



WHAT A DIME CAN DO:

An Evaluation of the 10 Cents a Meal Pilot

10 Cents a Meal for School Kids & Farms (10 Cents), administered by the Michigan Department of Education, matches what participating schools spend on Michigan-grown fruits, vegetables, and legumes with grants of up to 10 cents per meal. This brief is part of What a Dime Can Do, an evaluation report on two years of the pilot program (2017-18 and 2018-19).

School Food Service Directors Use 10 Cents Grants Differently: Insights from Interviews

Food service directors (FSDs) have different strategies for purchasing local foods and using 10 Cents grants in their school food service programs. This is according to information from the 10 Cents pilot program in 2018-19, including applications to participate, food purchasing data, and results of surveys of participating school food service directors (FSDs).

To begin to understand how FSDs use 10 Cents differently and some factors that drive their decision making, a series of short interviews was conducted with FSDs awarded grants in 2018-19. We sought out grantees with a wide range of purchasing behavior, based on the number of different fruit, vegetable, and legume (FVL) types purchased, both prior to participating and during the 10 Cents program.

Of the 57 grantees in 2018-19, 18 grantees were invited by email to participate in 30-minute phone interview with one member of the evaluation team from the Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS). Phone interviews were conducted in November 2020 with six FSDs. A summary of interview findings, along with information on the interviewees purchasing records, is outlined below.

Key characteristics of the FSDs and their food service programs in 2018-19 include the following:

- **Region.** Interviewees represented four of five geographic regions eligible for 10 Cents in 2019-19.¹
- **Enrollment.** Two FSDs had districts with enrollments of less than 2,000 students. The other four represented districts with student enrollments between 3,000 – 10,000 students.
- **Free and reduced-price lunch (FRPL) eligibility.** None of the grantees' school districts had FRPL eligibility percentages above 50%. The average FRPL was 30%. This average was lower than the average of all 10 Cents school districts at 45.7%. (The state average FRPL was 50.74% in 2018-19.)²
- **Program type.** Four FSDs had self-operated programs run by the school district, and two represented contract managed food service programs, which are run by an external company.
- **10 Cents participation.** Of the first three years of the state-funded 10 Cents pilot program (2016-17 through 2018-19), two FSDs participated for one year, two for two years, and two for all three years.
- **Grant spending.** One FSD, a returning 10 Cents grantee, underspent the initial matching grant award, while the others spent more than the grant amount initially awarded by Michigan Department of Education (MDE).



All FSDs interviewed indicated that the 2018-19 school year was one of fairly typical operations for their food service programs. One FSD noted that some new salad bars might have slightly increased local food purchases that year.

¹ See the **10 Cents a Meal for School Kids and Farms 2018-2019 Legislative Report** for a map of Michigan Prosperity Regions eligible for 10 Cents grants. ² See the **10 Cents a Meal Pilot: 2018-2019 Evaluation Results, Reflections, and Recommendations** report for more information on the student population reached through 10 Cents grants.

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Local Food Products

The chart below shows the number of fruit and vegetable types used each month and the total over the year for the FSDs interviewed. Most of these FSDs purchased a diverse set of Michigan products, and they did so throughout the school year although with some variability by month.³

School District Grantee	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN-AUG	Month Unknown	Total Fruit Types	Total Veg Types
A	15	16	13	10	12	11	16	20	19	15		7	20
B	16	7	5	14	6	5	12	4	7	1		7	16
C	5	1	14	9	9	4	11	11	6		22	11	20
D	21	21	15	19	15	9	7	8	2	9		9	19
E		4	3		3	3	3	2			2	3	3
F	11	10	7	8	4	7	6	7	2			7	7

The FSDs who were interviewed affirmed that their reported 10 Cents purchases – fresh and minimally processed (including frozen) Michigan-grown fruits, vegetables, and legumes - represented most of their total local food spend. These FSDs mentioned local dairy purchases (milk and yogurt). Some other 10 Cents grantees are known to use local meats, as well.

FSDs' decisions about which food products to purchase and use in their school meals programs were influenced by product availability, preparation requirements, menu possibilities, and student preferences. Three FSDs sought to use grant funds to serve different types of foods more frequently, i.e., foods that were not typical of their standard menus or not yet familiar to students.

Market Channels

Fresh or minimally processed (including frozen) Michigan-grown fruits, vegetables, and legumes from any Michigan-based source are eligible for 10 Cents grants, as long as the farm of origin is known. One grantee purchased local foods from a specialty distributor and another from a farmer cooperative. Two purchased foods directly from a food processor. All purchased from at least one broadline distributor and food hub, although these purchases represent very different percentages of their total 10 Cents spending. All but one of the six grantees purchased foods directly from farmers.

