

Michigan Farm to School Grant Program Information Webinar Transcript

Abby Harper: Hello, everyone, welcome to the webinar today. Just for your own knowledge, this webinar will be recorded and available on our website [mifarmtoschool](http://mifarmtoschool.com), that's www.mifarmtoschool.msu.edu after the fact for future reference. This will be an informational webinar on the MI farm to school grant program for the 2016 to 2017 year. My name is Abby Harper, I'm the farm to school specialist here at the Center for Regional Food Systems, and I manage the program as well as provide technical assistance throughout the course of the year. So, we're going to jump right in. The agenda today, I'm going to spend a little bit of time just doing an overview of farm to school and the elements of it and opportunities within, as well as an overview of what we in Michigan focus on in farm to school. This is just for those who may be new and just hearing about and learning about farm to school, just to give a little bit of background on our work. And then I'm going to spend the bulk of the webinar talking about the MI farm to school grant program in particular, we'll go over eligibility criteria, expectations, a calendar year of things, application requirements, I'll give you some examples of ways that grantees this year have used their funds, and then we'll have plenty of time for question and answers afterwards.

And if you have questions throughout the webinar you can feel free to type them in box on the top right side of your screen, if I don't answer them throughout, we'll get back to them at the end.

So for those who may be new to farm to school, it's a broad term that encompasses a wide variety of activities, all of which center around efforts to purchase and serve local foods in K through 12 schools and early childhood programs. A big piece of this is the procurement piece. Actually using and purchasing local foods in your meal programs, but there are additional components that could support these efforts, including school gardens, education or curriculum developments, taking field trips to local farms, bringing farmers in for visits, and a whole host of activities that all come under that umbrella of farm to school. At the Center for Regional Food Systems, we focus largely on providing technical support on that procurement piece, because we see it not only as a chance to increase good food access for Michigan children, but also a means to provide economic development for Michigan's farmers. You may have heard recently the term farm to early care and education, sometimes it's referred to as farm to preschool, but this term came about in recent years after recognizing that healthy habits and food access are equally if not more important for the 0 to 6 crowd. So farm to school is starting to be more broad to encompass early childhood programs as well, but farm to early care and education is a way of really specifically calling out those programs that serve 0 to 6 children and including



them in the conversation. So the term farm to ECE includes any and all programs serving children in the 0 to 6 range, including preschools, day care homes and family childcare programs, head starts, great start readiness program, early head start, MI grant seasonal head start, American Indian and Alaska native head start, as well as center-based programs. And what really makes farm to school great are the benefits it brings not only to schools and children, but also to farmers. So those in the food program may see the opportunities for increased variety, increased access to fresher food, and the ability to specify needs and desires for products, increased access to fresh produce, the opportunity for hands-on teaching tools that sometimes come with increased purchasing from farms. And it really also provides an opportunity to engage the community as a whole in the work, and then many folks see benefits in supporting the local economy and keeping their purchasing dollars local. There are equally as many benefits on the farm side of things, there's an opportunity to expand and diversify markets for farmers so that they're not just focusing on direct to consumer CSAs, or farm stand sales, they're also tapping into institutional markets.

This also provides a market for seconds and seconds don't necessarily have to mean less, less high quality product, but typically it can be products that just may not be suitable for specialty markets. So, a carrot that has two legs, or tomatoes that might be a little nobby, perfectly fine product that especially if you're processing, can be as good as the first. And then, for a lot of farmers it's an opportunity to create loyal customers and cultivate the next generation, and that kind of gets at that free promotion piece, that farmers are able to promote their product through schools getting families more aware of the local resources and creating that next generation of consumers. So there's a variety of both state and national resources that can aid you in developing your farm to school program. The MI farm to school website is a great resource at your disposal and you can see the web address, mifarmtoschool.msu.edu, there on the bottom of the screen. All the resources I'm going to talk about from here on out are available on that page as well.

At the Center for Regional Food Systems, we engage in a variety of farm to school support services. We focus on research and conduct surveys on farm to school activity throughout the state to track the growing movement and demonstrated demand for local products and schools. We've also developed a lot of resources to support folks in their farm to school effort, so that comes with some guides on different steps in the procurement process. We've created some briefs, some fact sheets, as well as the MI farm to school listserv, if you go on our website mifarmtoschool.msu.edu you can sign up for our listserv where we keep communication coming about opportunities and resources that might be available, as well as send out news items. We also collaborate with a variety of partners in order to expand our outreach. We work closely with our MSU extension community food systems workgroup. They really provide technical experience in the field and helping folks interested in local purchasing and have more access to those localized knowledge. And then we work with some of our state



agency partners, such as the Department of Education and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, as well as a variety of nonprofits throughout the state. And lastly, what we're here to talk about today are the funding opportunities we provide, Hoophouses for Health is one you may have heard of, I won't be going into detail about that today, but you can find out more information at hoophousesforhealth.org, and then the MI farm to school grant program.

