness Policies in place by July 1, 2006.

VT DEPARTMENT of EDUCATION

► **Child Nutrition Programs**

Oversees all school food programs in the state providing monitoring, training and technical assistance to Vermont School Food Authorities.

VT DEPARTMENT of CHILDREN & FAMILIES

► **State Commodity Office**

Oversees the distribution of federal donated food programs including the USDA Commodity Programs and DoD Fresh Program.

VT DEPARTMENT of HEALTH

► **Food and Lodging Division**

State sanitarians perform school food program facilities inspections.

STATE MANDATES & SUPPORTING POLICIES

► **Healthy Vermonter 2010**

Provides specific goals for increasing daily servings of fruits and vegetables and reducing obesity and child hunger.

► **ACT 161**

Requires all school districts to develop a school wellness policy including nutrition and directs the Commissioner of Education to develop a model school wellness program.

► **VT State Statutes, TITLE 6, Chapters 207 & 4601**

Directs purchases of Vermont grown or produced products when standards of quality, availability and price are equal.

► **VT BILL S.293**

Decrees that milk, the state beverage, shall be served at every state function where refreshments are served.

LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

- Provide about 17% of the total cost through local appropriations. In most schools the principal oversees the food program. In bigger districts the business manager typically plays this role. In some school unions, the superintendent plays an active role.

What factors determine how a school food dollar is spent?



What are the challenges to increasing fresh local produce in school meals?

Food distributors or wholesalers provide about \$13.4 million per year in food to schools. Based on discussions with food service managers, only about ten percent or \$1.3 million of this total represents fresh or lightly processed produce. Less than ten percent of THIS is purchased directly from Vermont farms. There are a number of challenges to increasing the supply of fresh local products into the school:

STUDENT PREFERENCES

Studies show that getting food and farmers into the classroom connects students to the source of their food and has the most direct impact on

- ▶ helping them make healthier food choices. Taste tests, school gardens and involvement in menu development all make good food a tangible part of the student's curriculum.

FOOD SERVICE PRACTICES

Food service training, proper equipment, and streamlining the process of buying local produce are essential given the time and

- ▶ cost constraints local food service managers already face. It will also be important to explore methods to lightly process some products to make them easier to incorporate into existing school meal programs.

COST & AVAILABILITY

Schools need a dependable supply of food at a competitive price. Building a reliable local produce supply network that can meet the daily

- ▶ produce needs of both big and small school meal programs represent an essential element of the Farm2School Initiative. Various purchasing agreements, including contracting with CSA farms, will also help insure that adequate supplies are available when needed.

SEASONALITY

Vermont's relatively short growing season places emphasis on summer programs, fall harvest foods, and produce with greater storage capacity. Introducing foods and recipes

- ▶ that use seasonal foods and exploring methods to extend produce with light processing will allow schools to enjoy Vermont produce for more of the year.

SECURITY

Food safety training for suppliers and food workers will need to address the special concerns to food safety raised by promoting relationships between small farms and local schools.

What initiatives are happening in Vermont to improve the healthy quality of school food?

▶ Many towns around Vermont are launching Farm2School efforts, trying to improve their students' health through initiatives such as:

- school gardens
- farm-based field trips
- student taste tests
- community-led food/nutrition committees
- nutrition & wellness education
- purchasing local foods for the cafeteria

VERMONT TOWNS

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <p>▶ Alburg
Barre Town
Brattleboro
Bristol
Burlington District:
 9 schools
Cambridge
Chelsea
Colchester
Cornwall
Craftsbury
Essex Town
Fairfax
Fayston
Ferrisburg
Georgia
Hardwick:
 Hardwick Elem.
 Hazen Union H.S.</p> | <p>Hyde Park:
 Lamoille H.S.
Huntington
Jay
Jericho
Johnson
Orange
Middlebury
Milton
Montpelier
Randolph S.U.:
 Braintree
 Brookfield
 Randolph Elem.
 Randolph H.S.
Sharon
South Burlington
Starksboro</p> | <p>Stowe
Underhill:
 Underhill Elementary
 Mt. Mansfield H.S.
Waitsfield
Washington Central S.U.:
 E. Montpelier
 Middlesex
 Worcester
 Berlin
 Calais
 U32
Westfield
Westford
Westminster
Williamstown
Windsor County
Woodstock</p> |
|--|--|--|

Food Service Directors Buying Cooperative

82 School Food Authorities representing roughly 37,000 students have banded together to purchase food under a single competitive contract from wholesaler Burlington Food Service Co. (BFSC). This makes them BFSC's single largest customer. They work from a centralized food list and price structure but order independently. Together they purchase roughly \$4.2 million in food annually accounting for 33% of VT school food purchases.