Percent of Purchases by Market Channel

School District Grantee	Broadline (Full Service) Distributor	Specialty Distributor	Food Processor	Food Hub	Farmer Cooperative	Farm Direct
A	54%	25%		19%		2%
B	49%			50%		1%
C	37%		21%	24%	14%	4%
D	2%		3%	61%		34%
E	95%			5%		
F	49%			41%		10%

³ See 10 Cents on the Menu: Fruits, Vegetables, and Legumes Served Through the Year for a summary on foods used by grantees.

School Food Service Directors Use 10 Cents Grants Differently: Insights from Interviews (cont.)

Market Channels (cont.)

A number of factors affect FSDs' decisions about vendors for 10 Cents food purchases and reporting.

- While it varies somewhat by distributor, **FSDs felt that broadline distributors cannot yet be relied upon to provide information about local foods**, either at the point of sale (typically through online ordering) or for purchasing reports. Since FSDs did not always have the necessary information to choose local foods over conventional sources when they purchase, some of the 10 Cents purchases from these sources are unintentional, meaning they just happened to be local, so they got to be counted after the purchase is made. The FSDs' comments indicated that while the availability of this information may be slowly improving overall, the information shared with an FSD may depend most on the individual sales representative to which they are assigned.
- **Information about local foods was more reliable through specialty distributors and food hubs, which specialize in local and regional food** aggregation and distribution, than through broadline distributors. One grantee said that purchases from these sources represented more intentional local food and 10 Cents purchases.
- **FSDs balanced local food purchasing for 10 Cents against student preferences and the availability of low-cost foods** primarily available from federal sources, including Department of Defense Fresh Program and broadline distributors.
- **FSDs weighed convenience** and the additional cleaning and preparation required for whole fresh fruits and vegetables, when they decided which local food products to purchase from which source and how frequently they wanted to serve them.
- **FSDs who purchased directly from farmers had varying experiences.** Challenges were related to delivery to multiple school buildings, preparation required for whole fresh foods, and the volume of farm products available, as well as competitive pricing for the school food market in one case and consistent availability throughout the year in another. One FSD had planned with farmers for planting in 2018-19 and another expressed interest in a forward contract arrangement.

Spending of Grant Awards

FSDs who were successful in spending more than their initial grant awards on eligible Michigan-grown foods suggested a few different factors that helped. They mentioned getting to know farmers, including through farm tours; product-specific factors like whether the apple season was a good one; and promotion of local foods in school meals, including through letters to community members, social media, and a video.

One FSD attributed the inability to meet the initial grant award to difficulty finding local sources with sufficient volumes of vegetables to meet the 10 Cents grant amount and the matching requirement. According to this FSD, finding local sources of high-volume products that students like, such as winter squash and carrots, could have helped to meet the required spending in 2018-19 and is still a priority as of the 2020-21 school year.

Meal Participation Rates

Participation in school meals was referred to as a reinforcing loop for 10 Cents success. Two FSDs reflected that student participation in school meals was an important outcome of their grants. Both FSDs ran school food programs with relatively low FRPL percentages and both mentioned being grateful for these grants because their programs are not often eligible for funding assistance given that a 50% or greater percentage is often an eligibility requirement.

In one case, participation in school lunch among teachers also increased by at least 50% from participation prior to the grant program.

The FSD's assessment was that excitement and communication about 10 Cents generated more participation in school meals, which led the FSD to purchase and serve more local foods, which in turn further drove participation.

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Future Evaluation

Similar evaluation interviews of 10 Cents participants in future years could confirm and solidify these findings. A larger sample of FSDs will be available in the 2020-21 year as an increase in funding and expanded geographic area will allow for more grant awards.

Additional research into how FSDs use grant awards could provide more generalizable results in the future, including:

- If and how much FSDs increase the diversity of food products in their food programs,
- how food preparation and service might evolve, and
- how the number and type of food vendors FSDs use for Michigan-grown foods change as a result of participating in 10 Cents.

These findings could also inform practical support for future grantees and provide a basis for investigating student-focused impacts of 10 Cents.



foodsystems.msu.edu/what-a-dime-can-do

The Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS) leads evaluation of 10 Cents. The work presented here is part of What a Dime Can Do: An Evaluation of the 10 Cents a Meal Pilot by Colleen Matts, CRFS; Kathryn Colasanti, School of Social Work, University of Michigan (formerly CRFS); and Elissa Trumbull, consultant, and was funded by the Michigan Health Endowment Fund. To learn more, visit tencentsmichigan.org and canr.msu.edu/10-cents-a-meal.

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