So just to go back to our resources a little bit, these are some of the guides that we've developed out at the Center for Regional Food Systems in recent years. Marketing Michigan products, there's putting Michigan produce on your menu, purchasing Michigan products, and then, whoops, two recent ones this year which are the garden to cafeteria guide, and that walks through step-by-step how you can incorporate food grown in a school or center garden into your cafeteria and purchasing program. And then the most recent one was are our farm to early childhood programs guide, which walks through childhood programs of any size and any age in the steps necessary for increasing local purchasing. All these guides are available for download on our website. So at MSU CRFS, part of our rule in farm to school is to conduct research on interest and perceptions of local food purchasing. So in 2013, we conducted another survey of school food service directors, which revealed that interest in local food purchasing was high and also that many food service directors were motivated to purchase local foods, to access fresher food, support the local economy, and help Michigan farms and businesses. We also did some research into the barriers and found that the top barriers were a limited seasonal availability, food safety concerns, and budget constraints. And so this grant program, even though it's relatively small-scale, can help soften some of the budget constraints for building farm to school programs and then provide some of that technical assistance as well.

So, the Michigan farm to school digging in and taking root project is funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and our primary goal for Michigan farm to school is to increase the number and expand the breadth of programs in order to help increase vulnerable children's access to an awareness of healthy, local foods. So to accomplish this goal we have three primary activities, administration of the MI farm to school grant program, which help schools and early childhood programs plan for and implement farm to school programs, providing outreach training and technical assistance to other programs and partners throughout the state, and link with outreach and education partnerships, primarily through our new partnerships with the Hoophouses health program. All of this work falls under the umbrella of the Michigan good food charter and its goal for institution, that they source 20 percent of their foods locally by the year 2020. You can find out more information about the Michigan good food initiative at www.Michiganfood.org So, the MI farm to school grant program, we offer up to \$2000 in funding, and programs and schools do not have to apply for the full \$2000 in funding. In fact, if you're a smaller program and you would thrive with less funding, we encourage you to apply for less. But the focus is really on local food procurement so we want to see that schools and



early childhood programs are taking the steps to connect with local food. Whether that's through their distributor, through connecting with local farmers to get more local food in their meals and increase access for children to local and healthy food. And I want to say, I want to emphasize that this is not a school garden program, so there are many folks that want to do school gardens and this program is meant specifically for those who are trying to increase the amount of local food in their purchasing plan. We have had some grantees in years past that have used on-site gardens as substantial components of their purchasing strategy, in which case we may support some piece of that, but we do not want to support school gardens that don't contribute to the procurement strategy.

And the two grant types available are planning grants, which help food service providers plan for and initiate farm to school programs, and implementation grants, which help expand and sustain existing farm to school programs. And I want to say that planning grants are only available for one year, implementation grants are typically available for two years or if you start the program at the implementation level. So if you've done some previous planning outside, outside the MI farm to school program, you're welcome to start on an implementation grant level provided that you provide evidence of previous farm to school planning. So eligibility for K through 12 schools and districts is based on the free and reduced price eligibility for the district. So even if you operate in one school, we use the whole district level free and reduced price eligibility. The only instance where it would just be based on school building is if you are a charter school or a district of only one building, but we do go by district levels. And then we also require that you participate in national school lunch program, and then also that only the food or nutrition service director applies. This has come out of recognition in previous years that if it's not the food service director that is deeply involved in the program, the opportunities for sustainability are more limited and programs tend to have less success. And so recognizing that that food service director, or whoever is in charge of nutrition and food purchasing, is such a key role in making farm to school programs a success.