What are other states doing?

NEW YORK

- The DoD Farm to School Program has purchased over \$1.5 million in local farm produce for schools, spurring food service directors to seek additional produce from local sources. The recently enacted Agriculture & Markets Law establishes a farm-to-school program to facilitate and promote the purchase of New York farm products by schools, universities and other educational institutions. The State Department of Agriculture connects farmers to schools, providing outreach and promotional events statewide. Legislation adjusts purchasing laws to promote school purchases from small local farmers.

CALIFORNIA

- The Food Service Supervisor in Healdsburg, CA has integrated direct farm purchases, school gardens, student workers, and student and parent involvement in menu planning to emphasize healthy home-cooked lunches in one school district, boosting sales in the process. In Santa Monica, each school has a Farmer's Market Salad Bar stocked daily with products purchased from local farmer's markets. School gardens staffed by parent volunteers, field trips, classroom demonstrations and tastings integrate food choice with nutrition education.

KENTUCKY

- Kentucky coordinates direct farm to school purchasing statewide. The State Department of Agriculture facilitates communication between farmers and local school districts and promotes the use of Kentucky grown products in schools. A model program in Clark County integrates Farm2School with a wellness curriculum that includes nutrition, time-management, exercise and self-esteem with introductory, intermediate and advanced levels for 5th, 7th and 9th graders.

IOWA

- An 11-member farm cooperative, "GROWN", coordinates the crops and arranges the distribution of produce to various schools in North-ern Iowa. The cooperative washes and cuts a number of the products, adding value and eliminating food service labor expense.

A description of other Best Practice research is available on the Vermont FEED web site: <http://www.VTFeed.org>



What does the Farm2School Initiative involve?

DEPARTMENT of DEFENSE FARM-to-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

- ▶ the Commodity Food Program through the DoD Fresh Program.

The Farm2School Initiative is working to make it easier for Vermont farmers to provide key commodities like apples, carrots, and potatoes to

PROMOTING BEST PRACTICES

- ▶ and food service practices, making them available to school districts state-wide through networking, staff trainings and technical assistance.

The Farm2School Initiative is researching some of the state and nation's best farm-to-classroom education programs

PURCHASING & DISTRIBUTION

- ▶ existing distribution network for schools. The initiative is also working to create models for more rural schools that involve direct purchase.

The Farm2School Initiative is working with distributors and farmers to get more fresh local produce into the

ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITIES for PROCESSED PRODUCT

- ▶ value-added and lightly processed foods to school meal programs.

The Farm2School Initiative is exploring opportunities for local farmers and food producers to combine their efforts to provide

MARKETING CAMPAIGN

- ▶ fresh local produce into school meals by strengthening the network of schools, food service staff, parents, and farmers committed to bringing the value of healthy eating into the classroom and the lunchroom.

The Farm2School Initiative is leading an effort to raise awareness of the economic, educational and health benefits of including



How can you help?

The Farm2School Initiative is a partnership involving the entire Vermont community. All stakeholders have a role in promoting healthier eating habits connection to local agriculture for all Vermont children.

LEGISLATURE

Support efforts to provide professional development training for food service workers and incentives to school districts to promote Farm2School programs.

STATE GOVERNMENT

Focus baseline health and learning measures that permit the evaluation of Farm2School initiatives. Support efforts to expand the variety and quantity of local fresh produce available through the DoD Fresh Program.

Provide economic development support for entrepreneurs to offer more local product to the school meal program.

SCHOOL COMMUNITY: Students, teachers, administrators

Create local food committees with parent involvement to support Farm2School Programs. Strengthen food/farm/nutrition education and hands-on learning opportunities. Incorporate Farm2School efforts into wellness policies.

FOOD SERVICE PERSONNEL

Seek out local farmers and discuss ways to purchase local produce. Offer taste tests for students to try healthier food products.

Request more local products through distributor contracts. Work with schools to make products available for school use.

FOOD DISTRIBUTORS

Participate in efforts to develop an efficient system for delivering local food products from Vermont farms to the school cafeteria.

PARENTS

Encourage local teachers, principals and school boards as well as farm neighbors to participate in efforts to expand local farm purchases and food/farm/nutrition education activities. Encourage and assist with field trips to local farms.

FARMERS

Contact your local school principal and talk about arranging classroom farm visits and classroom demonstrations. Work with schools to identify what products may be grown for school use.

Contact Vermont FEED to learn more about getting involved in the Farm2School Initiative: 802-434-4122 or www.VTFeed.org.

Learn more about how to get involved in the Farm2School Initiative on last page inside!

Food Education Every Day!



Vermont FEED