We require that they be the ones that fill out the application. They can of course partner with other folks in the school, but they need to be the primary point of contact. Since there is such a wide variance in types of early childhood programs, our eligibility criteria is a little bit more nuanced. So to be eligible you must participate in the child and adult care food program, in addition to meeting one of the following three criteria. So for head starts, early head starts, great start readiness program, migrant head starts, and American Indian head start programs, those automatically qualify, that's based on federal standards for who those programs serve, and so those are automatically eligible to participate in the MI farm to school grant program. For centers that are based in K through 12 schools or districts, similar to K through 12 districts, we use that district level 50 percent free and reduced price eligibility. And again the only case where it would be based just on a school would be in charter schools or in school districts that are housed in one building, which not many are. And then for public or private centers or faith-



based centers or family day care homes, anything that's not tied to a school district, we judge eligibility based on being located within an attendance area of a school building with at least 50 percent free and reduced price eligibility, and there's a link there where you can go verify what the free and reduced price eligibility is near you. We also have metrics for figuring that on our end if you need help with that, but essentially whatever school building is closest to you, we'll measure it based on the free and reduced price meal eligibility of that building. So to go into a little bit more details about our grants, the planning grant is a one-year grant, it's intended for K through 12 schools districts and early childhood programs that are just beginning farm to school programs. So we recognize that there are a lot of preliminary steps that go into building connections and creating the supporting structure before you are able to purchase local foods.

So these grants are meant for folks to be able to have time to support this process. You can only receive one year of a planning grant and as an expectant deliverable at the end of the year, you must create a farm to school action plan that would address how you would utilize current resources to incorporate local foods, address any obstacles, engage in sustained partnerships, align plans with broader values, goals, and commitments, such as a school wellness policy, and how you will document engagement in the program. So that is a deliverable at the year-end report, so that would be in June 2017. Then planning grants can be used in a variety of ways, a couple examples are up there on the screen, you can use them to train staff in new skills that are required for prepping fresh product, like knife skills trainings or menu development training, seasonal menu development. You can use them to conduct outreach activities with farmers, distributors, or community partners. You can use them to plan meetings and special events that center around local products, some have used it to fund staff time to facilitate those meetings or do that extra work that's required to set up the program.

And many have used it for parent engagement activities as well. And the big things we want to see in those applying for planning grantees are differentiating between local and fresh foods. So this is not a fresh food grant program, it is a local grant program, local food. So, we don't necessarily want to see the product being used to buy lettuce from California, even though it's fresh, we want it to be used to buy lettuce from Michigan, or from whatever your definition of local is, and that's really up to schools and programs to define what local is for them, whether it's countywide or statewide, that's up to you to decide. We also want to see an eye towards developing a farm to school team, we emphasize a lot specially this last year the need for teams in farm to school programs because we've seen many cases where one champion will leave and the farm to school program dies. So we want to see it supported from a variety of levels with multiple partners engaged, and I already covered how funding, how funds can be spent and these are by no means the only way they can be spent, but just to give you some examples. So then implantation grants, as I mentioned, they can be 2 to 3 years, total amount, you're able to apply for the grant for a total of three years, but for some that's three years of implementation and for others it's one year of planning followed by two years of



implementation. So they're, implementation grants are for those who have demonstrated farm to school activity and have created some sort of farm to school plan, and they're meant to focus on procuring local foods. So we don't necessarily expect planning grantees to purchase local food in their first year, we do expect to see local food purchasing in, for implementation grants, and that can be either through your school food service budget or through using the my farm to school dollars, but we do expect to see a focus on actually purchasing local food and using it.

For implementation grantees, we do allow some money to be spent on equipment, although it's limited, that's because we're not an equipment grantee, granting program, so that's limited to \$500 and then as the deliverable of the planning grant was the farm to school action plan, for implementation grantees it's a farm to school sustainability plan. So this will address plans to continue using local foods and engage in sustain the program beyond the my farm to school grant funds, and again, how it will align with plans, how the plans will align with broader values, goals, and commitments, and address the obstacles of document engagement. So it's basically showing how will you continue farm to school programming beyond the duration of the grants. And then the focuses for the implementation grant, like I said, it's really that focus on local food procurement, small amounts can be spent on equipment, such as blenders, knives, you know, things to process food, we've had folks who have used it for dehydrators or small refrigerators. And then we really want to see the focus on developing or sustaining farm to school teams.

Implementation grantees have used funds for a variety of purchases, purchasing local foods is a big one, or hosting special events, for example the Michigan Apple Crunch, which occurs every October and is a one-day statewide and regional event to crunch into a Michigan apple on the same day, it'll be October 13th this year and you'll hear more about that soon. And then, or, we've had, I'll give an example later of one of our programs that uses the funds to future cultivate Michigan products and I'll go into that a little bit more later. And again, some folks have used it to purchase small equipment to develop marketing materials, to highlight the local products that are on their menu. So either farmer profiles or materials that really showcase the local food that you're purchasing. So on our website, you can see where the MI farm to school grant program link is, there on the left, and all of the information I'm giving you today will be available there as well. So check that out afterwards for reference. And on our website, you'll also see a list of grantees from last year. These are all of our grantees, you can see there are a variety of both implementation and planning grants, they're really spread throughout the state. So we have grantees in Detroit, we have grantees in, in the western side of the state in Oceana County and Muskegon County, we have grantees that are up in the U.P., Sault Sainte Marie tribe of Chippewa Indians is up in Sault Sainte Marie, as well as sort of all across the middle of the state. So they do have a good geographic spread, they're split pretty evenly this year. There were about ten early childhood programs and nine schools. So we do our best to,



you know, make sure we're reaching all corners of the state, and supporting a variety of programs. And each year, we support roughly 20 programs, we have a limited amount of funding that we can give out, but if programs apply for smaller amounts of funds, and we tend to get a lot of small programs applying for smaller grants, that number may increase slightly, but it'll hover around 20.

So now I'm going to go into a little bit of detail into the specifics of the application, they've changed a little bit this year. So if you've applied previously, this might be new information for you, and if you're planning of applying this year, I'd recommend opening up the application so you can follow along a bit more easily. The first page is pretty straightforward, it's a contact and program information page. I mentioned that the contact should be the food service or nutrition director, is required to be in order to be eligible. So make sure that the contact information on that page is whoever is in charge of your food purchasing and potentially anyone in charge of that. And the one thing for, and then there's also another section after this just on program characteristics, that's basically just so we make sure you're eligible. And also for the contact name I recognize that for small early care and education programs, the food service director and the director of the program may be the same person, but we really just want to make sure whoever is in charge on the meal program, is in charge of the application. And as I mentioned before, that's really just to ensure sustainability of the program.

So this is a section that's new this year, it's program indicators and it's pretty straightforward as well. There are, there are a few questions about community partners and farm to school teams. If you're a planning grantee and you don't know yet, you can just include who your potential community partners or farm to school team members are. And then there are some questions on where you currently source local food from, what kinds of local food you've purchased in the last year, and general expenditures on local food, as well as an opportunity to suggest ideas for webinars or trainings that you might be interested in. The program narrative is also pretty straightforward, it's meant to be short and sweet, maximum of three pages. And basically, it will include a one page, or one paragraph, excuse me, overview of your application, what your program goals are, and how you plan to achieve them. One or two paragraphs on the needs and readiness. So why your program needs a farm to school grant, and sort of what structures have you set up to make it successful. And then detailed information on your objectives, activities, and timeline for activities. So, this typically takes up the bulk of the narrative, basically just documenting what activities you're going to do over the course of the school year, in regards to your farm to school program, when they're going to occur, and who will be involved. And then, even though you don't have to develop a action or sustainability plan with the application, we want to make sure that people are aware of that requirement and have an eye towards it. So, keeping a paragraph or two about what your thoughts are with regards to the action and sustainability plan are also a part of the narrative. And then the last section is budget, this was a sample one from the planning grantee, and



yours will look different, but just to emphasize that we do want an itemized detailed budget. We understand that it might change over the course of the year, and we have two checkpoints, a midyear report and the year-end report, to work with schools and early childhood programs if things changed and make adjustments together. It's important that staff be notified if you're making any large adjustments, and we've definitely had folks change their, change staff that are in charge of the program. And so maybe that changes priorities a little bit, or just have found resources in one area that allow them to divert funding to another source.

So for example, one of our grantees this year had a line item for training their staff and then they found out they had some internal staff that could provide that training and shifted that budget to more local food purchasing. So. And then I just want to go through a couple examples of grantees from previous years, or from this past year, and what they've done. The tribe of Chippewa Indians Early Childhood Programs was our grantee in Sault Sainte Marie, and they used their funding for a lot of local purchasing. So they hosted the Michigan Apple Crunch, which I mentioned previously, at three different centers. They also used the money to collaborate with Community Health Department and other partners to provide complementary activities. So this wasn't necessarily what they used their funds for, but it was included in the application. These kind of broader collaborations with partners to provide complementary activities. And then they're connecting with Cherry Capital Foods, which is a food hub in Traverse City that works throughout the U.P. and statewide now as well. And it focuses specifically on Michigan products. So they've connected with them to increase local purchasing from them.

The next example is Montague Public Schools, they're a school district in Western Michigan, medium-size school district and they center their MI farm to school grant funds around the Cultivate Michigan featured foods. So for those of you who aren't familiar with Cultivate Michigan, it's a local purchasing campaign that's come out of our Michigan farm to institution network. And essentially every year, they feature four foods and with each of those foods they provide a purchasing guide that highlights where you can purchase that product locally, whether it's through distributors, farmers, markets, food hubs, going through the whole gambit of where it's available, and then also provide some recipes. And the food service director at Montague Public Schools works with his culinary students to do seasonal tastings where they create their own recipes and test them out with the schools and then provide those available to the schools in their lunch. So the recipe to the right is the squish squash salsa that they made, I think that was their winner for winter squash, which was our featured food in fall of last year. And then they also used some funds to develop marketing materials for their events and promotion for the farmers that they work with and purchase from.

And then lastly, Calumet Center is a residential juvenile center in Highland Park, in Detroit area, and they have also used a lot of their funds for purchasing local foods. Early on in the



grant program, they were partnered with a Hoophouse for health farmer, and have been just getting a ton of product from them, and have moved towards a long-term sustainable purchasing plan with that farmer to purchase more from them in future years, even beyond the grant funds and make it sustainable. And they've also used their funds to diversify their menu and training staff on preparation. So right there you can see one of the staff members preparing local eggplant from that Hoophouses for health farmer. They, the farmer had a abundance of eggplant at one point in the season, and because of their size, they were able to take it and do some creative stuff with it. So the grant program calendar applications are due on May 11th, and then award notifications will go out in very early June, and we'll have a quick orientation webinar just to introduce grantees to the year. On September 6th, the grant year begins. We'll send some information over the summer about W-9s and invoices that we need to be able to award funding. There are mandatory trainings in September, we have these regional farm to school trainings every year, and we move them around. So this year, we'll have one in Wayne County, one in Kent County, and one in Charlevoix County, and those will be mid-September, typically.

I mentioned there are two reporting requirements. So the midyear report will be due in January of 2017, and those aren't super cumbersome, they're, they're basically just a way for us to have a checkpoint so that we can touch base with any programs that might be having difficulties implementing what their plan was for the year or, you know, may want to shift their budgets around like I talked about before. And, then in June, the grant end of year reports with either the action or sustainability plan is due. And then throughout the year, there will be opportunities for webinars, site visits, and other educational opportunities that aren't limited to grants, grantees. But are available for folks to enhance their farm to school programming. And with that, I will end it and take any questions that you guys might have. So there's a check box on the top right that you can use to ask any questions.

Okay. So I had a question about whether or not funds can be used to purchase from farmers' markets and that is absolutely an eligible use of funds. We recognize that there are family day care homes from six kids to some school districts of 12000 kids and that, not the purchasing for each of those programs will be the same. So, purchasing from farmers' markets, if that's the appropriate outlet for you, is definitely an eligible option. I had another question about food hub options and where more affordable local food might be found. That is going to be based a lot on seasonality as well, and I think as our food hubs get more attuned with what schools, that might shift, but I'm not aware of one universally cheaper option, our Cultivate Michigan guides do a great job of highlighting the local products in, from each distributor. And so you can kind of cross-compare there, once you know what the local products are, and so it's not just specialty distributors that offer local products. You know, there are also some of the wholesale distributors that you guys are already used to working with, that also offer local. Sometimes it's just about asking, and getting clarification on what those are. So I encourage you to do some



research there, and often we've had some schools that once they developed a relationship, a direct relationship with a farmer, they've been able to secure lower prices for things like seconds, or when they're able to take, you know, bulk crop surpluses that the farmer may not have another outlet for. So there are ways to come to agreements, especially when you have that direct relationship with a farmer. That can, keep your price line lower.

Okay. I also had a question about whether or not a program that doesn't participate in National School Lunch Program can be eligible. So this program is specifically for the K through 12 and early childhood world. So any programs that serve beyond K through 12 that don't participate in the National School Lunch Program, would not be eligible. Then I had a question as well about reporting. Our reporting requirements, we try to keep minimal, they're enough for us to get the information we need. And a lot of people like them because they provide a point for reflection in the middle of the year, and kind of, you know, give you a kick-start if you've been a little bit slower. So typically, it's going to be the program indicators page again, as well as a 2 to 3 page, if that, narrative on sort of what objectives you've accomplished, which ones maybe you haven't yet, and why, and addressing any shifts in priorities or shifts in your budget. So it's not super cumbersome, we try and keep it to a minimal. The end of year is a little bit more, requires a little bit more work, because you have to also submit that action or sustainability plan. But even so, we do try to keep it minimal, so.

And if you have individual questions about a specific situation on whether or not you qualify, please feel free to email me. My email is up there, harperab@msu.edu

I have my phone number there as well, but email is typically the easiest and most effective way to reach me. So if there are no more questions, we will end the webinar here. All of the materials can be found on our website, www.Mifarmtoschool.msu.edu I look forward to seeing many of you turn in applications. Thank you very much, happy Thursday.

